

## THE CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTALISM IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*With a population of over 120 million and a land area of 983,213 km<sup>2</sup>, Nigeria is a country whose environment bears the visible and invisible scars of human habitation. The human race's impact on the natural world has led to a host of problems, including increased urbanization, less forest cover, desertification, overpopulation, and pollution of various types. These shifts take place as a result of people's insatiable need for basic necessities including food, housing, entertainment, and infrastructure. Even if these needs and wants help the nation progress, they hurt the environment due to careless land and resource exploitation. The purpose of the regulatory agencies like the Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) in Nigeria is to regulate the use of natural resources, as well as their management and conservation. However, data collected from the field shows that environmental degradation is progressing at a faster rate than it was before the advent of FME. In order to address these issues, it will be necessary to move beyond the goals and strategies outlined by FME. Indigenous peoples, especially core environmentalists, should lead efforts to preserve the environment. This course ought to be composed and conveyed in languages spoken in Nigeria. Humans should act as agents in the design process that takes into account the country's diverse natural zones. Primary and secondary school curricula should incorporate Environmental Education (which should cover environmental protection practices) to ensure a lasting impact.*

**Keywords:** *Environmentalism, Nigeria, Urbanization, Desertification, Overpopulation. Pollution*

## **Introduction**

Although studies of the environment give knowledge of and about it, and that knowledge of the environment equally propels studies of the environment, modern academic analyses and discussions of the environment explain and force the distinction between the two. Because the difference in question is unique to the realm of practice, the formulation it reflects is purely pragmatic. The theory of contemporary global interdependence between and among nation-states and non-state actors working independently and about the state explains the relationship between the environment and sustainable development as it is currently discussed in globalist discourse.

A growing number of people are becoming more environmentally conscious and globally concerned about environmental issues, and they are becoming more vocal in their support for sustainable development and other related causes (Agyeman, 2020). By grounding their work in the current state of social scientific analysis, environmentalists can see the numerous facets of the environment through the lens of the multidisciplinary approaches intrinsic to environmental discourse. Consequently, as part of intellectualism's usual procedure, we must enquire into these crucial matters: What are the benefits of learning about and studying our surroundings? When it comes to what is already known about it, what has the pattern been? The importance of the information and research begs the question: why? The questions are essential, but how will the answers help Nigerians and Africans? Environmentalists advocate for a more sustainable future and study the environment to understand it better.

Therefore, the implications for our present and future existence provide the groundwork and rationale for studying and understanding the environment and its challenges and, by extension, their importance in this modern day. Who or what is this inference, and how does it relate to who we are at our core? To develop future projections, it is necessary to answer all the questions collectively.

The historical rainfall and the specific seasonal oscillation revealed the interconnections of trade, manufacturing, agriculture, and industry. Stimulating the patterns allows us to investigate the connections and draw significant conclusions. Looking at average weather data collected over many decades is helpful to understand the current climate and its changes better. Since specialists have been trying to convince the UN for over twelve years that the world's climate is changing and that this will change for the worse if we do not do something soon (Agyeman, 2020), we finally know. Whether or not the Earth's climate has altered is an issue that has been debated to death. The current political climate has made it so that the efforts necessary to counteract the contained implications and effects are fraught with controversy.

Considering the multidisciplinary nature of environmental concerns and the need to understand and foretell their impact on sustainable development, it is clear that a multi-method approach is necessary. Development, ultimately about people, implies that any effort to understand or improve it should center on human beings and all aspects of their existence, including but not limited to their language, religion, habits, culture, and so on (Allam et al., 2022). To get to the bottom of the environmental and sustainable development debate, scientific inquiry and technological advancements should adopt an investigative stance grounded in those mentioned above. By understanding our natural surroundings, we can better prepare for potential natural catastrophes like floods and landslides, which threaten human survival now and in the future. Understanding the environment is, hence, crucial for everyone.

It is important to note that out of a total land area of 983,213 square kilometers, 773,783 square kilometers are located in the savanna zones of Nigeria. 133,717 square kilometers are forested, and 75,707 square kilometers are part of the derived savanna zone. With a population of over 120 million, Nigeria has a density of over 120 people per square kilometer. It is clear that Nigeria already faces a high population density. However, this density may differ from one location to another. A permanent imprint on the terrain results from the millions of Nigerians interacting with their various ecosystems. Some examples of these repercussions include increased urbanization, desertification, overcrowding, and other forms of pollution.

These interactions affect The natural environment in both good and bad ways. The results of this study highlight the detrimental effects of human activity on the natural world.

Environmental deterioration has resulted from careless human activities caused by a myriad of factors, including but not limited to lack of knowledge, poverty, overpopulation, and greed. The deterioration occurs due to Nigerians trying to meet their (apparently) limitless needs for food, housing, recreation, infrastructure, and so on with the resources already around them (Allam et al., 2022). Both the positive and harmful effects on the environment are caused by these land use activities, which together help the country flourish. These unfavourable effects are known as environmental degradation, which means "abuse of the environment" due to mismanagement of resources.

This paper investigates a few of the subsequent repercussions of man's contact with his environment, with an eye toward highlighting their role in contributing to environmental problems. It also proposes redesigning the goals and strategies to guide stakeholders in combating these challenges.

## **Literature Review**

### **Environmentalism: An Overview**

Environmentalists work to keep the planet's air and water clean for future generations, and they also work to preserve and safeguard the many ecosystems that support life on Earth (Allam et al., 2022). This movement's primary goal is to preserve Earth's resources, which are essential to human existence and progress, as well as the preservation of natural elements. Climate change is the biggest problem facing our world now (Ascensão et al., 2018). Air and water pollution, water scarcity, food insecurity, deforestation, increasing sea levels, biodiversity loss, indigenous environmental knowledge and traditions, and rising sea levels are all part of this.

A municipal, regional, or even personal approach to environmental problems is known as civic environmentalism. As a form of social action, it encourages locals to

band together and find solutions to environmental issues affecting their neighborhoods and cities. A community or movement can only be sustained by the combined efforts of its members, and this is the overarching purpose of civic environmentalism (Johnson et al., 2019). Sustainability can be described as an approach to living that prioritizes preserving natural resources and promoting social and technological innovation aimed at resolving environmental issues. Making these choices about how we live now will ensure that future generations can enjoy the same standard of living.

Ecology, in its purest and most ethical form, has its roots in the customs, practices, and wisdom of the world's indigenous peoples. Sanitation and waste management were practices the Indus Civilization adopted around 5000 years ago. To protect land and minimize soil erosion, ancient civilizations in India, China, and Peru developed agricultural practices like crop rotation and terrace farming (Johnson et al., 2019). Ancient Greek thinkers like Hippocrates and Plato raised concerns about deforestation and environmental health. Native American culture in the United States is deeply rooted in the land and its natural resources. The indigenous peoples of the area, from Alaska to Australia, have a long and rich history of knowledge about the resources available to them, including the plants and animals they ate, the fish they caught, and how to manage wildfires for improved hunting. Using fire to clear land in the past allowed for a diverse regrowth of plants, which in turn boosted the number of prey and predator species. Worldwide, indigenous peoples view the environment more comprehensively.

"Western environmentalism," as it is commonly known, emerged as a reaction to human activities that depleted Earth's natural resources and sought to mitigate or eliminate them. The colonization of Native American territories around the world brought about environmental degradation and exploitation, and this fact must be recognized. The colonizers disregarded the well-rounded ways of the indigenous people, who had a deep understanding of the country and its resources.



Fig 1: Essence of Environmentalism/Source: Google image .

Following traditional techniques that preserve ecological harmony, environmentalism has always originated in indigenous and aboriginal cultures. Although they own 11% of the world's wood, indigenous peoples only comprise 4% to 5% of the population. According to Robbins (2018), this action helps to preserve 80% of the world's biodiversity. Similarly, communities and individuals of color in the United States spearheaded the environmental justice movement in response to the reality that they were disproportionately located in regions most affected by pollution (Miller & Skelton, 2016).

In 1972, 114 countries came together at a United Nations meeting in Stockholm to have the first global conversation about environmental issues. Today, 195 member nations of the United Nations have signed the Paris Agreement of 2016, the most recent global framework and agreement on climate change. The USA declared withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in 2017.

Immense fossil fuel corporations ExxonMobil and Shell each conducted their climate change studies in the 1980s. As we know more about the climate catastrophe, their experts concluded that the extraction, sale, and use of fossil fuels like coal and oil would cause the planet's temperature to rise. The fossil fuel industry shamefully buried the evidence supporting its claims and actively worked to quell any discussion

of climate change. Their decision was driven by a desire to maintain their financial stake in fossil fuels, the principal cause of the current global catastrophe (Franta, 2018). Fossil fuels power our cars, homes, buildings, technology, entertainment, and every aspect of our existence. However, burning these fuels emits dangerous environmental pollutants, including large amounts of carbon dioxide.

The most pressing issue confronting humanity at present is climate change. The grim truth of the climate crisis's effects on the lives of current and future generations is the root cause of its severity and urgency. All of Earth's ecosystems and habitats will suffer permanent harm. The main reason for concern is the rate or speed at which changes occur in our global atmosphere and on Earth (Lindsey, 2019).

This generation, particularly millennials and Gen Z, is more motivated than ever to take action and lessen the impact. Thanks to initiatives like recycling, reduced consumption, and online environmental petitions, progress has been made in environmental conservation, and the supply of environmentally friendly items has grown. Nevertheless, this falls short. We need stronger environmental regulations and a sea change in legislation, consumer habits, and human lifestyles generally because the world's population and consumption have led to a climate catastrophe.

Regardless of one's socioeconomic status, color, or country of origin, the climate crisis knows no bounds. However, prejudice and sexism in politics and society affect how people and governments react to the climate catastrophe. Since low-income and minority groups experience disproportionately high levels of environmental degradation and disproportionately high costs associated with these issues, environmental activism is essential in advancing social justice (The Lancet, 2018). Developing countries are struggling to balance economic growth and environmental conservation. In contrast, Western and industrialized nations like the United States, Russia, China, Germany, and many of Europe have released the most greenhouse emissions. Emotional and intangible ties to the natural world are also in danger. The environmental movement may have a heavy scientific foundation, but the bond between humans and the natural world is the most inherent.



We can do our part to combat climate change by engaging in civic environmentalism. It is primarily the duty and obligation of Western and industrialized governments and multinational enterprises to mitigate the consequences of climate change. However, this issue affects all humans; we can all do our part. We can all do our part to be more eco-conscious, even though some people are more directly responsible for the problem than others. It is within our power as citizens to recycle or repurpose certain materials and support businesses that employ environmentally conscious packaging. Supporting local businesses and opting for eco-friendly modes of transportation like public transportation and bicycles is always a good idea. Overall, we may lessen our environmental impact by consuming less meat and dairy products, whose industrial production is harmful. We can all do our part by reducing, reusing, and recycling—no need to give up the things that matter to us or make us happy (EPA, 2019).

In 2018, donations to animal and environmental groups hit a record high, according to Giving USA 2019, with an anticipated 3.6% increase to \$12.70 billion. For the greater good of the environment, nonprofit groups employ tried-and-true and unconventional tactics. Two groups that focus on protecting the environment through litigation are the Environmental Defense Fund and the National Resources Defense Council. In addition to these organizations, many more work to protect the environment. These include the Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, National Wildlife Federation, protests, public hearings, lobbying of governments and corporations, and land acquisition for preservation. Unlike for-profit businesses and government entities, a nonprofit environmental group's only goal is to protect the environment.





Fig 2: Typical Forest/Source: Google Image

The environmental movement and related groups do an excellent job of advocating for change and setting an example for society. A good example of a civic movement taking on the advocacy role is Extinction Rebellion, an international movement that focuses on nonviolent civil disobedience to draw attention to the social and environmental collapse of both the government and the general public (Extinction Rebellion, 2019).

Formal organizations and groups, as well as the nonprofit sector, have become environmentalists. On the other hand, environmental protection is a civic duty that helps our civil society's democratic processes function. Teaching people about environmental issues is the most essential thing we can do and the most selfless thing we can do for the planet. Verifying the information is just as vital as raising awareness and providing education. While credible newspapers, scientific journals, and databases are our best bets, we should also examine our sources and information from other places to ensure accuracy.

Similarly, we can be conscientious buyers if we inquire about the product's origin, manufacturing process, and manufacturer(s). Any product or item that cannot be shown to have originated from its manufacturer is unsustainable and harms both people and the environment. We may take our involvement in the environmental

movement further by lending our skills and time to environmental groups, advocacy groups, community groups, and even non-profits and voluntary associations not necessarily concerned with environmental issues. Environmentalist principles and constructs are found in every study area because environmentalism is a global movement.

### **Environmentalism Challenges in Nigeria**

**i. Urbanization:** Rapid population expansion and movement from rural areas to urban centers are the main drivers of urbanization. Slums in urban areas have a negative impact on the environment in Nigeria (Omisore, 2018). The situation is a prime example of how development strategies have failed to keep up with the exponential increase in the human population. The fast production of non-biodegradable materials, such as plastics, has made the disposal of trash and refuse a significant challenge.

As a result of cities' fast expansion and the inadequacy of social services and infrastructure to support them, urban environmental conditions have been steadily worsening. Evidence points to inadequate storm drains, garbage dumping into drainage systems, and building houses near or even on natural water channels as the top three causes of urban flooding. Overcrowding in filthy dwellings, inadequate or nonexistent social services and infrastructure (including water and sewage facilities), and inadequate or nonexistent access routes are all environmental issues linked to the expansion of urban slums (Angaye & Abowei, 2017).

**ii. Overpopulation:** In every environmental problem, population growth is a crucial component. The environment is stressed out due to overpopulation. The overexploitation of natural resources by humans is the root cause of many environmental problems, including desertification, erosion, degradation, and overpopulation. Up until recently, Nigerians tended to oppose efforts to significantly lower their "high population size" because they saw it as a sign of greatness, power, and status. The extent to which traditional communities are being compelled to forsake the production systems and resource management strategies that enabled them to sustainably produce food while minimizing environmental impacts is only now

coming to light as a result of overpopulation. The fast deterioration of environmental quality and human living situations is a straightforward consequence of the exponential rise in the human population. After the country's economic emergency was proclaimed in 1985, Mabogunje (1985) cited in Baus (2017) reasoned that the following years would see massive attempts to boost output and efficiency. People will be so focused on meeting their short-term demands in such a stressful atmosphere that they will fail to give much thought to the long-term effects, particularly on future generations (Baus, 2017). "The present high rate of our population expansion is already contributing greatly to the destruction of the ecosystem of the country," the Federal Government of Nigeria said in its 1988 National Policy on Population for Development. It notes that soil erosion and desertification have resulted from overgrazing, overcrowding, and land fragmentation and that these problems will only get worse if the current rate of population expansion is maintained (Liu et al., 2022).

**iii. Deforestation:** Large areas covered in trees, often found in sub-equatorial and monsoon climates, are known as forests (Njora & Yilmaz, 2022). It is impossible to overstate the significance of the forest to humans. For endangered and uncommon species, they provide a haven. Forests play the role of storm breaks in protecting towns and villages from storm damage. They serve many practical purposes, including as fuel (in the form of wood and charcoal), paper and textile fiber, medicinal (in the form of some plants' stems and leaves), habitat (for animals to breed), erosion control, food production, and building materials.

Approximately 360,000 square kilometers, or over one-third of the country's total geographical area, was projected to be covered by forests of various varieties in 1975 (Bora, 2016). It would take 25–30 years to harvest all of the matured timbers from the high forest, according to estimates, which is 1.5 million cubic meters each year. It would take fewer than fifteen years to deplete the forest of its timber supplies, given the fast increase in household consumption of lumber as a consequence of higher building construction rates caused by rising incomes and populations (Njora & Yilmaz, 2022).

When trees are cut down for various reasons without also planting new trees to take their place, this practice is known as deforestation. Everyone and everything is at risk when forests are cut down. It triggers storms and soil erosion, which in turn can wipe out crops, homes, and animals. Soil erosion, floods, and silt buildup in rivers and lakes are all consequences of clearing forests. Deforestation reduces the amount of water that trees can collect through transpiration, which in turn affects the relative humidity in the air and, ultimately, the amount of precipitation that falls on a given area. Soil mineral content is depleted when crops are grown repeatedly on previously removed plant areas (Andrée et al., 2019).

Reduced forest size, diversity, and stability have resulted from deforestation in Nigeria for a variety of reasons, including agricultural development, urbanization, industrial expansion, and population pressure. Approximately 600,000 hectares of forest are lost annually due to negligent exploitation and husbandry, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (Nathaniel & Bekun, 2019). Soil erosion, infertility, desertification, and flooding are just a few of the environmental problems that have worsened throughout the country as a result of this reckless forest exploitation.

**iv. Desertification:** Deserts, like the one that stretches across Africa, are landmasses devoid of vegetation and water and typically covered with sand. Consequently, desertification occurs, wherein the once fruitful area is gradually covered by desert. Desertification can occur as a result of natural processes or human interference. Drought and wind-borne sand deposition are two of the most essential natural dangers that exacerbate desertification.

A more significant amount of desertification has occurred in the northern region of the nation, where the Saharan desert has consumed the formerly arable territory. Part of the region that is experiencing desertification is the basin of Lake Chad. The water surface area of the lake has decreased from approximately 24,000 square kilometers in 1963 to approximately 3,000 square kilometers in 1984 (Mahmood et al., 2019).

This is because of both natural disasters (such as drought and sand particles carried by the wind) and human mistakes in managing the lake system.

One of the greatest threats to humanity is desertification. The result is mass starvation, sickness, and the loss of agricultural land, animals, and people. Terrace plowing, irrigation, and tree and grass planting are all ways to slow or stop desertification.

**v. Pollution:** There are three distinct types of environmental pollution. These can be classified as air pollution, water pollution, and land contamination. When substances in the outer atmosphere are present in concentrations that are detrimental to both humans and the environment, this is known as air pollution, according to the World Health Organization (2018). Human activities have significantly worsened the state of the lower atmosphere on the surface of the world. There is an excess of carbon monoxide due to combustion and other human activities, and this is mainly attributable to the expansion and modernization of industrial processes and urbanization.

When carbon monoxide combines with blood vessels, it blocks them from absorbing oxygen, leading to suffocation. Air pollution has recently become an issue in numerous rural areas in Nigeria that were formerly characterized by dry, fresh air (Njora & Yilmaz, 2022). This is a result of the growth of human activities and the process of industrialization.

The term "aquatic pollution" refers to the discharge of undesirable physical, chemical, and biological substances into bodies of water from the human environment. Substances that alter the water's natural state are known as pollutants, and they can be chemical, physical, or biological. This incident causes widespread water contamination in most cities in Nigeria. The waterways in these urban centers are also clogged with solid trash.

When undesirable things like trash or debris end up on land, it is called land surface pollution. The most prevalent land pollution comes from urban areas' dispersed

garbage and other waste materials. Most environmental problems, according to Njora & Yilmaz (2022), are caused by the manufacture or use of things whose waste products quickly become pollutants. The fast accumulation of solid waste was attributed by Mahmood et al (2019) to the advent of urbanization. Land area pollution in Nigeria has taken on a new dimension due to the country's rapid industrialization and increasing urbanization, as well as its inadequate waste management controls.

While this paper does touch on a few of the most pressing issues caused by humans' interference with nature, it is far from exhaustive. We will go over the next steps and provide some fundamental suggestions that will help the Federal Ministry of Environment accomplish its goals in the following part.

### **Tackling the Challenges of Environmentalism in Nigeria: Roles of Stakeholders**

In the last 30 years, Nigeria has seen a rise in environmental challenges such as desertification, overcrowding, pollution, deforestation, and urbanization. Similarly, the focus on minimizing, halting, and alleviating the effects of environmental deterioration by governments, NGOs, corporations, and individuals is relatively new. Decree 58, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FME), was established in 1988 by the federal government to establish regulations for the management of Nigeria's environment. This agency did not come into effect until December of that year.

Nonetheless, there were a number of government acts and statutes pertaining to environmental preservation before the 1988 Decree (which created FME). Among these, there are several notable acts, such as the Mineral Act of 1969, the related Gas Injection Act of 1969, the Chad Basin Development Act of 1973, and the Oil in Navigable Water Decree of 1968. To solve specific recognized environmental issues, these laws and acts were proposed. They were limited in both scope and space. The Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) was established by Decree No. 58 of 1988 and later amended by Decree 59 of 1992. The decrees granted the agency broad authority over the management, exploitation, and protection of Nigeria's natural resources.

The Federal Government provides FME with both legal support and financial resources, yet the agency has failed miserably in its efforts thus far. This is because since FME was established, the rate of environmental degradation has steadily increased. More so than in the past, issues including pollution, desertification, deforestation, and urbanization stand out. In the next fifteen years, Nigeria might become an uninhabitable country unless effective methods of protecting and managing the environment are implemented.

People do not recognize regulatory agencies like FME as organizations. The people's customs and practices did not give rise to the notion. FME has a complete disregard for human and environmental health. Those working for her are reminiscent of the tax collectors of yesteryear. Unlike the more common "Bottom-up" approach, FME is a "Top-down" development technique.

The success of regulatory agencies like FME depends on the conceptualization of certain fundamental notions regarding environmental management. Our ancestors were very dependent on the natural world before the advent of modernity. They have the know-how to harness natural resources while preventing their depletion. With this in mind, FME should be a community-based idea. The agency establishes what is referred to as an "Agric cell" to disseminate contemporary and scientific agricultural practices. Each cell has an agricultural officer whose job it is to spread knowledge about contemporary farming techniques.

Similarly, environmental protection personnel should be dispatched to specific communities to educate them on cutting-edge environmental protection tactics and approaches. Each of these tiers will be housed in the community-based framework. There are three levels of government: the ward, the neighbourhood, and the city or town.

Offenders caught should face consequences at the hands of the local government. Both the federal and state levels are then involved. Wherever this model of



community involvement has been implemented, outstanding results have been attained.

It is expected that the environmental protection officer is proficient in the language(s) spoken in the region under his control. This is because, according to Babalola & Olawuyi (2021), most people who work in the land do not have a Western education. People will start to care about the environment when this happens. The national policy on the environment will be successful in achieving its aims when the public understands the consequences of careless environmental practices and has access to practical environmental management tools. At long last, the researcher is in favour of including environmental education in primary and higher education curricula.

### **Conclusion**

Over 120 million people call Nigeria home, spread out over 983,213 km<sup>2</sup> of territory. There will always be a visible reminder of the millions of individuals who have interacted with their natural surroundings. Deforestation, desertification, urbanization, overpopulation, and pollution of all types have been the outcomes of these Nigerians' efforts to satisfy their seemingly infinite needs for food, shelter, recreation, and infrastructure amenities, among many others. Even if these land-use activities help the country develop overall, they also harm the ecosystem.

These environmental issues prompted the establishment of FME to regulate all land use activities. Nonetheless, after the FME was passed, environmental degradation in Nigeria has worsened at a faster rate. We need to move beyond the aims and tactics of regulatory agencies to address these difficulties since they pose new and complex issues.

Methods for preserving the environment should be "Bottom-up" based and cultivated domestically. It ought to center on the community. It is recommended that the framework be structured at the community or village level. At the ward level, a number of communities should be grouped. From ward level to Local Government

Level. It is only fair that local environmental protection officials have the authority to penalize violators on an individual basis.

Both elementary and secondary school curricula should incorporate lessons on environmental awareness.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the challenges explored, the paper recommends that:

- i. **Enhance Public Awareness and Education:** Launch comprehensive campaigns to educate the public about the importance of environmental conservation, sustainable practices, and the impacts of overpopulation, deforestation, and pollution.
- ii. **Implement and Enforce Environmental Regulations:** Strengthen and strictly enforce environmental laws and regulations to mitigate pollution, control deforestation, and manage waste effectively.
- iii. **Promote Sustainable Agricultural Practices:** Encourage sustainable agricultural methods, such as crop rotation and organic farming, to reduce land degradation and desertification while preserving soil fertility.
- iv. **Develop and Expand Green Infrastructure:** Invest in green infrastructure, including renewable energy sources, public transportation, and green spaces, to reduce the environmental impact of urbanization and promote sustainable development.
- v. **Foster Community-Based Environmental Initiatives:** Support local and indigenous community initiatives that focus on environmental conservation, such as reforestation projects, clean-up drives, and the protection of natural habitats.

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