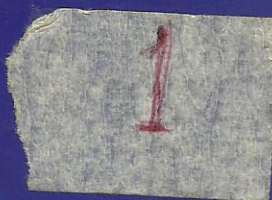
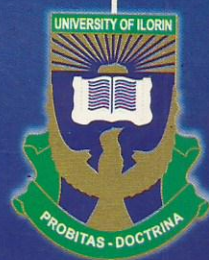


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ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION: MEANING AND ITS EFFECTS ON HUMAN HEALTH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the meaning and effects of environmental degradation on health and well being of people in Nigeria. The paper x-rayed in detail types of environmental degradation, effects of environmental degradation on health and wellbeing of man in Nigeria. The review shows that environmental degradation have serious effects on health and wellbeing as seen from desertification, deforestation, poor waste disposal, environmental pollution and so on. Based on the appraisal, it is recommended that government at all levels should make enabling laws to control indiscriminate dumping of wastes in the environment. It is also recommended that government should endeavour to plant trees and embark on large scale farming to control desertification and deforestation problems.

Introduction

The term environment simply connotes total surrounding of man that consists of human and material resources. It consists of the land on which we build houses, plant crops, people and animals, societal norms and values' and so on. Lucas and Gilles (2006) posited that man's total environment includes all the living and non-living elements in his surroundings. It consists of physical, biological and social components.

It has been adequately observed that the notion of land use and misuse is a recurrent issue in our daily life. This is due largely to the need to make an end meet and man quest for survival in a complex society. In an effort to ensure effective and judicious use of land and the resources abound in it, many environmental problems and abuses have been observed.

The concept environmental abuses can be conceived as an act of subjecting our environment to undue ecological problems and strains. Jimoh (2003) asserted that environmental abuses is the deliberate efforts to put environment into optimal use without the slightest consideration for the stress introduced into the environmental system. The abuses are often manifested from soil tilling for agricultural purposes, mining activities, inadequate waste disposal, noise generation, pollution among others.

The unfavourable conditions created by man not only threatened the survival of man, but also other living organisms. World Health Organization (1992) noted that there will be considerable number of plant and animal species which are likely become rare, threatened and endangered due to the current pace of environmental abuses. The body gives prominence to all round improvement of environment for better health and prevention of diseases as enshrined in its "health for all" goals and programmes.

The rapid pace of industrialization coupled with uncontrolled exploitation of nature has resulted in continuous dumping of industrial by products, hazardous chemicals unclear wastes, deforestation in vast areas of earth and pollution of river basins, lakes and sea. The list of abuses wreck on our environment is inexhaustive, and collectively tagged "environmental degradation". This paper will therefore review meaning, effects and management of environmental degradation in Nigeria.

Meaning of Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation is a term constantly used to refer to all forms of misuse and abuses perpetuated by man in a given geographical location. Jimoh and Ajibade (1995) remarked that environmental degradation is a number of environmental problems that ensue due to the abuses meted to the environment in the course of interactions. Abubakar (2000) noted that it is unlawful and inconsistent utilization of resources abound in our environment to the essence that amount to deterioration of living standard of people.

In the light of foregoing, environmental degradation encompasses all havoc wrecked on the environment as a result of man's selfish and diletic quest for economic gains. Smart (2004) asserted that the ecological and environmental hazards in Nigeria can be attributed to five principal factors which include, selfishness, greed, ignorance, shortsighted view point and self centred attitudes.

Environmental degradation appears in different forms ranging from land degradation, environmental pollution, flood disaster, waste dumping, and so on. Smart (2004) enunciated that the ecological and environmental hazards experienced by Nigerians are gully erosion, droughts, deforestation, desertification, water hyacinth, global warming, health hazards, pollution, to mention but few.

It has been observed that the strive for sustainable development poses serious threat to environmental stability in many ways in Nigeria. The economic activities in industries, farming occupations and other production sectors have caused devastating problems on living standard of Nigerians. Adeniyi (1986) denounced that rural Nigeria has witnessed severe environmental degradation in recent times resulting from oil drilling, surface mining and quarrying. The researcher reiterated that frequent oil spills in the Niger Delta and coastal parts of the country have caused serious damage to marine and aquatic life as well as to the traditional economics of the region.

By and large, a critical look at constituents of environmental degradation shows fashion of living and non-living within our society ecosystem. The disperse in the environmental activities is often resulted from conflicting interests and roles play by animates and inanimate objects in the ecosystem. Tade and Ademola (1992) posited that major challenge of sustainable development in Nigeria is the relationship between land and environmental degradation.

Types of Environmental Degradation

Environmental abuses take different forms and shapes depend on perspective by which we look at them. In whatever any way we view degradation, land and its component parts will continue to feature in such issue.

The easiest way by which we can identify different categories of environmental degradation is to appraise the abuses through constituents of ecosystem. Smart (2004) noted that the major global environmental problems range from pollution to biological losses, deforestation and atmospheric contaminations. Below are some of the kinds of environmental degradation in Nigeria environment:

- (i) Land degradation is the first and foremost environmental abuse that exhumes other environmental misuses in our society. Cuninghame and Cuninghame (2005) emphatically stressed that we generally consider the land degraded when the soil is impoverished or eroded, water runs off or is contaminated more than is normal, vegetation is diminished, biomass production is decreased or wild life diversity diminishes. Abubakar (2000) noted that there are different ways by which the land has always been abused which include:
 - Indiscriminate dumping of industrial and harmful waste products on land which often resulted into loss of its fertility;
 - Multi-farming activities to which land is subjected. This consists of over-fertilization and long-time mixed cropping practice to which land has been conditioned;
 - Oil drilling which make land unsuitable for farming. This usually make crop planting and germination difficult;
 - Erosion also constitutes a significant abuse to the environment in many ways. It can result to poor harvest by farmers, collapse of buildings and so on.
 - Apart from the factors and forms of land abuses identified above, Ukpong (1994) noted that land degradation is often resulted from land degradation with pesticide and fertilizer, population growth and population influx, property ownership issues, inadequate control of uses to which land are subjected, and so on.
- (ii) Deforestation is another form of abuses perpetuated either consciously or unconsciously. Deforestation is a process by which the busy areas are being denatured. It has to do with changing the biological properties of an area. Smart (1998) asserted that forest clearance on a massive scale for agricultural development, urban growth, industrial expansion and general pressures from increasing population have reduced the extent, diversity and stability of the Nigeria forest.

- (iii) Desertification is one of the ways by which land were being misused and neglected. It is an act of neglecting or degrading land which usually resulted from man's actions and natural causes. Ukpong (1994) posited that desertification is the process where lands are reduced to desert-like conditions and the areas mostly affected by desertification are the savannas.
- (iv) Environmental pollution is another form of environmental degradation. This has to do with means by which elements in natural environment are being denatured and abused. Ukpong (1994) tacitly remarked that pollution occurs whenever potentially harmful substances are released into the environment. It is usually classified according to the receiving agents of air as emissions, water as effluent and land as dumps and disposal. Simply put, there are air, water and noise pollution.
- (v) Environment can also be misused or abused through improper disposal of waste products (solid and liquid wastes), overcrowding due to improper location and sitting of houses and living apartment, to mention but few. There is always involvement of hazards and land misused in the cause of refuse and sewage disposal processes. Olorunfemi and Odita (1998) observed that rapid population growth coupled with inefficient waste disposal methods and aggravated by inconsistent waste management policies greatly abuse the status of the environment.

Effects of Environmental Degradation on Health and Well being of Man in Nigeria

A critical appraisal of harmful and diabolical changes that often exerted by abuses wrecked on our environment revealed debilitating effects on people's health and well being. The environmental abuses as identified above affect either directly or indirectly health and well being of people in Nigeria. Abubakar (2000) and Okafor (1988) identified the following as harmful effects of environmental degradation:

- There is always low foods production as a result of desertification. In a situation when the land used for farming purpose has been over-used and lost its fertility, there will be low food production. This condition often lead to malnutrition and food deficient diseases Okafor (1988) observed that fast declining states of forest resource in Nigeria constitute great threats to soil fertility, desertification incidents, agricultural productivity and in fact, to the quality of life in general.
- The effects of pollution are unquantifiable on health and well being of people. The different types of pollution such as air, noise and water pollution are known to cause severe health problems related to the pollution effects. Air pollution for instance caused air borne diseases such as avian influenza, Asthma, skin cancer and so on. Apart from problems relating to air pollution, noise pollution also leads to severe health problems such as hard of hearing, deafness, psychological problem that can lead to psychiatric ailments. Water pollution resulting from environmental degradation can also lead to water borne disease such as diarrhea, typhoid fever, dysentery and so on.
- The abuses of environment due deliberate and careless dumping of wastes have been confirmed as roots cause of health problems such as food poisoning, gastro-enteritis, epidemic of cholera and so on.

- Industrial wastes and mineral spillages often lead to infertility of soil, poor and low agricultural output, water pollution, fire explosion all of which can result to diseases such as nutritional deficiency, water borne diseases, physical injuries and disabilities.
- Radiation and other forms of ultra violet rays abuses are known to cause problems such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, skin cancer, conjunctivitis, glaucoma, blindness, malaria to mention but few.
- Other known implications of environmental degradation and abuses are stress, emotional problems such as high blood pressure, depression and so on.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been adequately observed from the appraisal above that environmental degradation and abuses have serious effects on the health and well being of people. Some of the effect of environmental degradation can be felt directly through environmental pollution, desertification, deforestation and so on. The effect of environmental degradation can be indirectly felt through improper disposal of waste, oil spillage and explosion, to mention but few. In view of the above inferences, the following recommendations were made:

- Governments at all levels should make an enabling laws to control indiscriminate dumping of wastes in the environment;
- Government should endeavour to plant trees and embark on large scale farming to control desertification and deforestation problems.
- There should be adequate management and disposal of generated waste products to prevent diseases outbreaks;
- People should be adequately trained on safety precaution and education to prevent occupational and industrial hazards that caused severe health problems.
- Health workers and environmentalists should endeavour to be given health talk and organize series of public enlightenment programmes on effects of environmental degradation and abuses on over all quality of life.

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