

The Impact Of Climate Change In Nigeria: Implications For Schooling

**Kak'mena Audu Goteng,
Hemba Emmanuel Census**

*Department Of Physics
Federal College Of Education,
P.M.B. 1027 Pankshin, Nigeria*

and

Eyimoga Helen Alikeju

*Kogi State Polytechnic
Osara, Nigeria*

Abstract

Although climate change is a global issue, likewise its impacts, but the biting effects are felt more by poor and developing countries especially those in Africa due to low level of infrastructural development, awareness and coping capacities. This can become worse if the educational systems of such countries experience serious setbacks as a result of the negative impacts of climate change. A lot of research has been carried out on the impact of climate change in Nigeria and the diverse ecological problems been faced today in the country have been linked to the ongoing climate change. However the impact of climate change on the access to quality education is yet to receive much attention. In this paper an overview of the impact of climate change as it affects schooling has been carried out with a view to spurring research on the subject matter.

Keywords: Climate change. Flooding, Drought, Desertification, and Schooling.

Introduction

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing the world today. It has impacted on all ecosystems and human societies in different ways and to varying degrees. As we well know, climate change is not a natural occurrence. It differs completely from climate fluctuations or climate variability which are inherent in the nature of climate and are dynamic on various temporal scales. The temporal scales could be monthly, annual, decadal, seasonal periodic, quashi-periodic or non-periodic.

What then is climate change? It is a change in the composition of the atmosphere that is over and above natural variations, attributed directly or indirect to human activities. (Odjugo, 2010). The implication here is that climate change is a man made phenomena and the situation can be changed if activities of mankind are geared towards restoring and conserving the environment.

Nigeria, like other African nations which are at the receiving end of the effect of global climate change, is counting its losses from the impact of the phenomenon. From desertification and drought in the north to gully erosion and flooding in the south, Nigerians are witnessing firsthand the effect of climate change on their socio-economic life. It is therefore necessary for us to take a look at how this menace affects access to quality education in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Evidence Of Climate Change In Nigeria

The Nigerian metrological agency NIMET this year (2012) reported that episclope flooding and erosion in the coastal zone and river catchment areas of Nigeria may be inevitable. The agency further predicted that normal rainfall may result in flash flooding particularly in the northern states. These NIMET predictions are not only in line with climate changes worldwide but have manifested in the past in this country and are still being anticipated.

In July, 2011 Lagos experienced severe flooding due to unusual rainfall of 233.3mm. Ibadan experienced it in August of the same year with rainfall recording 88.2mm. In 1997, Lagos was heavily flooded following a rainfall value of 237.3mm (Njoku and Akinboade, 2012). Nigeria is thus experiencing adverse climate conditions with negative impact on the welfare of millions of people.

The International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC, 1999) reported that sea level rise and flooding are clearly affecting millions of people worldwide. The report pointed out that 10 million people are at the risk of coastal flooding and that flood is making 3 million people homeless every year and the number is expected to rise due to annual sea level rise. Okon and Egbon (1999) in Uyigue and Agho (2007) reported the occurrence of coastal erosion in the Niger Delta area which cuts across the nine states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, cross river, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and rivers in southern Nigeria. Udofa and Fajemirokun (1978) in Abu (2007) showed a rise in sea level along Nigerian coastal waters. They carried out a mechanical analysis of Niger Delta from 1960 to 1970 as reported in Uyigue and Agho (2007), and estimated a sea level rise of 0.462m above zero level of the tide gauge.

Floods of the low lying areas in the Niger Delta have already been observed. In Egor and Ogida communities in Edo state, several houses have been abandoned by the owners due to floods and many more areas are vulnerable to floods. Calculations have shown that Nigeria will inundate 3400 KM^2 of its coastal lands with a 20cm rise in sea level (Onoeghara, 1990). Also the Niger Delta could lose over 15000 square kilometer of land by year 2100 with a one meter rise in sea level. It is valuable of note that the Niger Delta region spans over 20,000 square kilometers, (Uyigue and Agho, 2007), one can only imagine the loss of land mass in the offing in this part of the country as a result in climate change if adequate precautionary measures are not put in place. It is also worthy of note that the oil rich Niger Delta region is the main source of revenue in Nigeria accounting for about 97% of the country's total export.

In the northern part of Nigeria, drought and desertification has been taking place steadily in the arid and semi arid zone with destructive socio-economic impacts for decades. The principal causes have been ascribed to deforestation, over grazing and poor irrigation practices resulting in negative impacts like food scarcity, resource use conflicts, migration, and losses of fauna among others (Medugu 2011). Experts have revealed that Sahara desert is advancing south wards through the northern part of Nigeria. The desert is said to be advancing at the rate of 0.6km a year resulting to the loss of land mass and displacement of farmers in the affected areas. It is also projected that an area of about 75 million hectares of land is susceptible by desertification in the north (NGO News Africa/Afrigue en Ligne, 2009).

These threats can lead to increased human competition resulting to mass migration, civil unrest and wars. Lagos, Africa's largest city is currently having immigration growth of about 8% per annum. At this rate its population will exceed 25 million by 2015, making it the 3rd most populous urban centre in the world. Many of its new comers will be climate refugees from the north (Medugu, 2011).

How Climate Change Affects Schooling

The impact of climate change to the socio-economic well being of mankind has been discussed worldwide yet its impact on access to quality education has not received much attention.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its Education for all monitoring report 2010 highlights that girls are often the first to feel the impact of climate change. It cited the example of Pakistan and Uganda where climate related shocks result in far more girls being taken out of school than boys. The report indicates that cross-country research on past economic crises and climate events shows that the effect of shocks on schooling tends to be more pronounced in low-income countries. This report also finds that about 27 million children worldwide are still out of school, as a result of countries' slower economic growth and rising poverty which increases marginalization in education. Often, the children of the poorest house holds are most likely to suffer consequences with regards to education, health and nutrition, and poverty tends to persist across generations.

Without missing words, Climate change has adverse effects on children's education as it hinders the attainment of qualitative education for children of schooling age. For this, women and girls are worst hit than men because of their physiology and societal attitude towards girl-child education. This is one vital area that has not been properly given support initiative for sustainability.

One of the major effects of climate change on society is drought which also affects women and girls most. This is because drought results into water and food scarcity thereby bringing untold burden on women and girls who are vested with the responsibility of collecting water for domestic use in most societies. They may spend more time and energy in search of water for family use.

In addition to increased burden on women is the widening gap in gender inequality and poverty. While the boy child is preparing for school, the female has less time for education, less time for any income generating venture and so not considered in decision making as she lacks the critical mind to make good decisions in the home. This places the woman at a disadvantage because she finds it difficult to cope with climate change.

Changes in ecosystems caused by climate change can lead to loss of diversity and reduced agricultural output and increase food insecurity thereby bringing negative impacts to farmers as some settlement areas become completely uninhabitable. A careful study on migratory trend in Nigeria shows that there has been a significant displacement of numerous farmers and nomadic population in the northern states especially those state that are ravaged by drought desertification and other natural disasters. This means that the families migrate with all their children resulting in to children missing their education rights. Sometimes it is only the men who migrate in search of greener pastures where they may face exploitative and poor working conditions. This increases the chances of children not been provided with their basic school needs like uniform, stationeries and the psychological support necessary for learning.

Food insecurity and scarcity means lack of adequate or proper food. This in turn means children will lack proper meals to sustain them in school. Thus the adage, "A hungry man is an angry man" takes effect as most children become truants as a result of hunger, some of them may even drop out of school since they cannot properly participate in the school activities. This greatly affects the learning process in children.

Increased poverty at home due to the impact of climate change affect children in school as most times, they are withdrawn from school by parents to work in order to increase household income. This affect school attendance and when a family decides who leaves school, it is the girl

child that is at the receiving end. They may be forced to work in the farm, become house girls or help do petty businesses to keep the family going.

Increased flooding and other natural disaster results in houses, school buildings and other infrastructure such as roads, bridges etc. being damaged thereby impacting on children's rights to education as many of them are cut off from their schools or become refugees in refugee camps where there is no room for education. These disasters caused by the effects of climate change leave many children homeless or living in overcrowded accommodations that are inadequate. For some, their belongings like school uniforms, books, shoes, bags, and other school items get missing. Worst of all, some children become orphans in the process as their parents are killed in the process (by disaster). In some cases, schooling premises are also used as temporary refugee settlement for disaster victims. This means the children will stay at home and even if they later resume school, they will fall behind.

The adverse effect of climate change and environmental degradation on human health starting from water borne diseases through polluted water supply, extreme weather conditions resulting in disasters, changes in air quality cannot be over emphasized. These impacts negatively on women and girls who are the principal household care givers. This will in turn affect sick children who cannot have good school attendance as a result of poor care at home. In such situations, children in remote areas are mostly hit since they have poor or no access to proper health facilities when they become sick. This lack of proper medical attention and care will definitely affect their school attendance as they stay out of school more than in school.

It is important to restate that diseases caused by climate and environmental change can have adverse effect on household income thereby reducing households into poverty. The nomadic Fulani household for example depends mainly on cattle as their sole source of income and food. If cows therefore die in large numbers as a result of disease caused by climate change and degradation, there is bound to be untold hardship and poverty on the inhabitants resulting in high mortality rate. Extremely poor households might find it increasingly difficult to provide for their families as well as meet children's school needs. This will eventually result to either poor performance due to poor attendance or sometimes outright dropout from school.

Way Forward

Climate change has more effect on women and girl child than on men. This situation can however be changed if individuals and communities adapt behaviors that are geared towards restoring and conserving our environment. Local and international communities need to reduce the emission of green effect gases, provide environment education to members of their societies and also take necessary precautionary steps to prevent these impacts.

Schools will serve as the strategic area to introduce environment education for learners. School or education curriculum should provide skills to children to study and understand the causes of climate change, its effect on various social groups and to participate in improving their local environment. It is good to act locally while thinking globally. Only then would the menace of climate change and environmental degradation be checked and prevented. This will indirectly empower girl child education and alleviate poverty in society.

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