

# ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: BEYOND THE RHETORIC OF GOVERNANCE

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## **Abstract**

*In Nigeria, like most present day societies, various measures have been embarked upon with regards to environmental sustainability as an aspect of socio-economic development. This is no doubt not unconnected with the recognition of the role of the environment in facilitating optimal social functioning and therefore, the need to protect it not just for the present but for the future as well. However, while these various efforts are reflected in a plethora of existing government agencies and documents, there has also been a corresponding increment in the challenges facing the environment. From desertification, deforestation, environmental pollution and many others, the environment in Nigeria has continued to suffer. With a combination of neo-Marxist political economy and decision-making theory as its tools of analysis, it is the contention of this paper that environmental policies and governance in Nigeria have continued to be a reflection of contradictions in deeds and intentions as policies counteract each other. Based mostly on secondary data and the review of existing literature, this paper submits that government pronouncement and actions on environmental sustainability must reflect linkages with other policies of development in order to ensure structural harmony and therefore, achieve full impact if success is to be ensured*

**Key words:** Environmental sustainability, Development, Governance. Nigeria.

## **1.0 Introduction**

The last decades of the last century saw the movement of concerns for the human geophysical environment from a subject of social activism to a global agenda. This was as a result of the realization that one of the consequences of human economic activities was the accumulation of Green House Gases (GHG) in the earth's atmosphere and this could lead to climate change and its negative consequences and, the environmental degradation resulting from that could harm humanity, fauna and Flora, biodiversity, ecosystems and many others (Barker, 2008; Ifeanyi, 2002).

Historically, these growing concerns were galvanized into political action with the organization of the Stockholm United Nations (UN) Conference on Human Environment and the Rio de Janeiro UN conference on Environment and Development- also known as the Earth Summit, in 1972 and 1992, respectively (Osuntokan, 1999 cited in Ajibade, 2013). These conferences did not only signify the growing global concern about the environment but also drew

the connections between environmental sustainability and development (Eneh, 2011). This growing awareness was also highlighted when in 1997, the Kyoto protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) were adopted with the aim of reversing the industrial activities that contributed to high Green House Gases emissions and the depletion of the ozone layer particularly, by the industrialized nations of the world. While several environment centered conferences have held since then, the Kyoto protocol stands out in its recognition that developing countries contribute the least to climate change but could likely suffer the most from the effects (The Global Climate Change Regime, 2013).

For Nigeria and other African countries, the situation of socio-economic development at the heart of the environmental discourse fell surely in line with what is already considered the main agenda of the African state; development. After all, the post colonial African state, by its origins and political exigencies, has been forced to assume the image of a developmental state (Egwu, 2006). But beyond the political considerations, the objective realities of the effects of climate change and environmental degradation have already become real issues in Nigeria. Increased problems of water shortages, floods, droughts and desertification which threaten food security and human survival have become symptomatic of the effects of the ailing status of the environment on the Nigerian society. For instance, in the past few years, most urban and rural communities have suffered from floods with the situation in year 2012 being recorded as the worst in recent times (Adejumo and Adejumo, 2014; Odermeho, 1993). This in addition to the continuing herders versus farmers conflict which has resulted in tremendous losses in lives and property, and has been attributed to climate change, albeit indirectly.

In the face of these clear and present dangers of environmental degradation, the Nigerian state has responded through agencies, policies, and programmes aimed at the protection of the environment and to ensure sustainable development. Some of these intentions are clearly evident in a plethora of documents, laws and establishments which traverse the entire Nigerian administrative system. From the 1999 constitution with its provisions for the protection of the environment (Sections 20, 16(2), 17(2)) the National Policy on Environment of 1989, the Millennium Development Goals project; to the many International conventions and summits which the country is a signatory to, there have been obvious attempts in the developmental rhetorics of various Nigerian governments to include environmental protection and sustainability in the development agenda. However, the contention remains as to the effectiveness of these various efforts in accomplishing their major objectives of facilitating socio-economic development while ensuring environmental sustainability especially, when viewed in relations to other sectoral policies which also aim at the same objectives.

This paper is an attempt to evaluate government policies on environment sustainability with regards to other government programmes and actions on development. It is divided into an introduction, of which the on-going discourse is part of and followed by an attempt to clarify some of the major concepts used. This is followed by the theoretical framework and an overview of some of the major environmental challenges within the Nigerian society then, an evaluation of government policies and environmental sustainability. It ends with a conclusion and recommendations.

### **1.1 Clarification of Concepts**

#### **1.2 Environmental sustainability**

The environment refers to both the physical and social circumstances which surround people and have influence on them. It is both objective and subjective. This is because it includes water bodies and the life there in, land mass, forests, grasslands, deserts, animals and man himself and all the interactions that take place (Gana and Toba, 2015). It also refers to:

all the natural endowment and those provided by man in his efforts to make life meaningful and comfortable. This means everything that affects man in anyway- land, water, air, trees, grasses and houses (Nwanne, 2013:23).

The environment is basically, an aggregate of the physical and biological entities which support the existence of man in all ramifications (Adegoroye, 1997 cited in Nwanne, 2013). This encompassing importance of the environment is further underscored by the fact that it provides all life support systems with air, water and land as well as the materials for fulfilling all development aspirations of man (Lawanson, 2006).

Relating it to sustainability is the recognition that the environment represents a wealth of resources which must be protected. This recognition as an aspect of current development agenda can be traced to the 1987 Bruntland Commission of the United Nations which ascribed sustainability to development and defined it as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Comprehensively therefore:

Environment sustainability refers to the conservation, management and rational utilization of natural resources in such a way to maintain the integrity of each ecosystem, support all life, ensure the preservation of biodiversity and prevent environmental degradation (Gbenda, 2012: 3).

Environmental sustainability forms one of the pillars of sustainability development, the others being social sustainability and economic sustainability. It is an aspect of the development process which emphasizes the harnessing of natural and social resources with major considerations for continuity and the future.

#### **1.3 Development**

From notions of economic growth, social justice, liberation, modernization etc, very few concepts have been bandied around as the concept of development. It is a very slippery and value-laden concept (Alubo, 2012). There are therefore, as many definitions of development as the perspectives concerned and the seasons involved.

Recently however, there has been a growing acceptance of the centrality of people as the *raison d'etre* of the development process. For this reason, according to Olunola (1977), it is advancement through progression in economic, social and cultural as well as technological and political conditions leading to an improvement in the welfare of citizens. In a similar vein, Uche (1999) sees it as the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potentials. It is therefore, progress on all levels of human endeavour be they social, political, economic and even psychological. And in line with the current global agenda, development is about sustainability. That is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs ("Our Common Future". Report of the Bruntland Commission, UN, 1987).

#### **1.4 Rhetorics**

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines rhetoric as the art of speaking or writing effectively; the study of the principles and rules of composition formulated by the critics of ancient times: the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion (Definition of rhetoric, 2018.). But traced back to classical Greek scholarship, rhetorics is associated with public oratory especially, the teachings of Aristotle who defined it as, the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion (Rhetoric translated by Robert, 2008).

Though, no longer a popular area of scholarly attention, its association with persuasion has largely moved it to the realm of political oratory where specific techniques and conceptions of persuasion are still considered rhetoric (Leff, 1993). Unfortunately, this relationship has assumed a derogatory nomenclature as rhetoric has become associated with less than believable political pronouncement hence, the allusion to political claims as “mere rhetorics” (Rhetoric, 2014).

Drawing from the above, rhetoric would be used in this work as a metaphor for the various political pronouncement, including programmes, policies and actions of government, which over the years have been put across with regards to environmental and developmental sustainability without the corresponding political will and coordination to attain their objectives.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts a combination of Decision-making theory and Neo-Marxist Political Economy as its tools of analysis. This choice is anchored on their amenability to the central issues involved; inconsistent government policies as against the reality of the environmental situation in Nigeria. Also, the lack of political will, which is symptomatic of systems devoid of real developmental strides, by those who put toward these same rhetorics (Dokpesi, 2013; Oyefara, 2013; Imhonopi and Urim, 2010).

Decision-Making theory represents one of the most widely shared theories in the social sciences with variations in virtually all of the disciplines particularly, Psychology, Economics and Public Administration. Associated largely with scholars such as Herbert Simon, C. I. Bernard and Richard Snyder among other prominent public policy scholars. It is concerned with decision making as a process of how individuals behave under risk and uncertainty, evaluating alternatives and the selection of any particular options in relation to ranked preferences (Nitisha, 2013).

Built into Decision-Making theory are models of how decision making occurs in various organizations and establishments. Some of these models are the Rational-bound model, which emphasizes rationality, the Organizational procedure view, the Incremental and the political view models (Turpin & Marais, 2014). The political view model is of particular interest to our discourse.

The political view model believes that despite national considerations in decision making, it is basically a personalized bargaining process whereby the agenda of the participants rather than rational considerations come into play. That, self interests rather than what is good for the organization is usually the central theme of actors involved in decision making. The centrality of self interests in the decision making process actually strikes a chord with the Neo-Marxist political economy thesis on Nigeria’s socio-political system as would be seen in the following.

Neo-Marxist political economy, like classical Marxism, draws its analysis from historical and dialectical materialism, or the primacy of material conditions, in the understanding of social phenomenon (Beckman, 1983; Ake, 1986 cited in Anifowase and Enemuo, 1999). However, while classical Marxist political economy emphasized the contradiction and ills of capitalism as a mode of production, Neo-Marxist political economy emphasizes the role of the world capitalist system as the harbinger of underdevelopment in the Third World.

Founded on the contributions of Andre Gundar Frank, Samir Amir, Emmanuel Arghiri, Walter Rodney and others, Neo-Marxist political economy centrally believes that the capitalist incursion into Third World societies through colonialism left these societies underdeveloped while ensuring the development of the colonizing societies. It is a major contention of this thesis that, through colonialism, Nigeria and most Third World societies were de-capitalized with all sorts of distortions and disarticulations infused into their socio-economic systems (Ake, 1995; Onimode, 1983). And along with this, was the creation of a disadvantageous relationship whereby such Third World societies, even after colonialism, have had to depend on western countries in all aspects of their developmental needs including culture. The consequence of this dependency is also the evolvment of a type of political elite that lacks any real development abilities as it has become enmeshed in a political gauntlet of self preservation (Ake, 1996). The deepening effect of this on development is that:

The Nigerian state cannot embark on policies that can fundamentally restructure the Nigerian economy for development... it is caught in the trappings of a neo-capitalist state which has produced a distorted capitalist class whose interest is not the development of an autocentric capitalist economy (Anifowase and Enemuo, 1999:40).

The implication of the above fact is the lack of true consistency in government development policy as through the IMF, World Bank and other subtle multilateral means, there is a pull between local development needs against the controlling demands of these foreign interests with social services and other public oriented policies being supplanted by financial interests' demands (Onimode, 1988). It is within this scenario that Nigerian government policies including pronouncement on environmental sustainability would be examined and their impact evaluated.

### **2.1 The Environment and its Challenges in Nigeria**

The Nigerian environment has been bedeviled by a multiplicity of challenges and issues which range from poverty, pollution, deforestation and desertification, population growth and urbanization among others. An attempt is made here to provide an overview of some of these environment problems and the implications they portend for socio – economic development.

### **2.2 Poverty**

This represents one of the most daunting challenges undermining environmental sustainability in Nigeria. This is because it encapsulates most of the activities which undermine people's ability to uphold environmental protection goals. As a condition, poverty puts individuals in states of want and lack which do not only affect their physical well being but also impact on their access to information and so on.

Unfortunately, the poverty situation in Nigeria is such that official figures from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) show that in 2014 alone, over 22.6 million Nigerians were unemployed. This represented a 20% increase in the unemployment figures of the previous years and, a 31% of the entire population (Vanguard April, 2015 Vanguardng.com/2015/05/22.6m-Nigerian-unemployed). Such high unemployment figures imply high poverty levels among the population. Currently, according to ActionAid, poverty levels have so worsened since 2016 that

from a range of 54-60% in 2016, about 82 million Nigerians now live below the poverty line of 1.9 dollars a day (PREMIUM TIMES, 9/6/2018). This also means that, with such basic survival needs, a very substantial proportion of the Nigerian population can hardly be bordered with issues of the environment or, even the future. After all, as was noticed by a renowned demographer centuries ago:

The labouring poor seem always to live from hand to mouth. Their present wants employ their entire attention and they seldom think of the future (Thomas Malthus, 1798. cited in Dokpesi, 2013: 81).

Another damning implication is the fact that a high proportion of this poor population also dwells in the rural areas which harbor the largest biodiversity of the Nigerian geophysical environment. The Nigerian environment is therefore, under pressure from people who are themselves too impoverished to consider its protection and sustainability as they eke out their survival imperatives. Unfortunately, the environmental degradation that results from such unbridled usage, as a result of poverty, becomes a factor of poverty itself. This is because:

Environmental degradation and poverty are intrinsically intertwined. The consequence of this linkage is the vicious circle in which poverty causes the degradation of the environment and such degradation in turn perpetuates poverty (Amechi, 2012:114).

### **2.3 Deforestation and Desertification**

Deforestation is the conversion of forested areas into something different while desertification is a type of land degradation in which a relatively dry land region becomes increasingly arid, typically losing its bodies of water as well as vegetation and wildlife (Geist, 2005). As problems of environmental and ecological degradation, human activities have been very pivotal in their occurrence especially in Nigeria. As implied under the discussion on poverty, a very high proportion of the Nigerian population lives directly off the natural environment. For instance, over 95% of the rural and poor communities in Nigeria use firewood as the major source of household energy (Nathaniel & Nathaniel, 2001). This is in addition to the number of those who fell trees for the purpose of income generation.

Other human activities like traditional slash and burn subsistence farm methods and open range animal grazing have continually contributed to the clearing of forest areas thereby exacerbating the problems of deforestation and desertification in Nigeria. Already, evidence abound that in Borno, Yobe, Jigawa and other frontline states, between 35% and 40% of landmass has already been lost to desertification (Oyeshola, 2008; Nneji, 2013). Relatedly, between 2001 and 2010, the forests area in Nigeria shrank from 14.4% to 9.9% (Nigeria: Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010. [www.mdgs.gov.ng](http://www.mdgs.gov.ng)).

The implication of such deforestation and desertification is the continued degradation of the soil and the biodiversity of the affected areas leading to economic losses in the form of agricultural activities. In 2005 alone, the African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE) estimated that Nigeria had lost about N106 billion to deforestation (AIAE, 2005, cited in Nneji, 2013). This is in addition to attendant problems like water scarcity, crop failure, malnutrition and stress migration. Even recent clashes between herdsmen and farmers have also been cited as the consequences of droughts and famine brought on by these challenges as pastoralists increasingly push southwards in search of pasture for their livestock (Naziru, 2016).

### **2.4 Population Growth and Urbanization**

The central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America asserts that Nigeria has an estimated population of over 190.6 million people which ranks it as the 7th most populous country in the world (CIA World Factbook. [www.cia.gov/library](http://www.cia.gov/library)). Furthermore, according to the database website, Trading Economics, the Nigerian population constitutes 2.35 percent of the world's total population and that, one person in every 43 human beings on earth is a resident of Nigeria ([www.tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/population](http://www.tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/population)).

The existence of a large population clearly means the occurrence of greater human needs and a higher dependence on the environment. This has clearly been the case in Nigeria; increased population has led to increased needs for agricultural lands, industrial and infrastructural development as well as new human habitation which have resulted in a high urbanization rate.

With an annual urbanization change rate of 4.66%, urbanization constitutes about 47.8% of the Nigerian dwelling space ([www.cia.gov/urbanization/publications](http://www.cia.gov/urbanization/publications)). This widening phenomenon has seen the clearing of forest areas as more people congregate to form new urban centres in the search for jobs and other life opportunities. Unfortunately, a combination of failed urban planning and poverty has implied woes for the Nigerian environment. The Nigerian environment has been left at the mercy of human attitudes especially as there exists an absence of political will by policy makers to reflect the growing needs of the ever increasing population. This combination of high population growth and rapid urbanization has become the root cause of high rates of environmental degradation, social delinquency, poverty, industrial decay and pollution

(Lawanson, 2006). There has also been a complete roll back of successes which had been attained in the past with regards to the environment. This fact is most obvious when it is observed that:

In most Nigerian cities and towns, most of what we may have had as cultural health and natural environment has been wiped out in the name of industrial growth and advanced civilization. There are hardly parks, green areas or places designated for recreation in most cities and towns in Nigeria (Imasuen, Oshodi & Onyeoba, 2013: 53).

### **3. Pollution**

Estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that about a quarter of the diseases facing mankind today occur due to prolonged exposure to environmental pollution. Also, that while some of these diseases could be detected within short periods of infection, most of the environmental pollution related diseases are not easily detected and may be acquired during childhood but only manifested later in adulthood (UNEP Report on Environmental Pollution and Impacts on Public Health). This reference to human health clearly captures the true nature of the consequences of environmental pollution; the ability to have immediate as well as far reaching effects).

In Nigeria, problems of environmental pollution range from poor urban planning and lack of essential waste management facilities to inefficient industrial practices which put the environment in harm's way. A combination of related factors such as poverty, population growth and rapid urbanization and, the inability of governments to provide effective housing schemes has given rise to cities with high number of slums in which there are no waste management systems (Ezeabasili, 2009). Under such conditions, citizens especially the slum dwelling poor and vulnerable have become increasingly exposed to communicable diseases and other health endangering circumstances (Akinola, Ekpo and Haruna, 2012).

A history of electric power insufficiency has also given rise to environment hazards arising from noise and air pollution. Most residents in Nigerian towns and cities have to depend on generating plants to compliment the perpetual power outages associated with the public electricity company. These fossil fuel dependent systems do not only pollute the air with their fumes, but cause noise pollution as well. However, despite the degree of environmental pollution that results from the above, it all pales when compared to what is obtainable from industrial sources.

Ezeabasili (2013) asserts that the discovery of oil in the Niger-Delta and other mineral resources such as tin in Jos Plateau State, and their exploration paved the way for environmental degradation in Nigeria. Other industrial activities such as timber and logging, the textile companies and oil exploration have led to increased water channel sedimentation, water contamination and loss of bio-diversity (Ifeanyi, 2002). The worst scenarios are found in the Niger-Delta which is the bedrock of oil exploration in Nigeria.

The Niger Delta presents a very grim picture of what industrial pollution can do to an environment in the face of the lack of political will by those in charge to effect positive changes. While evidence abounds as to the devastation of farmlands, fish ponds and water ways resulting from oil spillage, it is a known fact that Nigeria flares more gas than any other petroleum producing nation in the world. As of 2008, Nigeria was responsible for 13% of the total 168 billion cubic feet (BCT) of gas flared annually across the globe (Bassey, 2008). This is despite the known fact that gas flaring releases high levels of methane gas, carbon dioxide as well as benzene which are all known to have climate warming properties and other soil contaminating attributes (Van Dessel, 1995; Ukegbu & Okeke, 1987 cited in Dokpesi, 2013).

The socio-economic development implications of such high levels of pollutions are that, there is a reduction in the biodiversity of the natural environment and food security is undermined as a result of soil contamination. For instance, oil spills create undesirable changes in the natural elements thereby impinging on various social and economic activities (Imevbore, 1979). Even the high incidence of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta has been traced to the environmental degradation induced poverty brought by oil industry pollution of the entire region. There has also been an upsurge in the cases of flooding across Nigeria with year 2012 witnessing the worst cases of flood ever in the history of the country. Quite obviously, these can be linked to the high levels of pollution the Nigerian geophysical sphere has been subjected to (Odermoho, 1993; Adejumo & Adejumo, 2014).

#### **4.0 Government Rhetorics and Environmental Sustainability**

In recognition of the growing global concerns on the place of the environment in the human development index and, the awareness of the various challenges faced by Nigerian environments, Nigerian governments have over the years enacted and formulated various policies directly and indirectly, to stem and control the effects of these challenges. Therefore, the attempt here is to critically evaluate some of these policies of government and how they have impacted on the challenges identified.

The debilitating effect of poverty on the citizenry and its ability to undermine socio-economic development including environmental sustainability has never been lost on governments in Nigeria. To this end, successive administrations have enacted and tried their hands at a plethora of programmes aimed at reducing poverty across the nation. In the 1970s up to the 1990s, the government embarked on such programmes like Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Economic Empowerment



Programmes (FEEP) and many others. More recent ones have been the United Nations Inspired Millennium Development Goals, the 7 Point Agenda, Vision 2020 and so on. Contradictorily, despite these various efforts at poverty reduction, Nigeria continues to witness high levels of poverty among the citizenry so much that, as recent as 2005, Nigeria was counted among the 17 poorest countries in the world and, is currently the country with the highest population of people who live in extreme poverty (PREMIUM TIMES 9/6/2018).

Curiously, in as many years as policies were formulated to eradicate poverty, so were other government programmes and actions undertaken which indirectly undermined the impact of the former policies. For instance, while poverty reducing policies like Better Life for Rural Women, FEEP and the National Directorate for Empowerment (NDE) were being projected, the World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was also being implemented alongside its conditionalities which sought the reduction of spending on public enterprises and social services (Onimode, 1988). These SAP conditionalities rolled back any gains that could have been made as they led to loss of employment by workers and, several families losing their ability to afford necessities due to the wage cuts and high inflation (Nwagbera, 2011). Such policy contradictions can still be observed under recent administrations as policies on removal of subsidies, increased tuition in public educational institutions, high cost of medical care have eroding effects on the impact of policies like the Millennium Development Goals. The trend continues with regards to desertification and deforestation. While there exists edicts regulating the use of forest resources and policies such as the Millennium Development Goals on environmental sustainability, it is unfathomable why the same government continues to consider open grazing reserves as against ranching in animal husbandry. This is in spite of the known fact that animal grazing is one of the factors responsible for desertification. It is also note worthy that in as many as the administrations that have changed in the last two decades, aside from that of Umaru Yar' Adua, all of them have reduced subsidies on petroleum products as part of World Bank economic prescriptions. The consequences of such increased prices of petroleum product is the continuing destruction of forest resources as majority of the rural dwellers continue to use firewood as their major source of household energy (Nathaniel & Nathaniel, 2002). Evidently, the removal of subsidies on educational services as earlier noted, comes into play here too. This is because with better education, farmers are able to learn and apply more environmentally friendly farming methods (Tsue, Nweze & Okoye, 2014).

In the bid to provide adequate and affordable housing to its teeming citizens, Nigeria in 1977 established the Federal Mortgage Bank with the aim of providing funds to individuals to access better housing for themselves. Subsequently, the National Housing programme or Shagari Low Cost scheme was formulated in 1982, National Housing fund in 1993. Other programmes like the National Housing Policy of 2006 still came along later under the same objectives; provision of adequate, decent and affordable housing to Nigerian citizens. While the ideas were environmentally friendly and development enhancing, the funding arrangement were largely above the ordinary people it was meant to help. Also, the provisions largely favoured those with formal working appointment thus, excluding a very large proportion of the population as unemployment levels are very high in Nigeria. The debilitating effect of unfavourable economic policies could still be detected here as the schemes articulated savings which are impossible in a society of low wages and high inflation as a result of currency devaluation.

As observed earlier, the epileptic nature of public power supply has greatly compromised attempts to facilitate environmental sustainability and the dependence on fossil fuel operated power generators contribute to both noise and air pollution. Unfortunately, this scenario has been

further compounded by the privatization of the power sector leading to hikes in energy units without corresponding improvement in the supply. The contradictions in the environmental policies are even more confusing when the laws on environmental protection are critically evaluated. Critically, the bourgeoisie dominated nature of the high income yielding power generator import business might just be part of the inspiration for this continuing non-chalance from official responses to this problems.

As a member of the United Nations Organization (UNO), Nigeria has been a signatory to conventions bordering on the environment including the 1968 African Convention of Conservation of Nature, and Natural Resources, the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and many others. In the Nigerian constitution too there are chapters which seek to protect the environment such as section 20 of the 1999 constitution which says; the state shall protect and improve the environment and safe guard the water, air and land, forest and wildlife of Nigeria (The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). Other policies also exist such as the Federal Environmental Protection Agency decree No58 of 1988 which has since been repealed into the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement agency (establishment) Act of 2007. The problem however, is with the enforcement of these laws as well as their interpretations. Making a legal interpretation of some of these laws, Ogbodo (2010) specifically makes reference to section 20 thus:

the handicap to this constitutional provision is that it comes under chapter II on fundamental objectives and directives principles of state policy. These objectives are not enforceable in the Nigerian courts... (section 6/6) makes all provisions of chapter II non justifiable under Nigerian courts (Ogbodo, 2010: 204).

The above legal contradictions could rightly be held responsible for the agitations in the Niger – Delta as most communities and individuals cannot adequately raise legal issues against pollution by oil corporations. They can only do that at international courts as was the case against Shell BP a few years ago. Such ventures entail the involvement of huge amounts of resources so, structurally, the Nigerian law prevents the ordinary individual from legally raising issues even when his environment is being wantonly undermined and destroyed as it is the case in the Niger Delta. The bias towards the protection of foreign economic interests become explicit here when it is observed that the entire oil industry in Nigeria is dominated by foreign multinational corporations and their local affiliates all superintended by the local politico-economic class.

Such complicity is further observed as even non – environmental friendly products and projects, under excuses of low costs and investment incentives, are given waivers to be imported and undertaken in the country (Ifeanyi, 2002). Despite having ozone protection, control of hazardous substances etc as parts of the law establishing the now repealed Federal Environment Protection (FEPA) act, it has been observed that the government still inexplicably displays ambivalence to an issue as critical as gas flaring as it has continuously shifted the deadline to end gas flaring (Eneh, 2010). The above policy somersault and contradictions become even more emphasized when lack of political will, inter-agency rivalry and corruption are thrown into the mix. The above explanations provide clear indications of a dislocated political class whose interests continue to be the satisfaction of their own and foreign dominant interests as against local needs including environmental considerations.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

While socio – economic development is an enduring agenda of Nigeria and most African societies, the Nigerian experience clearly shows that environmental sustainability as an aspect of sustainable development is yet to be given the unfettered approach it deserves. This paper has shown that in as much as the Nigerian environment is constantly under assault from various challenges, the different efforts from government to curb such challenges have not been adequately streamlined to stem the tide. It has shown that most of the policies, including industrial laws, are largely ineffective as they are vacuous and even counteract the impact of others.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

It is the recommendation of this paper that realistic policies and legal structures must be put in place so as to harmonize government policies among sectors. A situation where policy implementation erodes the gains of another policy leads to stagnation in the development aspirations of the society. Therefore, government policy, if it must not end up as mere rhetoric, must assume the people – centered notions of development which see wholistic interventions and, not just peripheral actions.

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