



CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION, FULCRUM OF SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is all-encompassing and requires environmental resources imbued in the environment. Thus, attaining effective sustainable development calls for an enduring environment whose carrying capacity has not tampered hence, sustainable environment, consequently, conscious efforts must be garnered to ensure it. Since bad habits are an easy task to erase, there is the need to get children involved in the campaign at a tender age and enlist their technological inclinations in ensuring an environmentally friendly stance. This study determines the impact of children's environmental resource conservation on sustainable environment and development in Nigeria sub-Saharan Africa. Among others, it was observed that the environmental wars on many occasions do not involve children, the future leaders laden with technological innovations and population; the state of the environment arising from human impacts in the present dispensation requires concerted efforts to drive change; such changes requires right attitude to the environment and environmental friendly posture; children possess teachable spirits, vast in the technological waves and thus, constitute the fulcrum of the current environmental concern. It is imperative therefore to provide an enabling environment that can drive children's technological inclinations, necessary resources, and materials for them to participate effectively in driving a sustainable environment achievable through necessary encouragement.

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1. Introduction

There is no gainsaying in the fact that a sustainable environment is a sine-qua-none of sustainable development the world over. Sustainable development of any nation does not occur in a vacuum rather, it is a product of available resources, human, material, and environmental resources alike. More importantly, the largest percentages of the resources needed for sustainable development are imbued in the environment. At the same time, the lives of the resources depend on the environment at large.

Thus, the extent to which the environment, through technology-driven posture, is developed and utilized, will go a long way in determining the strength of sustainable development prevalent in such a nation. Under-utilization and wreaking havoc on the environment through human impacts constitute environmental hazards. The corollary of this is environmental degradation and reduction of the productive capacity of the environment. This constitutes multiplier effects on human beings, the nation

and the sustainable environment at large.

Nigeria with its vantage position on the world globe is blessed with a suitable environment and monumental resources, human beings inclusive. For instance, the nation's population has been described among other sub-Saharan African nations as demographic dividends. The said demographic dividends as well as plenitudes of resources imbued in virtually all parts of the country are but potentials capable of ranking the country among the world's top 20 economies.

In apparent affirmation of the foregoing which further attests to the abundance of the resources inherent in the country, Areoye (2015) affirmed that natural resources prevalent in Nigeria are awesome providence' endowment. However, despite these scores card, Nigeria found it difficult to achieve her tall dream of being ranked among the 20 best economies of the world tagged 'Vision 20, 20:20' by the year 2020. The situation continued unabated even as the nation celebrated decades of independent anniversary as a nation. Thus, it is instructive to state that despite the avalanche of resources imbued across the length and breadth of Nigeria, she still occupies the lower ebb of development. This is the more reason why the nation is being ranked among the developing countries among her counterparts that got their independence around the same period (Ajiboye, 2011).

The above scenario might not be unconnected with the unwholesome attitude of the country to the environment. Such attitude arises from plenitudes of environmental impacts occasioned by human beings with concomitant and continuous threatening of the environment. Without mincing words, it is high time that concerted efforts be deployed to preserve the environment, the corollary of which is a sustainable environment. Attaining such a feat however cannot be done in a vacuum but through the unalloyed contributions of human beings as prominent players and drivers of the environment, using state-of-the-earth technology of the past and present age. Little wonder the submission of Marinho (2007) who believed the future of the environment lies with each of us as individuals.

Children of today who are technologically inclined constitute almost half of the entire Nigerian populace. As such, they constitute a force to be reckoned with in any vital decisions and policies, arising from their population might. Reasons for this might not be unconnected with the fact that the children population has been described as youth bulge generally in Africa (African Union 2007, Raymond, 2012). Going by the notion presented by Educare Trust (2007) that the children population's strength in the fight for a sustainable environment is a requisite for a sustainable environment and sustainable development, it, therefore, follows that there is the need to enlist the entrepreneurial and technological

inclination acumen of children in the quest for environmentally friendly strand. Such effort is also in the right direction considering the saying that ‘bad habits are hard nut that is not always easy to crack when it comes to change issue’.

It is against the foregoing background that this study focuses on the impact of children's environmental resource conservation on sustainable environment and sustainable development in Nigerian sub-Saharan Africa. The paper is presented under three major variables of the study. These are An examination of the state of the environment and its resources in Nigeria in retrospect; Extrapolation of entrepreneurial and technological acumen of children and environmental and development sustainability; and Harnessing children’s technological potentials for environmental sustainability for sustainable development.

It is not gainsaying the fact that the issue of climate change has become a global phenomenon. This is evident in the global stance on the issue with several extant global and continent programmes such as Education for All, EFA; Millennium Development Goals Strategies, MDGs; as well as the current Sustainable Development Goals strategies, SDGs; Education Agenda 2030; Africa Agenda 2063, among others. All these programmes are having environmental issues as the centrepieces, all in a bid to curtail the bastardization of the environment especially, by the human species. Above giant strides, the world over notwithstanding, the issue of negative attitudes to the environment by the citizens continued unabated. The said attitude dishearteningly keeps on generating threats to the environment manifesting in further depletion of the ozone layer that further exacerbates environmental problems continuously generated by climate change.

It also needs to be stressed that human activities keep on destroying environmental resources daily. Furthermore, many of the resources that are non-renewable in most cases are being wasted in their thousands daily. The consequences of these dastardly acts on the sustainable environment and sustainable development are better imagined than real. The said acts are being perpetrated to the detriment of the present time and more importantly, the future generations. Worst still, the efforts at salvaging the environment in most cases are being done without adequate incorporation of the viable population structure, the children going by their population might, technological inclination as well as their vantage position as the future leaders coupled with their entrepreneurial prowess. Consequently, it becomes imperative to enlist children and their population coupled with their unbeatable entrepreneurial and technological acumen in this ‘new normal’ age typified by increased technological advancements in revamping the environment as a resource for sustainable environment and

development in Nigerian sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Empirical Review

At this juncture, it is imperative to consider some extant literature on the crux of the current study. It is also necessary to situate the study in some related theories to drive home the issues being considered in the study. Thus, theories germane to this study are paraphrased under such theories as the constructivists' theory also known as 'constructivism theory' which according to the Constructivists, has as its basic tenets, the need for knowledge construction by learners as against being spoon-fed while finding solutions to problems and issues arising from human interactions in the environment. In this regard, children who are seen as possessing certain innate tendencies and knowledge, especially in this technological era are expected to be allowed to construct knowledge, using their God-given potential in finding solutions to the problems facing the environment. This is pertinent in the struggle for an ideal environment devoid of negative impacts by human species by their actions and inactions, thereby, engendering a sustainable environment.

Other theories are those put up by some authorities such as Aristotle and Nwankiti (1981) in explaining human-environmental relations (Oladiti, 2019). For instance, three basic theories of environmental determinism, possibilism and probabilmism have been put up in this regard. Environmental determinism according to the theorists explains various ways by which the environment dictates to man in the course of exploring the environment in satisfying one needs or the other. To therefore benefit maximally from the environment, human beings must yield to the environment which cuts across different areas of human endeavours. Environment determines where one lives, what one does for a living, what is being put on, the kind of shelter one occupies, and what one eats, among others. Thus, human beings are products of the environment where they find themselves. Environmental possibilism and environmental probabilmism are borne out of counter-reactions to the theory of environmental determinism. As such, it was the contention of the theorists in this regard that human beings as higher animals full of well-developed brains are by no means a 'slave to the environment' and cannot be doing 'subservient yes sir' to the environment. Thus, human beings by their ingenuity will always make the environment work for them rather than 'dancing to the tune of the environment' (Oladiti, 2010).

With this, what could not be possible ordinarily by environmental dictates, human beings use their wherewithal, science, and technology inclusive to make such possible, hence environmental

possibilism. The other theory is rooted in the fact that as human beings tend to make the environment work for them, they sometimes have breakthroughs and a times meet with brick walls, hence, such activities are guided by the principles of probability, thus, the ability of human beings to drive the environment is to a certain extent limited. The forgoing further explains why human impact on the environment keeps on increasing and exacerbates the effect of climate change and its attendant effects on environmental sustainability.

3. The State of the Environment and its Resources in Nigeria in Retrospect

The environment is a phenomenon that encompasses means of survival for human beings and other elements in the ecosystem, plants and animals included. It implies the condition and circumstance capable of affecting human lives. Hence, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol.1.4, environment connotes the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community which ultimately determines its forms and survival. It is a region in which man carries out his economic, social, political, scientific, and cultural activities. Hence, the environment is human beings' all in all. Bamikole (2003) corroborated the foregoing when he submitted that the environment is the very place where man, animal, as well as plants, lives. It is a phenomenon that entails both living and non-living surroundings including physical and social that may be informed of building, living, and working environments as well as cultural and aesthetic factors contributing to moral ways of life (Oladiti & Ayanwale, 2007).

As such, the environment can be taken as that single complex whole containing virtually everything making up the world which encompasses arts and crafts, flora and fauna, traditions and history, weather and climates, rivers, lakes, and vegetation (Oladiti, 2010). Thus, it is a phenomenon that comprises humans and all the natural as well as man-made components of the planet containing four divisions namely, biosphere, atmosphere, lithosphere, and hydrosphere (Akinola, 2014). The corollary of the foregoing analysis is the indefatigable uniqueness of the environment especially to human, plant, and animal survival. Little wonder, the Stockholm Declaration of 1972 regards human responsibilities to the environment which spanned through protection, improvement management as well and prevention of distractions of the environment. It also includes the education of people of all ages on environmental conservation and ecological balance. The United Nations Millennium Development Strategy (MDGS) also lend credence to the foregoing (Educare Trust 2007; Oladiti, 2015) with its Goal 7 centering on securing environmental sustainability while target 9 deals with the integration of the principles or sustainable development into country policies and programmes to reverse the loss of environmental resources.

The negative stance of third-world countries on the environment according to Ifegbesan (2006) is obvious in the fact that while people and governments of developed countries are committed to protecting the natural resources and sustainable environment, their counterparts in developing countries seem largely indifferent, uninformed, and uninterested in preventing decline or degradation of the environment, if done, not with right vision and mission towards a sustainable environment. Gbadamosi (2012) buttressed the above and establishes the basis for renewed interest and actions on the environment by indicating that the need to take care of the environment is gradually gaining ground nowadays ‘when the effect of the polluted environment is dawning on us.

The impact of the human attitude and the situation of the environment is the seeming paradox characterizing the country that is naturally blessed but wallowing in abject poverty. This is evident in the World Bank Report of 1996 indicating that ‘Nigeria presents a paradox, the country is rich, but the people are poor’. A similar view was that of Dr Susan Rice that ‘Nigeria is too rich to be poor and too poor to be rich’ (Ubong, 2013). No doubt, human activities are responsible for the state of the environment presently with actions and inaction of individuals, groups, communities, and governments, among others continue to exacerbate the state of the environment.

It is also instructive to state that the spate of advancement in Science and Technology pervading the global world also has its toll on the environment. Ascribing to this, Ifegbesan (2006) averred that as the people and government exploit the resources to survive, they are consciously or unconsciously accelerating the destruction of the immediate environment and the planet and the concomitant sacrificing of the future. Capturing the said activities in detail, Gbadamosi (2012) affirms that the environment is gradually becoming mysterious despite the scientific and technological advancement, and challenges arise from human behaviour that is inimical to the sustainability of the environment. Thus, the whole nation is engrossed in an environmental mess. This can be vividly seen in the side effect of climate change’s effects on the entire ecosystem manifesting in increasing Green House Gasses (GHG), loss of vegetation, seasonal changes, global warming, persistent air and sea temperatures, more heavy precipitation accompanied by rainstorms, snowstorms, flood, and erosion, among others (IPCC, 2007, Ozor et al, 2010; Njoku, Ononeze & Ahamefula, 2014). Consequently, the need for more environmentally friendly imperativeness cannot be over-emphasized.

4. Children, Sustainable Environment and Sustainable Development Interplay

Sustainable development is all-encompassing, and it requires sustainable resources such as human,

material, and natural resources. Effective sustainable development attainment requires an enduring environment with unhampered carrying capacity, the corollary of which is a sustainable environment. It was the contention of Eyibe and Ogbuagu (2015) that sustainability is strongly related to human beings' sense of place in the environment, and it calls for a new relationship between human beings, nature, and the wider scheme of things. By implication, environmental sustainability relates to balancing environmental protection and social responsibility associated with the wealthy economy over the course of time. It involves making decisions and taking actions in the interest of protecting the natural phenomenon with an emphasis on the preservation of the environment's capability to support human life. Abdusalam (2010) described sustainable development as that which entails involvement in the creation of the conditions that support development in human, natural and economic systems while safeguarding resources and opportunities for future generations. In apparent summarization of the foregoing, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, (IISD, 2013) averred that sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. There is therefore a symbiotic relationship between a sustainable environment and sustainable development. This calls for concerted efforts of all and sundry, children inclusive.

Children by their demographic might and innocence coupled with their teachable spirits qualified them as renaissance soldiers to safeguard the remaining environmental resources. While advancing the course of enlisting children in the campaign for a healthy environment, Gbadamosi (2012) indicated that 'it is worthy of note that children the world over are fast becoming an important yet powerless majority in many countries including Nigeria, children are used as an instrument for environmental destruction forced by their elders into preparing their doom. Shouldn't these children rather be equal partners for conservation, working towards a greener and healthier world, so that their children may live in it someday?' Without mincing words, such a view is a call for properly engaging children in the environmental war. Marinho (2001) however lamented that children are neglected in such a direction. Thus, Mitchell (2010) calls for the exposure of children to environmental education which can help them develop into adults with understanding and adequate care about their contributions to a safe environment.

Subscribing to the need to engage children in environmental regeneration for sustainable development, Leonardi (2010) opined that 'sustainable development besides demanding cultural, political and economic order change, also demands changes in the attitude of mankind who needs to develop a more complex and more multidisciplinary vision on this development aiming to provide the condition so that

society can reach it'. It is easier to imbibe such an attitude in children than the adults. Advancing this course, Knamiller (1987) affirmed that children of school age are at an age when important attitudes can be formed and encouraged such as curiosity, responsibility, cleanliness, perseverance, and cooperation. Ajitoni (2005) also ascribed that a child may be led to learn to consider the natural environment as 'shared by all and used by all' with moderation.

Considering the foregoing, children as a formidable group can be engaged in different ways to curtail harmful practices to the environment by coming up with environmentally friendly ideas. Since children learn by doing, several hands-on activities to which children are exposed in school are a roadmap to a sustainable environment. For instance, students actively engage in activities such as clearing the school environment, and proper disposal of refuse, among others is meant to prepare children for environmentally friendly tasks. In apparent confirmation of this stance, Marinho (2007) adduced that the school is a 'living laboratory for environmental experimentation and innovation'. He therefore subscribed to the fact that the curriculum must have exciting practical content, highlighted immediate relevance, visits to good or bad local environments, and access to regularly updated environmental information at local, national, and global levels.

Similarly, practical activities such as Nature's Corner that the children prepare in their classes do expose them to the functioning of the different components of the environment. With this, their actions and inactions are made plain on the environment in terms of both living and non-living things. Thus, the spirit of conservation, preservation and protection is being developed in the learners. Among others, organizations for tree planting and projects on ecosystems in school have been canvassed. To this, it was the contention of Njoku, Ononeze and Ahamefula (2015) that tree planting exercises as well as drawing the attention of students to the ecosystem will enhance students who are the leaders of tomorrow to appreciate the importance of enduring vegetation.

More so, when children are exposed to some forms of environmental safety-related instruction it does influence children's actions on the environment. To beautify the environment, the students' aesthetic spirits come into play with the students decorating the school compound with materials such as used tyres, empty cartons, and containers for flowers, among others. Reiterating the need for instructional resources especially for environmental-related activities, Marinho (2007) advocated for children's need for instructional materials such as simple things like recycling paper, and envelopes, making jotters, and beautifying classrooms and school compounds. In like manner, instructions are also needed on how to make life jackets out of empty plastic bottles for journeys in canoes especially in the river-rine areas.

Thus, children should occupy the centrepiece of environmental education policy.

In addition, the formation of different groups and clubs on environmental issues is germane. The formation of clubs such as environmental conservation club, environmental sanitation club, environmental awareness club, and waste management clubs, to mention a few in schools will avail children to join the groups and by so doing widens their horizon and their consequent contribution to environmental sustainability. The concept of train-the-trainer is yet another way by which children preserve environmental resources and the environment at large. This is made possible by equipping children with an adequate environmentally friendly mentality capable of making them serve as the mouthpiece in their various environments to different categories of people they relate with. Buttressing this fact, Marinho (2007) advanced the need to remember out-of-school children through a rhetorical question, 'Who is to educate youth and adults selling the misnamed pure-water, containers and moin-moin wrappers with their cellophane?' This is where those children equipped with the ideal refuse disposal and management become relevant.

Exposure to entrepreneurship activities is another practical way of enlisting children in environmental regeneration activities. Such activities come in the form of 'waste-to-wealth' which can be developed in children. A good example is the simple stages involved in composite manure which can be generated from wastes. When such is exposed to children, they will in turn convert such into useful materials against allowing them to constitute an environmental threat. Again, instead of the illicit burning of refuse, tyres and other resources that can generate fossils and pollution the environment, such can be converted or recycled for further usage such as the demarcation of paths within the school, adorned with artistic paints for beautification, control of erosion, among others (Oladiti, 2017).

5. Concluding Remarks

In consonance with the crux of this paper, sustainable development is a product of the interplay of entrepreneurship, technology, environment, and rational attitude especially of children and mankind altogether. It, therefore, follows that the extent of sustainable development a country attains is a function of the attitudes of the citizens and the use to which the environmental resources, a component of sustainable development is put.

Presently, the state of the environment arising from human impacts is begging for change. Such changes are achievable through the evolvement of the right attitude to the environment and environmentally friendly posture. Children are noted for their teachable spirits, constructivists agility, technological laden and the large army that can be enlisted in the current environmental war.

Consequently, this study has beamed searchlight on how children could be positively engaged in the said environmental war following the saying “catch them young”. In doing this, clarifications were made on the main components of the task. Thus, a retrospective analysis of the environmental situation in Nigeria was attempted followed by a dissecting of the concept of environmental sustainability and sustainable development, bringing out how a sustainable environment is capable of evolving sustainable development.

Efforts were thereafter made to x-ray the importance of children in environmental sustainability and how children can bring about a sustainable environment for sustainable development in Nigeria. It is the belief of the author that if children are adequately enlisted in the said environmental war, a sustainable environment will be promoted to pave the way for sustainable development. Thus, the necessary enabling environment and requisite resources and materials should be provided for children to contribute their quotas towards a sustainable environment as a driver of sustainable development actualization in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa at large.

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