

## Challenges of Eco-Sustainability Campaign and Environmentalism in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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### Abstract

*The effects of Climate change alongside its attendant environmental issues have become glaring and devastating in Nigeria. Is it to talk about the incidence of flood that have cataclysmically wrecked several states in the Country, the massive loss of lives and property, or the increased York of poverty and destitution that have befallen thousands of people as a result of climate change? Good enough, there has been eco-sustainability campaigns and environmentalism in the country. These campaigns aim at stabilizing the earth's eco systems while encouraging environmental sustainability. Beyond this challenge already posed by the phenomenon of climate change, this Paper seeks to discuss the external challenges militating against efficient eco-sustainability campaigns in the Country. The rueful lack of fund, facilities, adequate environmental Training and the menace of corruption, high insecurity, poverty and poorly regulated population growth, have been found to be these challenges. The Paper however, recommends concerted efforts from both the government and other stakeholders, in order to successfully combat climate change and its effects in the Country.*

**Keywords:** *Eco-sustainability, Climate change, Campaign, Environmentalism, Eco-system, United Nations*

### Introduction

Over the years, the phenomenon of climate change and other attendant environmental issues have been at the front burner of global discourse. The global goal has been to heal and replenish the earth. This is because the earth has suffered generational neglect and injustice. The earth has for so long, been subjected to "slavery" and her natural resources and endowments exploited in utter disdain and condescension. The increase in land use, deforestation and burning of fossil fuels are some of the anthropogenic activities that have destroyed and pillaged the earth's atmosphere and environment. Consequently, the grave effect of climate change is currently felt in several parts of the world. Ecological disasters like extreme weather conditions, floods and loss of biodiversity which have resulted in increased rate of poverty, famine, draught, etc; are now commonly heard of, in several Countries. In Nigeria, for instance, the incidence of flood seem to be occurring on daily basis as there has been reported cases in Ibadan, Cross River, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, Enugu, Abia, Anambra, Plateau States etc.

According to Scientists, these ecological disasters are just a tip of the ice bag, when compared to the magnitude of danger, climate change holds for man, if it continues unchecked. Climate change is "an over-riding environmental threat that impacts most other aspects of environmental sustainability including forests, water and oceans". ([www.climateark.org](http://www.climateark.org)). And it has been estimated that at least a 80% reduction in greenhouse gas (Carbon dioxide, Nitrous oxide, Methane etc) emission is to be achieved as soon as possible and not later than 2050, to achieve adequate

ecological sustainability. Hence, there have been several Eco-sustainability campaigns both at the International and National levels with the sole aim of saving the earth's climate. While the global Eco-sustainability campaigns are spearheaded by the United Nations on the platform of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other similar agencies/organizations; these campaigns are carried out by both Nationally based and United Nation affiliated organizations at the National Levels.

In Nigeria, Eco-sustainability campaigns have been in existence and their methods are impressively eclectic. However, these campaigns are beset with some problems or challenges in the Country. Therefore, a critical look at these campaigns and these challenges is the main thrust of this Paper.

### **Eco-Sustainability Campaign and Environmentalism:**

**Eco-sustainability:** The word "sustainability" has its etymological origin in the Latin "sustinere" which is a combination of two words – "tenere" (to hold) and "sus" (up), literally meaning "to hold up". Eco-sustainability (or ecological sustainability) refers to the ability to hold up, maintain, conserve and enhance ecological features of the earth. It is currently applied to the consistent sustenance and development of the earth's ecosystems in relation to every aspect of human life, like health, economy, sports, commerce, etc. eco-sustainability campaign, then refer to all the environmentally friendly thoughts, decisions, actions and every other activity targeted or aimed at creating awareness on the welfare of the natural environment.

**Environmentalism:** Environmentalism on the other hand, refers to the human consciousness and concern for the natural environment which is expressed in environmentally friendly thoughts and actions.

### **Global Eco-Sustainability Campaigns**

The Global Campaigns for the conservation and sustainability of the earth's ecological systems is relatively old. The conservation of the natural environment has for so long been a global concern, hence, as far back as 1948, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was founded as the world's first global environmental Organization. And its fundamental objectives have been to tackle climate change, achieve sustainable energy, improve human well-being and build a green economy. This organization currently has more than 1,200 member organizations, including over 200 governments and over 900 non-governmental organizations. ([www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)). Again, in September 1961, the World Wide Fund for Nature (formally known as World Wildlife Fund) (WWF) was founded in Morges, Switzerland. The fundamental mission of this organization is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature through conserving the world's biological diversity. And since 1961, the organization has invested nearly US \$10 billion in more than 13,000 conservation Projects in over 150 Countries. ([www.panda.org](http://www.panda.org))

It is however, pertinent to note at this junction that, in global Eco-sustainability campaigns, the United Nations is the key player. The Organization has over the years, held several Environmental summits and created platforms for other global Eco-sustainability campaigns. For instance, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which lasted from June 5- 16, 1972, was held in Stockholm, Sweden. This is popularly known as Stockholm Conference and was the UN's first major conference on international environmental issues, and marked a turning point in

development of international environmental politics ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)). Also, in 1978, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held a conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, which emphasized the need for Environmental Education across the world. One of the Declarations of the Tbilisi Conference was "To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment" (UNESCO 1978). Again, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programmes (UNEP), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) organized the first and the second World Climate Conferences on 12-23 February 1979 and on 29 October to 7 November 1990 respectively in Geneva. The first Conference led to the establishment of the World Climate Programme (WCP), World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, whereas, the second conference was somewhat more political and a step towards a global climate treaty. This particular conference led to the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), "of which the Kyoto Protocol is a part, and to the establishment of the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS)". ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)).

Furthermore, on the phenomenon of climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has taken the lead in organizing several subsequent International Conferences on Climate Change. For instance, while the issues raised in respect to the Kyoto Protocol in the 1997 climate change Conference as organized by the United Nations Framework conservation on Climate Change (UNFCCC), were being deliberated upon, the Copenhagen Summit (COP15 – Conference of Parties) was convened in 2009, in Denmark. This was followed by the Cancun conference (COP-16 in Mexico) and the most recent Durban Climate Change Conference (COP 17) held within the months of November and December 2011, in South Africa. These later Conferences were, among other reasons, organized for the main purpose of evolving a mutually accepted legally binding agreement on the carbon dioxide emission reduction. On the other hand, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which is an offshoot of the Stockholm Conference of 1972, is waxing stronger in its Eco-sustainability Campaigns. As United Nations Programme, "it activities covers a wide range of issues regarding the atmosphere, marine and terrestrial ecosystems, environmental governance and green economy" ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)). Hence, it has recorded significant world ecological achievements like "the historical 1987 agreement to protect the Ozone layer-the Montreal Protocol., the solar loan Program in India, the marshlands Project in Middle East" ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)), and so on. Also, with the initiative and aid of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) several environmental projects have been initiated in several other countries across the globe. Some of these projects include "the Kawasaki City Environmentally Harmonious project in Japan, the middelgrunden Wind Turbine Co-operative in Denmark, the Sustainable Agriculture projects carried out by Centre for Applied Research and Environmental System (CARES) in U.S.A, Sustainable Projects (the Eco-village) in Ireland and so on. ([www.ecosustainable.com.au/projects.htm](http://www.ecosustainable.com.au/projects.htm))

Furthermore, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was recently held and concluded on 22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This is popularly known as the Rio + 20 Summit and was organized under the ambit of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The theme of the conference was "The Future we Want" and it attracted more than 190 Nations who deliberated and accepted the concept of "Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication"(Sheffield and Nierenberg 2012). Also, as part of the global Eco-sustainability Campaign, some dates have been designated to creating awareness on environmental issues. These dates include World Wetlands Day (February 2), World Sparrow Day

(March 20), World Water Day (March 22), Earth day (April 22), World Biodiversity Day (May 22), World Environmental Day (June 5), World Oceans Day (June 8), Zero Emissions Day (September 21), World Planting Day (October 22) and so on. ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)).

In summary, these Conferences and more, go a long way to buttress the fact that the conservation and sustainability of the natural environment is indeed a global concern. However, this global goal, which is to replenish and conserve the earth's Eco-systems, cannot be actualized without the collective efforts of all the countries that make up the globe. Therefore, it is on this premise, that the campaigns for Eco-sustainability in Nigeria shall be discussed.

### **Eco-Sustainability Campaigns and Environmentalism in Nigeria**

The environmental issues in Nigeria seem to be enormous and interconnected. Some of these environmental issues include air pollution, water pollution, deforestation, soil degradation, indiscriminate dumping of refuse, poor drainage and sewage system, bush burning, oil spills, gas flaring and so on. And at the receiving end, are the people who suffer a lot of ecological disasters like breathing problem, desert encroachment, loss of biodiversities, poor agricultural productivity, floods and attendant loss of lives, property and mass displacement diseases, increased poverty and destitutions etc. as a result of the above environmental injustice and neglect in the country. This has made the nature of eco-sustainability campaigns in Nigeria, somewhat aggressive and confrontational. Hence, there are many environmental right organizations in the Country. Some of these environmental organizations include; Gender and the Environmental Initiatives (GEI), Waste Management Society of Nigeria (WMSN), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Pan African Vision for the Environment, Environmental Right Action (ERA) etc. Particularly, the Environmental Right Action (ERA) is a Nigerian non-governmental organization founded in 11<sup>th</sup> January 1993, by Nnimmo Bassey along side other three persons. The members of the organization are also called Friends of the Environment/Earth (FOE) and are dedicated to the defence of human ecosystems in the context of human rights as well as, "the promotion of environmentally responsible governmental, commercial, community and individual practice in Nigeria, through the empowerment of local people" ([www.essentialaction.org](http://www.essentialaction.org)). The Niger Delta experiences in relation to ecological damages like oil spills and gas flaring by Oil Companies (Shell and others) in the region, is the organization's port of call.

Also, as part of the campaign for ecological sustainability in Nigeria, the Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team (NEST) has taken as a duty, the task of sensitizing and empowering Nigerians on issues of environment and sustainable development. ([www.nestinteractive.org](http://www.nestinteractive.org)). Similarly, Nigerian Youths have founded the Nigerian Youth Environmental network (NYEN), whose mission is to create positive environmental awareness among Nigerians, and fellow Youths in particular. ([www.orgs.tigweb.org](http://www.orgs.tigweb.org)). The Ecofest Nigeria, on its own part, has been impressive in its eco-sustainability campaigns. The Ecofest Nigeria is a Green initiative of Arther Mackenzie dedicated to promoting environmental consciousness and awareness. Its mission is "to reconnect humanity to the environment by addressing one of the greatest challenges facing humanity-climate change". ([www.ecofest-ng.com](http://www.ecofest-ng.com)). It is currently organizing "Ecofest Nigeria 2012," which is an Environmental Impact Assessment Conference. Additionally, it is carrying out an ecological project, which is called "Planting for Peace: 155 million Tree Campaign" which is expected to be completed within a period of five years. Furthermore, in 2006, there was a national coalition of over one hundred (100) diverse Civil Society Organizations from across Nigeria, to form the Climate Change Network Nigeria (CCNN). This coalition is "an imperative measure to

evolve a national CSO-led integrated stakeholder's involvement in climate solution campaign for effective mitigation, adaptation and national response to the deadly impacts/vulnerability of climate change". (www.unep.org). The Climate Change Network Nigeria (CCNN) works in partnership with the special Climate Unit of the Federal Ministry of Environment of Nigeria. The Organization has developed a Seven-point Action Plan which include:

- i. Promoting Grassroots Awareness through Community Outreach on Climate Change (COCC)
- ii. Facilitating Research, Exhibition and documentaries (RED)
- iii. Promoting Advocacy and Communication (A&C)
- iv. Training and Capacity Building (TCB)
- v. Renewable Energy promotion (REP)
- vi. Combating Deforestation and Desertification and Flooding (CODD+F) and
- vii. Implementing Climate Solution Campaign Programs (CSCP)

The discourse on the Eco-sustainability Campaigns in Nigeria, would be incomplete without the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF). This Organization, since inception, embraced three major thematic interventions to achieve its main objectives of Environmental Education in Nigeria. They include a Nationwide Schools Conservation Programme; Community Based Education at the Organization's Project Sites and Promotion of Environmental Learning through Publications, Education materials and environmentally related events and campaigns. ([www.ncfnigeria.org](http://www.ncfnigeria.org)) The Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), through its Nationwide school Conservation Programmes, has recorded some success in creating awareness on the need for environmental sustainability, among young Nigerians. This is done through the establishment of Conservation clubs in both primary, high schools and tertiary institutions. Hence, as at December 2009, NCF Conservation Club Programme had a network of 1,743 clubs with 34,077 members. These Clubs carryout various activities like planting of trees and organization of campaigns, lecture and walks. Also as part of the Campaign for ecological sustainability the NCF has established an Electronic Library called the Nature's Roost, for the purpose of linking Nigerian Conservation Club members to the global community especially as it relates to the environment.

Interesting, the campaign for ecological sustainability in Nigeria is not a duty restricted to non-governmental organizations; some state governments in the Country, have taken as a serious business, the campaign for sustainable environment. A good example, is the Lagos state. The Lagos state government is waxing stronger in it's campaign for a "green Lagos" under the leadership of Governor Babatunde Fashola who gave the theme of the year 2012 campaign as "Plant Trees for a Better Climate" (Udodinma 2012:46). In an occasion, Governor Fashola reportedly said thus;

*In the realization of the importance of Trees to sustainable environment, our tree planting campaign continues to wax stronger having planted over 3 million trees across the State since 2008. The air round Lagos is now Faster and cleaner (Adesina 2012:18)*

This is exactly what Nigeria and the world at large need: a clean air, a greener environment, and a restoration of the lost glory of nature which was aesthetically expressed in the quality of air man breathed, forest, lands and waters. This is the goal of Environmentalism and Eco-sustainability campaigns in Nigeria. However, these campaigns for the conservation and sustainability of the natural environment in Nigeria is faced with some external challenges which shall be discussed under the next sub-heading.

## **Challenges of Eco-Sustainability Campaigns and Environmentalism in Nigeria**

Besides, the challenges already posed by the phenomenon of climate change, there are other external challenges facing eco-sustainability campaigns in Nigeria. These challenges include:

### **Lack of Fund and Facilities**

This is one of the major obstacles to efficient eco-sustainability campaigns in Nigeria. Ecological campaigns involve a lot of methods like Awareness creation, execution of Ecological projects, environmental researches and so on. Each of these methods of campaign requires fund to be effectively carried out. Therefore, in a situation where there is insufficient fund to embark on these campaigns, Ecological sustainability as a goal, would be elusive. This is true of Nigerian situation. The idea of eco-sustainability seems not to have captured adequate attention in the Country and as such very little is often left for it. Hence, while speaking at the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2011 World Wetland Day (WWD) celebration organized by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) in Ogun State, Mr. Ademola Lawal, the Omo Forest Environmental Education Officer, described low finance as one of the greatest challenges facing the club. ([www.ncfnigeria.org](http://www.ncfnigeria.org)). Again, the lack of adequate facilities like laboratories for Environmental researches Buses for awareness creation, etc. which aids campaigns, is another major challenge to eco-sustainability campaigns in Nigeria.

### **Lack of Adequate Environmental Training**

In 1977, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) in a declaration at the Tbilisi Conference, emphasized the need for Environmental Education for every individual across the globe. It also recommended the inclusion of Environmental Education in school curricula. However, the challenge has been how to efficiently carryout this environmental Education. In Nigeria for instance, the question has always been; how many teachers embark on this Environmental Education and how many are adequately trained on environmental issues? Even beyond the school curricula and among the Environmentalists as well as those who embark on Eco-sustainability campaigns; how many are adequately vest with the fundamental knowledge in the science of Ecology and Environment? This is indeed a challenge which affects the quality of Environmental awareness creation in the Country.

### **Corruption and Mal-administration**

Embezzlement and misappropriation of public fund in Nigeria, has always been a great obstacle to growth and development in all aspect of the Country's life. Particularly, the menace of corruption has been a challenge to a successful and efficient eco-sustainability campaign in Nigeria. The gross mismanagement and misappropriation of ₦199.329 billion Ecological Fund by the Federal Ministry of Finance is a case in point. (Nwankwo and Oluwole 2012). Even the way some serious environmental issues like gas flaring, oil spill etc are being handled by the Federal government, is highly discouraging. For instance, several communities in Niger Delta Region have been wrecked by accumulated oil spills from aged and poorly maintained oil infrastructures owned by Shell Oil Company. In relation to Bodo Oil Spill, the United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP) has confirmed that "Nigerian Regulatory Agencies are at the mercy of Oil Companies when it comes to conducting site inspections" (The Nation 2012:4) Similarly, the Environmental Rights Action (ERA)

reportedly accused the Federal Government of abandoning the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) assessment report on Ogoniland pollution for over a year, which demanded a \$1 billion total oil clean-up of the region" (Amusan 2012:3). This lackadaisical attitude of the Federal Government towards the environment is indeed discouraging and a challenge.

### **High Insecurity**

It is no more news to be told that life and property are rarely safe in Nigeria. Every one, including the rich and the poor, is threatened by the astronomic rise of insecurity in the Country. This is occasioned by the incidence of armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, and all-dreaded Boko Haram insurgency. This challenge of insecurity has been a great obstacle to several developmental projects and activities in the Country. It has affected eco-sustainability campaigns and environmentalism in several ways. For instance, due to the level of insecurity in the country, some parts especially the north, have been declared danger zones. As a result, some of these places are hardly chosen for ecological projects like Seminars, Workshops or even Tourist destinations. On 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012, for instance, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), Taraba state Project Coordinator, Mr. Ashimi Tirimisiyu was reportedly killed by gunmen at Jalingo, Taraba State. And this was barely two months after the Foundation lost her executive director, Professor Emmanuel Obot in the unfortunate Dana Air Crash. Also, the Boko Haram insurgency and its characteristic bomb explosions have peculiarly exacerbated the phenomenon of climate change. This is true because, for each bomb explosion, some tons of Sulphur dioxide, ash and dust are released into the atmosphere, which contribute to climate change.

### **Population Growth**

Population growth in Nigeria is also a challenge to efficient eco-sustainability campaigns in the Country. The Country's population currently stands at 167 million and it has been projected that in 2050, it shall increase to 303.6 million (Population Reference Bureau 2002) due to the current rate of growth. The implication is that some socio-economic problems like poverty, conflict etc, shall intensify, due to the struggle that shall ensue for limited resources. Okpala (1990) has rightly observed that irregular "population growth causes soil erosion, nutrient exhaustion, rapid deforestation and other problems which render the land unusable for Agriculture". No wonder, President Goodluck Jonathan, on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2012, reportedly lamented the overwhelming rate of population growth and went on to back Birth Control Measures. More interestingly, however, the current rate of population growth in Nigeria has affected campaigns for ecological sustainability through the resultant pressure on the environment. It also increases the number of Ecological Footprints and as such as challenge. Ecological Footprints refer to the "real areas of the earth's surface dedicated to every individual's consumption of food and wood products, building, roads, garbage dumps etc." (Okonkwo 2005).s

### **Poverty**

The rate of poverty in Nigeria is overwhelming. It is no more news to be told that majority of Nigerians live below a dollar per day. More enigmatic, is that the consequences of this menace of poverty affects every aspect of the peoples life, including the environment. For instance, a larger number of rural dwellers are as well as some urban dwellers depend on fire woods for cooking.

These fire woods are gotten from fallen trees and branches, and as such, fuels deforestation. Also, poverty has been the major cause of rural-urban immigration in Nigeria which increases the population density of urban areas in cities like Lagos, Abuja, Abia, Enugu and other cities in the Country. Interestingly, an outstanding characteristic of these over-populated Cities, is illegal structures and buildings, which are put up for either commercial purposes or residential purposes. More interestingly, is that majority of these structures are wrongly situated on water canals which has resulted in poor drainage systems. Consequently, flood has wrecked several parts of these cities in recent times. This has, in extension, affected eco-sustainability campaign in the Country.

### **The Way Forward**

Indeed these challenges listed above have affected eco-sustainability campaigns and environmentalism in several ways, in Nigeria. Specifically, however they have affected both the quantity and quality of ecological awareness and Environmental Education in the Country. And Sutton (1998) has rightly asserted that "a society that is not ecologically sustainable is being driven recklessly". Hence, the following have been recommended as a Way Forward:

- A. Parental Participation:** The war against climate change is a war for all, not for a few. Therefore, parents should take as a duty, the task of inculcating environmentally friendly values in their children at home. This will go a long way in preserving the natural environment as well as enhancing campaign for eco-sustainability.
- B. Philanthropic Assistance/Partnership:** Apart from the age-long assistance and partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other internationally based governmental and non-governmental organizations, more organizations, companies and wealthy individuals both in Nigeria and abroad should financially assist and sponsor ecological projects in the country for the sustenance of the natural environment.
- C. Government's Commitment:** Government should place more value on the environment by allocating more fund and making sure these funds are adequately used in serving the environment. It should also probe the managers of previous Ecological Funds and prosecute offenders if the need arises. On the other hand, the Government should evolve a suitable Birth or Population Control Measures in the Country at least for the sake of the environment.
  - i. Also, Government should stop the procrastination of Action on Gas flaring. The Country loses a great fortune annually to gas flaring which on the other hand, contributes to climate change. Therefore, the Government should embark on this Associated Gas Re-injection to save both the planet and the country's economy.
  - ii. More importantly, the Government should rise to its fundamental duty of protecting lives and property by squarely addressing the menaces of Boko Haram, Kidnapping for ransom and other related security challenges in the Country. The creation of accessible quality education for all; as well as adequate job opportunities for Nigerian youths can help in this direction.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the effects of global climate change in Nigeria has become conspicuous with the deluge that has become a daily occurrence in several states in the Country. This affects all;



therefore, every hand must be on desk in the fight for a Sustainable Environment in the Country.

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