

Review Article

Promoting the Health and Safety of Individuals through Environmental Laws and Government Health Policy

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Article History

Received: 03.08.2019

Accepted: 16.08.2019

Published: 30.08.2019

Abstract: Promotion of health and safety of individual in the contemporary society of Nigeria and in other parts of the sub-saharan Africa countries of the world has been a critical issue under consideration. Our environment has been experiencing various environmental pollution due to human activities; hence promotion of the health and safety becomes a challenge in this regard. The paper sought to have a central focus on the promotion of health and safety of individuals through environmental laws and government policy. An overview of environmental laws in Nigeria, and the environmental and health problems in Nigeria were extensively considered. The paper further highlighted the specific laws in the pre and post-independence era of Nigeria. The paper came out with the conclusion that the danger posed by the environmental pollution is as a result of human action in the environment is a well establish fact that it is possible to constitute a health hazard into individual in the society. Based on this observation, the following recommendations among others where proffered: Relevant stakeholders in health, oil and gas should emphasize the necessity for a concerted effort to raise the level of awareness and their understanding of environment and health laws. Government should encourage works, write-ups, articles and desertions which high light and expose the population on the danger associated with environmental pollution and more enlightenment campaign program should be organized to emphasize the use of electronic media to explain the causes of environmental problems in the society.

Keywords: Pollution, health laws, sanitation, health policy and dislocating.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental health laws and government policies are those statutory laws and policies establish by government basically to promote and protect the health of individuals [1]. According to Lukas [2], environmental health laws and government policies are made specifically to ensure adequate protection and safety of people particularly among countries in sub-saharan Africa from hazardous environments as well as the promotion of good healthy living in the environment. Ewuzie [3], classified environment into three major components: the physical, biological and the social environment and there are laws governing these three components. As a result of some traces of some hazardous chemicals in some of the major cities in most parts of African countries, the third international conference on environmental enforcement has challenged most of the world leaders to protect the lives of the population. In Africa like in most and other developing nations of the world, the major concern of government for many years has been the provision of basic social amenities, the protection of the environment, the control and conservation of natural resources as well as industrial pollution. In Nigerians for instance, Allen [4] confirmed that it has become very important that the government and the populace had to wake up to their responsibilities for the protection of the environment. It is against his back drop however that some prominent Nigerian environmental groups have been selected to assess the level of persistent organic pollutants in the country. For example, the group friends of the environment, Nigeria environmental study team (NEST) and Nigerian environmental society (NES) are made to function under the guidance of the federal ministry environmental in conjunction with the United Nations industrial development organization (UNIDO). The management of the Nigerian environment has been very poor over the years with regards to the protection and promotion of the health of her citizens through health laws and government policies. In view of this development, Nigeria signed the stock holding convention a May 2001 and had it ratified on May 2004 [5]. By a conservative estimate, about 50 percent of the wetlands worldwide are gone; those include rivers, swamps marshes, small ponds and mangrove systems. In view of

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this the Nigerian environmentalist advocated for health policy against the abuse of wanton pollution of the ecosystem especially in the Niger Delta area of the country, (The guardian Feb. 6, 200 and Vanguard Feb. 2, [6].

An over view of environmental laws in Nigeria

The issue of environmental laws in Nigeria is date back to the town improvement ordinance of 1963. The objective of the ordinance was to control, develop and sanitize the environment. In 1902, the first environmental legislation emerged; this was an attempt to protect the citizens in developed world from health hazards that were so prevented in the late 19th and early 20th centuries [7].

In a similar vein, the cantonment proclamation and regulation was established in northern Nigeria, the regulation give guidelines on the layout sanitation of environment. A framework for effective planning of the environment was establish to secure proper sanitation conditions as well as the establishment of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) during the second republic in Nigeria of 1979-1983 to regulate the activities of the environment in the country.

In another development, environmental protection agency (FEPA) finally came into full recognition during the discovery of a ship load of waste traced to be of Italian origin that was deposited in small port town of Koko (Southern Nigeria). In order to safe guard the health and safety of Nigerian citizen, this action eventually led to the promulgation of the harmful (toxic waste criminal provision decrees No 42 o 1988 [8]. In a similar development, the decree that establish FEPA equally directed the establishment of state and local government environment bodies. Though quite unfortunate the federal environmental protection agency was eventually scrapped due to the poor environmental sanitation conditions in the country. In the determination of the federal government of Nigeria to maintain and protect the health of her citizens, the government mandated all polymers, manufacturer, all sachet water producers, water companies, pharmaceutical firms, confectioners, fast food centers and eateries, bag manufacturing companies, and other companies that wrap their products with non-biodegradable materials to register with the office of environmental services [9]. According to the World Bank Report [10], 1 billion people in African countries lack clean water and over 1.7 billion people in the sub-saharan Africa do not have access to adequate sanitation facilities in their immediate environment by the year 2015. This figure according to Daniels [9], will probably raise to 1.9 billion and 2.3 billion respectively. In realization of the environmental damage that threaten the health and safety many citizens in Nigeria and in other part of African countries, many countries have begun to incorporate environmental concerns into development policy making process like other developing countries of the world, Nigeria is confronted with numerous environmental and health problems which are capable of dislocating its economic development [11]. Past efforts of the Nigerian government in environmental protection (pre-and post-independence) were geared primarily towards safety or the protection and conservation of the natural resources. This effort was clearly demonstrated by promulgating some environmental laws which include:

- Oil pipeline Act, 1956
- Forestry Act, 1958
- Destruction of mosquitoes Act 1958
- Public health Act 1958
- Minerals Act, 1958 cap LFN 1990
- Minerals oil (safety) regulation, 1963 cap 350 LFN 1990
- Oil in navigable waters Acts 1968 cap 339 LFN 1990
- Endangered species Act. cap 108 LFN 1990
- Quarries Act cap 385 LFN 1990
- Sea fisheries Act cap 404 LFN 1990 [12]

Adams [13] argued that it has become very essential to formulate the principles that guide creating an efficient environment that is habitable and conducive for human life.

Due, to a lot of environmental problems that has over the years received less attention by the three levels of government to arrest the deteriorating sanitation and environmental pollution, the federal government promulgated decree regulating environmental sanitation laws and also directed all states government to institute a corresponding edict. Still in furtherance of the effort to regulate environmental hazards, the then military government of General Mohammed Buhari pronounces war against filth in Nigeria environment otherwise known as War against Indiscipline (WAI). Some of the specific laws that was established to protect the health and environment of individual are

- The Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) act as amended by decrease 59 of 1992 was the statutory agency that sought to revolutionize the tide of environmental problems.
- The harmful waste (special criminal provision Act is another environmental law which provides stiffer penalties for various forms of environmental problems.
- Another environmental law that adds a new dimension to the role of the Attorney general is the oil and navigable water Act.

All these laws are enacted to protect the health and environment the individuals. According to Lanre [14], "an abuse of the environmental could ultimately affect meaningful development, the environmental laws prescribe litigation to protect and preserve it from decadence".

Environmental and health problems in Nigeria

Ever since the discovery of oil in Nigeria in the 1950s, the country has been suffering the negative environmental and other health consequences of oil development. The growth of the country's oil industry, combined with a population explosion, poor health status, environmental hazards and lack of environmental regulation led to substantial damage to Nigeria's environment especially in Niger delta regions Nigeria. Abel [16], observed that Nigeria has severally faced environmental and health challenged from air pollution and desertification with the encroachment of the Sahara desert in the north and severe air pollution in overcrowded cities such as in Lagos and Abuja. It is only in the past decade that environmental group, the Nigeria Federal Government and the foreign oil companies that extract oil in the Niger-delta have begun to take steps to solve of the health and environmental issues. For instance, the Ogonis, an ethnic group that dominates in the Niger-delta region have often protested that not only have foreign oil firms degraded the local environment, but that the Nigerian government has failed to enforce environmental laws and regulations [16]. Subsequent upon this health and environmental problems in Nigeria, the Nigeria government has taken action to show that it is committed in reducing the dangers of environmental pollution by enforcing environmental regulations, hence in March, 2003 the Nigeria subsidiary of Shell was ordered to pay \$1.5 billion to Ijaw community, the Nigeria government is now committed to end the process of gas flaring from oil production by 2020 with the end of gas flaring activities in Nigeria. Air and other environmental pollution coupled with health issues are likely to remain a persistence problem in the country. Since other sources such as automobiles and diesel fired electricity generators contributors to the choking air in cities such as Abuja, Porth-Harcourt, Warri and Lagos which are plagued by daily sinus.

CONCLUSION

The danger posed by environmental pollution as a result of human activities in the environment is a well-established fact; it has constituted a health hazard in the developing countries of the world. The developing world example Nigeria is yet to fully grasp the implications of the effect of environmental health hazards created by various pollutants. However, the existence of the various agencies among other related bodies by the federal government has not really changed our environment since inception. Significant number of Nigerians of different ages is affected by the environmental pollution while the federal ministry that is responsible for the protection and promotion of good health of individuals are unaware of the dangers posed by these chemical in our environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of these challenges arising from environmental pollution, the following recommendation is made in order to safe guard the health and safety of Nigerians citizens.

- Relevant stake holders in health, oil and gas should emphasis the necessity for concerted efforts to raise the level of awareness and their understanding of environment and health laws this will be made possible if the three tiers of government can do more in creating this awareness.
- Government should encourage works, write ups, articles and dissertations which highlight and expose the population on the danger associated with environmental pollution.
- More enlightenment campaign programs should be organized to emphasis the use of electronic media to explain the cause of environmental problems as well as the proper use of our environment.
- Environment laws with good objectives should be establish and implemented accordingly.
- The federal government and other levels of government should make the good health of her citizen a top priority as well ensuring that the overall objective of the millennium development goals (MDGs) when fully implemented should reflect health and safety development of good habitable environment by the year 2020.
- The government in conjunction with the international communities should try to emphasis the importance of organizing a well-planned world "environmental day "that will incorporate among other programs worldwide campaign and the health safety to our environment.

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