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Environmental Education: A Pivot to Healthy Environment and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Environmental Education: A Pivot to Healthy Environment and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Contemporarily, man has undertaken a lot of activities that have adverse effects on the environment wherein he dwells. The effects of those activities became so intense that the health and hospitality of the environment began to degrade. In Nigeria, environmental health related issues are becoming a major concern of the people and the government with exacerbated environmental challenges such as flooding, air pollution, water pollution, oil spillage, deforestation, desertification, climate change and other environmental issues. Premised on this background, this paper analyses the situation, gives an open view to the matter of health, clearly discusses the subject 'environment familiarizes you with the practical relationship between health and environment', and the concept of Environmental Education. The paper discusses the conceptual meaning of Education, Environmental Education and Healthy Environment. In addition, it established various ways environmental education will enhance healthy environment in Nigeria. The study seeks to identify and examine the impacts of environmental education on healthy environment in Nigeria; it established the nexus between Environmental Education and Healthy Environment. The data for this study were collected through secondary sources. The secondary data were obtained from textbooks, journals, newspapers, internet materials and literature from academic journals in relation to the subject studied. The paper explored thematic and the descriptive method on approaching the arising issues. The study adopted Community Development Theory as a theoretical framework. The paper concludes that health, they say is wealth; for any nation to experience sustainable development, her environment must be the kind that is friendly with her citizens; it must be free all forms disease or epidemics. To this end, the paper concludes by recommending various steps that could be taken to reposition the environment towards making it healthy and hospitable through the introduction of environmental education in school's curriculum at all levels in Nigeria.

Keywords: Education, Environment, Health, Environmental, Living, Development

1. INTRODUCTION

The survival of man is a function of the environment. The environment is therefore a vital factor for life to be sustained. The environment that is devoid of certain qualities that are needed to support life will necessarily have adverse effects on the quality of life. God created everything good for man to possess and utilize for his existence and wellbeing (Gen 1vs 31), but man intentionally for quest for knowledge and the bid to satisfy his unlimited wants continuously alters his environment to his detriment. In other words, man in a bid to survive, takes and adds to the environment. This relationship has greatly altered and is still altering the environment in such a way that it has a lot of environmental consequences on both living and non-living things.

Contemporary, the nature of environmental problems or hazards that man experience demands that aggressive steps should be taken to ensure a quality environment for sustainable development and good quality of life. The environment changes brought about by human activities are not without their attendant problems. The environmental changes brought about by the consequent excessive exploitation and depletion of the resources of nature since the middle of the 20th century have signaled great danger to man's habitat (Okoye 2007). This is to say that a lot of problems are associated with man's exploitation on his immediate environment which include, global warming, ozone layer depletion, desertification, erosion, flood, oil spillage to mention but a few.

It is obvious that some of these problems keep on multiplying as a result of human activities and it is one of serious global concern that deserves serious attention. Also, the tremendous development in population growth, science and technological advancement and socioeconomic development have transformed the environment that determines human health sustenance. Globally, organizations such as the United Nation Organization (U.N.O), African Union (A.U) etc have had course to deliberate on how to ensure and maintain a healthy environment for humanity through their resolutions, treaties, conventions and protocols. It is therefore the responsibility of everybody, since we are all involved and affected to make sure that every step is taken in terms of sensitization, advocacy, seminar, to equip everybody both old and young with a view to working towards a healthy environment where sustainable development both on our lives and our surrounding would be enhanced. This is one area where environmental education is sacrosanct.

On this ground, there is therefore the need for a study of the environment with a view to understanding the relationship that should exist between it and man. This has motivated the present study as our discussion is centered on man and environmental relationship. Also environmental education and healthy environment form part of our discussion in this paper. From the forgoing, the objective of this paper is therefore to analyses the situation, give an open view to the matter of health, clearly discusses the subject 'environment familiarizes you with the practical relationship between health and environment', and the concept of Environmental Education. The paper discusses the conceptual meaning of Education, Environmental Education and Healthy Environment. In addition, it established various ways environmental education will enhanced healthy environment in Nigeria; the study seeks to identify and examine the impacts of environmental education on healthy environment in Nigeria; it established the nexus between Environmental Education and Healthy Environment.

1.1 Conceptual Clarification Environment

The word environment originated from the French word "viron" meaning a circle around, or the world around. The term "environment" refers to the total surrounding of any organism in a given area. (Dada, 2006). This simple definition implies that, environment is the object or condition that surrounds man, both physical and biotic which can affect the existence of man. The concept of environment as a global life supports system or "ecosystem" with which living organism interacts with physical elements is crucial here. This life support system drives a number of ecological processes that shape climate, cleanse air and water, regulate water flow, recycle essential elements, create and regenerates soil and keeps the earth fit for life. These authors clearly state the functions of environment to all organization (IBID).

According to Fasiku (2005), environment of man on a regular basis is the summation of all elements that influence man or are influenced. From the above definitions, one can simply infer that the environment consists of air, land and water; plant and animal life including the social, economic and cultural conditions that influence the life of man or community, any building, structure, machine or device made by man and any solid, liquid, gas, odour, heat sound, vibration or radiation resulting directly from the activities of man. In a similar manner, but much more, laying emphasis on the importance of the environment, Oderinde (2008) defines environment to be man's physical environment which comprises the atmosphere, which envelops the earth, the hydrosphere or the water bodies and biosphere which contains organic or living matter and the lithosphere in which man lives. It could be concluded that, environment is the physical, economic, social and cultural conditions that prevail in our world and the force emanating from these that influence human development.

Environmental Education

For man to sustain the environment so that coming generations could benefit from it, there is need for environmental education which centers on the quality of human's life and a quality environment. According to Iyawe (1996) cited in Dada (2006), Environmental Education is an environmental process which enables young people to understand and evaluate the relationship between people and their surroundings. From the above one could see that the inter-relationship between man and the physical environment needs to be studied, not for academic benefit alone but also to make known to the entire populace through acquired knowledge how to control and use efficiently the natural resources endowed on man for his socio-economic development.

On the other hand, Okoye (2007), posits that Environmental Education is a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of man's problem of maintaining a livable earth. Fasiku (2008), sees Environmental Education (EE) as a complex process covering not just events but a strong underlying approach to society building as a whole and as well provides people with the awareness of their environment and acquire knowledge, skills, values, experiences and the determination needed to build partnership, understand Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) activities, develop participatory approaches to urban planning and ensure future market for eco-business. It also, enhances critical thinking, problem-solving and effective decision making skill and teach individual to weigh various sides of an environmental issues to make informed and responsible decision.

The active key words of awareness, knowledge, skill and participating will no doubt furnish man with the need to live a better life and be actively involved in providing solution to environment problems. African Social and Environment Studies Programme ASES (1993), defines Environmental Education as a process of learning and teaching, knowledge and skills which enable us to understand the interrelationship between us, our society and the available resources. Environmental Education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges and fosters attitudes, motivation and commitments to make informed decision and take responsible action (UNESCO 1978). Accordingly, Ogunyemi (1994) conceives environmental education as a global movement whose root could be traced back to the 1972 Stockholm conference and the theme was to make people aware and be concerned about their environment hence the popular saying "act locally and think globally" The ultimate goal of Environmental Education is the promotion of the "quality of the environment" These goals or objectives were spelt out at the conference at Tbilisi in 1979 as follows: awareness, knowledge, skill, attitudes, participation

The above objectives are to foster awareness and concern about interdependence of man and environment and at the same time provide all and sundry with the opportunity to acquire knowledge, value and attitude and skills needed to protect and improve the environment and finally provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working towards the solution to environmental problems.

Finally, Grant (1997), highlighted nine principles for Environmental Education, these include:

- a) Education should emphasize our interdependence with other people, other species and the planet as a whole
- b) Teachers, students and school in the world's richer countries should reduce their consumption of the world's resources
- c) Students must have opportunities to develop a personal connection with nature
- d) Education should be future oriented
- e) We must learn "old wisdom" from native people to re-connect to the planet
- f) Teachers should incorporate media literacy into every school curriculum
- g) Teachers should be facilitators
- h) Teachers should be good role models for their students and "walk their talk" (<http://www.jaltorg/global/29nine.html>).

Health

Health as defined by WHO (World Health organization) is a state of complete physical, mental, social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Maintaining healthy environment however cannot be achieved by mere fiat or admonition nor rhetoric but through the introduction of Environmental education at all levels of the country's educational system.

Healthy Environment

Health is the level of functional or metabolic efficiency of living organisms, in humans, it is the general condition of a person's mind and body usually meaning to be free from illness, injury or pain. The World Health Organization (WHO) (1946) defines health in its broader sense as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity.

The main determinant of health according to the organization includes the social and economic environments, the physical environment and the person's individual characteristics and behaviours. The environment is often cited as an important factor influencing the health status of individuals. These include the characteristics of the natural environment, the built environment and the social environment. Factors such as clean water and air, adequate housing, safety communities and road have all been found to contribute to good health, especially to the health of infants and children.

Healthy environment is acceptable environment where people live doing their work and maintain peace at home, in working places and in the neighbourhood, where there is no rancor to enable man provide maximum output and enjoy. So an environment which invigorates the mind and does not cause any physical damage to the body is healthy environment. This means absence of foul air, bad water, disturbing sounds, pollutants, ill aesthetic setting etc (<http://www.environment.yahho.com>). This is brought about when people do not adversely contribute to environment. That is driving of cars with smoke engine, taking out trash from dirty rug which can affect air, dumping refuse indiscriminately which can cause flood and erosion, tampering with oil pipe to cause oil spoilage and others.

However when the above consciousness is absent, the result both in rural and urban areas may be likelihood of outbreak of epidermis such as offensive odours from refuse, ozone layer depletion which causes skin infection, catarrh, flood destroying lives and properties, diarrhea, oil spoilage in the river-rine areas to mention but a few (Grant, 1981). Environmental health objectives focus on six themes each of which highlights an element of environment health these are outdoor air quality, surface and ground water quality, toxic substances and hazardous waters, homes and communities, infrastructure and surveillance global environment health.

Most of the impact being effected on living organisms by its environment are as a result of the activities of the organisms themselves with equal proportion to the ascending trend in development, civilization and economic enhancement. Activities such as deforestation (cutting of trees and bushes for whatever purpose), use of ozone layer-depleting machineries (cars, lorries and other carbon emitting devices), construction and development of infrastructures, extraction of natural resources such as crude oil, gold etc. have contributed to the deteriorating state of the environment. Finally, to achieve a healthy environment is to determine how to live in total surrounding conditions with minimal or improving effects upon it.

1.2 Methodology

The study utilized quantitative methods in this study helps in understudying and examining the impacts of environmental education on healthy environment in Nigeria. The data for this study were collected through secondary sources. The secondary data were obtained from textbooks, journals, newspapers, internet materials and literature from academic journals in relation to the subject studied. The paper explored thematic and the descriptive method on approaching the arising issues.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

National Policy on Environmental Safety and Protection in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the first national policy on the environment was formulated in 1991. It was later revised in the beginning of Nigeria Fourth republic in 1999, the review was done due to the emerging environmental issues and concerns. Consequently, the reason behind the new National Policy on the Environment is to delineate and outline a new holistic framework to guide the management of the environment and natural resources of the country. The Nigeria National Policy on environment also prescribes sectoral and cross-sectoral strategic policy proclamation, declaration and actions for the management of the country's environment for sustainable development (National Policy on Environment, 2016).

In the same vein, the existing 1991 and 1999 draft policy documents, this Policy derives its strong point from the essential and basic obligation for the protection of the environment as stated in section 20 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended which affords that the "State shall guard and develop the environment and safeguard the land, forest, wild life, air and water of Nigeria". Accordingly, Nigeria is also part of several international treaties and conventions governing environmental issues. It is on the combined thrust of these instruments that the National Policy on the Environment rests (National Policy on Environment, 2016).

Man and Environmental Relationship

Environment can exist without man but man cannot exist without the environment. If only people can understand this, the world could be a better place to live in (internet). Take for instance, Nigerian as an agricultural nation, in some years back, people lived a simple and a happy long life, almost everybody lived long but now as a result of the introduction of industrialization people die at their prime. The main cause of all these troubles starts from health, feeding habit and life styles to social and physical surroundings. The environment is getting worse by the day; therefore, ensuring and maintaining a healthy environment is central to increasing quality of life and years of healthy of life.

Globally, nearly 25 percent of all death and total disease burden can be attributed to environmental factors such as exposure to hazardous substance in the air, water, soil and food, natural and technological disasters, nutritional deficiencies and others. In a nutshell, poor environment quality has its greatest impact on people whose health status is already at risk. Therefore, environmental health must address the societal and environmental factors that increase the likelihood of exposure and diseases.

The scientific view about the relationship that exist between man's health and his environment perceiving it from the line of respiration expounds that plants exhales oxygen which is highly beneficial for man's survival, thus exposing the danger man poses to himself in the face of deforestation and desert encroachment. No doubt, many of the ways we harm our environment came back to haunt us in form of sickness and eventually death. It is indeed obvious that the pesticide-laced food we eat, the smokestack-befouled air we breathe and the petro-chemical based product we use have negativity affected the quality of our lives (<http://www.jaltora/global/2gmne>).

Scientific America (2009) reports that a joint US-Swedish study looking into the effect of household contaminants discovered that children who live in homes with vinyl floors (which can emit hazardous chemicals) are twice as likely to develop signs as autism as kids in other homes. Other studies have shown that women exposed to high level of flame retardant common in cushion, carpet padding and mattress and about 97 percent of woman have detectable level of this chemicals in their bloodstream and most likely to have trouble in getting pregnant and suffer from other fertility issues as a result. Cheaply produced drywall made in china can emit so much sulphur gases that it not only corrode electrical wiring causes breathing problems, bloody noses and headaches for building occupants.

But perhaps trumping all of these examples is the potential disastrous health effect of global warming. Carbon dioxide emission may be directly responsible for health problems at or near their point of releases, but in aggregate, they can cause a lot of distress. According to the Centre for Health and Global Environment at Harvard Medical School, climate change over the coming decade is likely to increase rate of allergies, asthma, heart disease and cancer, among other illness. Also, it is quite likely that as global temperature rises, disease that were previously found only in warmer areas of the world may show up increasingly in others previous cooler areas where people have not yet developed natural defenses against them. And the loss of rain forest that accompanies increase in temperature means less access to undiscovered medicines and degradation of the environment's ability to sustain our species.

Environment Education and Healthy Environment

The relationship between Environmental Education and Healthy Environment is that of the moon and the sun, the sun reflects its light on the moon. The existence of the sun has a lot to do in the effectiveness of the moon. In the same vein, a healthy environment cannot be underscored without the necessary awareness, advocacy to enlighten people on how to ensure the sustainability of the movement. Environment health objectives focus on six themes of which highlights an element of environmental health, outdoor air quality, surface and ground water quality, toxic substances and hazardous water, homes and communities, infrastructure and surveillance, global environment health.

Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges and fosters attitudes, motivation and commitments to make informed decision and take responsible action (UNESCO, 1978). Environmental education could no doubt be effective in solving the emerging environmental problems of deforestation, climatic change, pollution (land, water and air), the extinction of species, the increased desertification of land, the rising sea levels, the destruction of habitats, the release of greenhouse gases (<http://www.jaltora/global/2gnme>).

In order to achieve the acceptable level of global environmental sustainability, the citizen must be empowered with essential knowledge and information. This can be made possible in schools, since educational institutions are the places where the contact of the society is more; it is possible to bring remarkable changes in the mindsets of the public. Take for instance; to protect children living in polluted regions. Environmental education represents a relevant means of prevention as it encourages learner's awareness of their environments about conditions as well as their active participation solving local problems (<http://www.jaltora/global//2gnme>). Environmental education has the capacity to re-orientate the people as to what their relationship with the God-natural resources in the environment should be.

Environmental Education, if incorporated and well developed in our school curriculum at all levels would indeed be a pivot to healthy environment as it is poised majority towards:

- a. Creating the necessary awareness about the importance of maintaining a healthy environment
- b. Educating people on ways and how to control erosion
- c. Encouraging people in the areas of tree planting to generate the outdoor quality air
- d. Helping in the preservation of natural environment i.e. maintaining the bio-diversity
- e. Instilling the awareness of the necessary mechanism in waste disposal
- f. Raising awareness on how to curb and stem the effect of greenhouse materials

3. CHALLENGES CONFRONTING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT IN NIGERIA

According to Omofonmwan (2008); National Policy on Environment (2016); Ya'u Mukhtar (2021); Hyellai Titus Pona et al (2021); there are various challenges confronting healthy environment in Nigeria;

- a) **Sustainable Management of Natural Resources:** there are various environment-unfriendly behaviour such as large-scale deforestation and land clearing, improper and illegal mining, extreme irrigation water supply, unsuitable use of agrochemicals and inorganic fertilizers, unrestrained and poor livestock farming practices, gas flaring, have

contributed to deformation change in vegetation cover, soil dilapidation, as well as alteration in drainage system, loss of biodiversity, overgrazing and disruption of the ecological systems, pollution, increased incidence of disease vectors and the like in many states and communities in Nigeria.

- b) **Environmentally Sound Technology:** In Nigeria, the utilization of natural resources, utilization of energy, production processes and generation of environmental pollution, wastes and degradation depend on the types of technology adopted. The major challenge for the country is to adopt and use environmentally Sound Technologies (ESTs), whether exogenously or endogenously captured and developed because they will give extensively to efficiency and the sustainability of resources through renewable-energy generation, pollution management, and waste lessening.
- c) **Climate change and disaster management:** The effects of the change are already manifesting in increasing extreme climatic events particularly storms, flooding and rising temperatures as well as altered climatic and weather regimes. These are creating many other effects such as declining productivity of rain-fed agriculture and relocation of populations with all its consequences. In the long run all the sectors of the economy could be severely impacted with huge losses including life. This would slow down the pace of development in the country as many economic activities are climate sensitive. There could be shift in the boundaries of ecological belts. The challenge is the promotion of climate compatible development for disaster risk reduction and healthy environment in Nigeria.
- d) **Land degradation and desertification:** Rigorous land degradation persists to devastate and destroy various communities in Nigeria, resulting in drastic declination in the productivity of land resources. Plummeting the rate and sternness of desertification and overturning land degradation is a major challenge for healthy environment in Nigeria.
- e) **Waste management:** Inadequate waste management that is prevalent in Nigeria is detrimental to the edibles of the environment as well as the overall economic growth development and advancement of the Nigeria. Controlling haphazard dumping of household and industrial wastes on land, water and air remains a main environmental challenge in Nigeria.
- f) **Pollution:** Pollution persists to be a main and foremost environmental challenge in the Nigeria, with significant effect on the well-being of the Nigeria environment and the populace.
- g) **Urban decay:** Nigeria is one of the urban states in the countries in the world with the rate about 66% in 2020. The rapidity of urbanization increase has been such that maintenance of unpretentious environmental standards had inevitably facing major setback. The functionality of most urban areas is thus abridged in addition to exerting adverse impacts on households, macro-economic performance and social well-being. This situation poses a main challenge to economic growth and healthy environment in Nigeria.
- h) Others are Environmentally sound technology; Environmental hazards and disasters; Integrated coastal management; Weak environmental governance; Inadequate environmental education and awareness; Dichotomy between environment and growth, and environment and poverty alleviation; Limited private sector participation in environmental management; Conservation of shared natural resources

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Impacts of Environmental Education on Healthy Environment in Nigeria

Environmental health education is concerned with the study of people's behaviour towards the environment in relation to health, as well as their reaction towards the environmental health education programmes and environmental health educators in the totality of environment. It is concerned with the use of environmental processes including consumer participation and motivational, facilitating and helping methods and techniques paying particular attention to the total setting of the consumer to bring about positive environmental behaviour.

Therefore, environmental health education has helped in creating awareness and understanding about environmental problems in Nigeria. Some of these problems are created by man and others are natural. Environmental health education has served as a tool which creates awareness on the causes of environmental problems and their health implications. For instance, all forms of land degradation lead to general lowering of natural fertility and productivity of the land resulting in insufficient food production, lack of food result in starvation and malnutrition. Soil erosion may result in loss of residential houses, farm crops, changes in topography and hydrology of the affected areas, disruption of communication lines and other economic losses (Peter Ekpoh and Bisong 2015). Lack of residential houses may result in physical and mental health problems, such as headache, exposure to cold, hypertension, communicable diseases and other stress related illness.

In addition, environmental education has enabled man to know the causes of diseases and relationship between outbreak of epidemic and environment. Man's negative attitude towards the environment such as open refuse dump, natural resources exploitation, water contamination through indiscriminate dumping of refuses and sewages, Socio-cultural practices that endanger health and environment may be abandoned through environmental health education. Lastly, environment health education has created awareness about factors in sustainable environment and their environmental health implications. (Pona et al, 2021).

Various Ways Environmental Education has been Enhancing Healthy Environment in Nigeria

There are various ways in which environment education has been promoting healthy environment in Nigeria. These are;

- a) The Nigeria federal government has incorporation of environmental health education into educational curriculum in schools from primary to tertiary education levels
- b) Government and various stakeholders has also been doing Environmental Health Assessment (EHA) which is been done no regularly and the result is communicated to the public
- c) Government at all level has been organizing intervention programs for environmental protection which focused on multi-settings and community involvement
- d) Government and environment stakeholders in Nigeria have been always embarked on regular tree planting exercise.
- e) Individuals were been Equipped with the knowledge and importance of health environment to one/community health
- f) There are always been orientation programmes sensitizing people on the effects environmental pollution and its implications of unhealthy environment on print and electronic media.

5. CONCLUSION

Health, they say is wealth; for any nation to experience development, her environment must be the kind that is friendly with her citizens; it must be free all forms disease or epidemics. This can be possible when we undergo Environmental Education with a view to sustaining the natural status or managing the resources of the environment without affecting the future generation negatively. This clearly shows that Environmental Education has a very role big role to play in ensuring healthy environment.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the great damage caused by man's activities on the environment, there is the need for everyone to have a change of attitude towards the maintenance and sustenance of a Healthy Environment. In actualizing this, Environmental Education programmes should be pursued rigorously to ensure that it is made to see the light of the day in the school Curriculum at all levels. Also efforts should be made to ensure environmental friendliness in the name of awareness campaign via the Mass media; one on one campaign should be put in place to raise the consciousness for a sustainable Healthy Environment.

Finally, all the stake holders on the environment right from individuals to groups, Nations, Government at all levels, corporate bodies as well as non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) must not relent in their efforts to contribute their quota and heed the clarion call for positive attitude towards the environment. There should be favorable laws and policies on environment to ensure the sustainability of both physical and social environments.

In a nutshell, to enjoy a healthy environment therefore all the above must be put in place because healthy environment is pivotal to healthy living.

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