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THE ROLES OF THE CLERGIES AND THE MEDIA IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION OF ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

Environmental awareness and education are among the key ingredients in becoming more sustainable. The roles of the clergy and the media in the environmental protection of Anambra State were examined. The strongest effect on people's worldviews, beliefs, attitudes, motives, behaviours, and cultures can come from religion which implies that the influence of religion can change people's negative views, values, attitudes, decisions, and behaviours toward the environment. The media have the enormous potential to inform the public, educate it, and help people develop their skills and attitudes. The environmental challenges of the state were stated while some were highlighted and prioritized. The highlighted ones include Erosion, Poor solid waste management, industrial pollution, deforestation, faecal sludge management and poor public awareness. The roles of both the clergy and the media were discussed. This paper conclusively implored the clergies and the media practitioners, to participate actively in actions that would preserve the environment of Anambra State.

Keywords: Awareness, Clergies, Education, Environment, Media Practitioners

Introduction

Environmental issues have captured the interest of policymakers, experts, and even laypeople throughout the world. Due to a growing understanding that human activities are harming the ecosystem, the field of education known as environmental education has turned its emphasis on how to reduce our impact on the environment to support a more sustainable future. Environmental awareness and education are among the key ingredients in becoming more sustainable. Environmental education could be defined as a process that allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem-solving and take action to improve the environment. As a result, people develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and have the skills to make informed and responsible decisions (National Environmental Education Advisory Council [NEEAC], 2015).

The environment cannot speak for itself. Environmental protection is not only the duty of the government but also of the governed. Any government cannot accomplish sustainable growth at its level until the general public participates in it. It is only when the public is aware of ecological and environmental issues can there be adequate public participation. The clergies and media practitioners are among the several stakeholders that can create environmental awareness in Anambra State.

The strongest effect on people's worldviews, beliefs, attitudes, motives, behaviours, and cultures can come from religion (Sponsel *et al*., 2007). The foregoing, simply implies that the powerful influence of religion can change

people's negative views, values, attitudes, decisions, and behaviours toward the environment, as seen above (Ogunkan, 2010). Hence, the clergies have enormous roles to play.

Politicians are infamous for giving spectacular speeches without delivering on their promises. One of those areas where promises are made but few are honoured is the environment. Nigerians must learn about environmental issues so they may demand that such commitments be kept. The media have the enormous potential to inform the public, educate it, and help people develop their skills and attitudes. Hence, they are in the best position to drive the process.

It is plausible to say that environmental education should now be focused, at least in part, on causing behaviour change given the severity of the environmental situation in Anambra State. Increasing environmental knowledge across various societal groups, such as civil officials, traders, craftsmen, public servants, and politicians, is one of the best strategies to preserve our State's environment.

This paper aims to highlight the roles of the clergy and the media in the environmental protection of the state to raise the environmental awareness of the stakeholders and make us aware of the current environmental problems and potential solutions, as well as to sensitize us enough to stimulate our feelings in such a way that we develop concern and responsible attitudes towards improving the environment.

Highlight of the Environmental Challenges of the State

The state's environmental problems may include erosion, flooding, poor municipal solid waste management, indiscriminate faecal waste disposal, improper liquid waste disposal particularly from industries that worsen soil and water pollution, low environmental awareness among the general public, an increase in illegal structures, deforestation, and other global environmental problems that Anambra state-related activities contribute to, such as global warming, acid rain and ozone layer depletion.

The state of Anambra's environmental challenges could be prioritized as follows: erosion, Poor solid waste management, Indiscriminate faecal sludge disposal, poor environmental awareness among the general public and flooding are given high priority; deforestation and the proliferation of illegal structures are given medium priority while industrial pollution and biodiversity loss are given low priority. Some of the challenges and their respective causes are highlighted below.

Erosion

In Anambra State, erosion has become the most common scenery and the state presents the most typical features of erosion in the country (Egboka, 2009) having the highest concentration of active gully sites. In Anambra State, the rate of soil loss in areas where terrain undulation is low is about 9.11 tons/ha annually and in areas with high undulation, the rate is 10.03 tons/ha annually (Egboka, 2009). Because of the high, undulating terrain that covers a large portion of Anambra State, deep gullies have developed and expanded more frequently. Therefore, the primary natural variables that contribute to gully erosion are the state's type of soil and terrain.

Developmental activities, including the creation of roads and building projects, poor road construction, farming, unrestricted grazing, deforestation, and mining operations are examples of anthropogenic causes of erosion. The State made numerous attempts to address the issue in conjunction with the recently concluded NEWMAP and is still on it with the newly established Anambra State Erosion, Watershed and Climate Change Agency.

Solid waste management

Poor Municipal solid waste management is another major environmental problem in Anambra State. For several years now, the

government has been making ineffectual attempts to solve waste management problems in the state due to a lack of political will to take the firm decision needed to save the state from this menace (Okoye, 2016). Currently, the situation has not changed. Worse still, there has been widespread apathy among Anambrarians on issues about waste management. This has aggravated the waste management problem of the state. Hence there is an urgent need for responsibility sharing and citizen participation in solid waste management in the state, the first step being having the government display the needed political will followed by environmental awareness creation and others.

The government needs more work in finance, effective stakeholder coordination, and educating the populace about how their acts and inactions contribute to this threat. To discourage defaulters, robust enforcement techniques are required.

1ndustrial pollution

The state is experiencing an alarming rate of industrial growth, particularly in urban areas. Unfortunately, the majority of these businesses didn't conduct an EIA before being established and also failed to do the periodic environmental audit. Their effluents are released without any significant treatment, and in most cases, they are released untreated in their raw state. Most of the time, the majority of villagers are unaware of the health effects of these industrial operations; otherwise, they would undoubtedly protest and pressure the manufacturers to adhere to the norm.

Deforestation

Anambra State has the second smallest land area in Nigeria with a high human population and an alarming rate of deforestation and forest degradation because of human economic activities (Okereke *et al*., 2015). Anambra state is made up of five (5) forest zones which are also based on the five agricultural zones of the state (Ezike 2011). They include the Awka zone, Nnewi zone, Abagana zone, Otuocha zone, and Onitsha zone.

The primary causes of deforestation in Anambra State are urbanization, land clearing for farming, bush burning for hunting, over-exploitation of medicinal plants, inadequate forest management techniques, highways and building construction (Okoye, 2023). Deforestation in the state has resulted in the loss of soil nutrients, extinction of species with high economic or medicinal value, siltation of rivers, species extinction, decreased biological diversity, decreased ecosystem stability, decreased plant biomass, and disruption of the food chain, among other negative effects (Okereke *et al.*, 2015). At this current rate of deforestation in the state, an untold hardship especially among the rural women who depend so much on the forest and its products is inevitable.

Faecal sludge management

The faecal sludge of a community contains the complete spectrum of enteric pathogenic microorganisms excreted by the community, which is a function of the endemic disease rates prevalent in that community. In addition to pathogenic bacteria, such as the agents of such diseases as typhoid fever and cholera, faecal waste may contain enteric viruses of such diseases as poliomyelitis, infectious hepatitis and numerous other diseases caused by enteric viruses.

In the urban cities of the state, the faecal sludge is collected by private companies using trucks with vacuum pumps for septic tanks. Some dump these wastes in dumpsites while some discharge theirs in the bush, water bodies and gullies. When rain falls, the enteric pathogenic microorganisms in the discharged sludge are carried to other places which in most cases end up in the water bodies. This constitutes a very serious environmental and health hazard.

The government is making some efforts to tackle the solid waste problem but, they are seriously dawdling in their efforts to tackle

the issue of indiscriminate disposal of faecal sludge and its management. Hence, the need to avail this opportunity offered by the Federal Ministry of Water Resources with invaluable assistance from UNICEF and other Donor agencies to buckle up and do the needful.

Poor environmental awareness

An overall assessment of the level of environmental awareness among key stakeholders in Anambra State reveals that people are not only unaware of some environmental challenges but are not informed about the causes and effects of most of the problems (Okoye and Amakom, 2017). For instance, according to the research, the majority of the stakeholders in the state are still not aware of the effects of the following on the environment; chemicals usage for agriculture; cutting down trees and bush burning; smoke emitted by vehicles; indiscriminate disposal of FS; disposing waste in the drainage channel during rainfall as well as wasting water in the house.

Roles of the Clergies

In the Assisi Declarations of 1986 which brought together Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Jewish leaders, the world religious leaders agreed that religion is a more pluralistic, constructive, and pragmatic approach to solving intractable environmental crises across the globe (Sponsel *et al*., 2007). The Assisi Declaration served as the summit that officially defined religion's role in environmental management.

In the bible, we are mandated in Genesis 2:15 "to cultivate and guard the earth". According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, to guard is "to watch or protect something/somebody from danger". Then the big question is "Are we protecting the earth from danger or are we putting it in danger?" If we look at the way we indiscriminately dispose of our waste and pollute the air by burning our waste most times, destroying our forests, polluting our water bodies with industrial effluents, unsustainably exploiting our natural resources that lead to land pollution, using chemicals in fishing, refusing to pay sanitation levy etc., the answer becomes NO.

In the Christian Declaration on Nature at the Assisi declarations, it was stated that man's dominion cannot be understood as a license to abuse, spoil, squander or destroy what God has made to manifest his glory. That dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures. It further stated that "Every human act of irresponsibility towards creatures is an abomination and that according to its gravity, it is an offence against that divine wisdom which sustains and gives purpose to the interdependent harmony of the universe"(Assisi Declaration, 1986). On the other hand, in the Muslim Declaration on Nature, it was written that "We are God's stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth; it does not belong to us to do what we wish. It belongs to God and He has entrusted us with its safekeeping."

People are impacted inevitably when the environment is hurt. If we fail to care for the environment in which we live, God's people will suffer. Caring for the non-human parts of the creation and preserving the intricate interactions among them is an important part of seeking justice for God's people. With the rise in the number of environmental problems that the world faces today, there is no doubt that environmental stewardship needs to be fanned into flame among clergies. Hence, the need to have "Environ-gelical" clergies.

The purpose of religion is not to build beautiful places of worship but to cultivate positive human qualities amongst the worshippers which in this context will be inculcating environmentally friendly attitudes. Religious leaders have been placed by God in strategic positions of leadership and influence in their various ministries, and they can use this to move people towards God's environmental agenda through their teachings, motivation and exemplary actions. It is, therefore, imperative that various

religious leaders should be sensitized about their roles in this context to help them to fulfil this God-given mandate.

Clergies should be related to and appealing to the government on some vital environmental issues. They can augment government efforts in protecting the environment by doing the following:

1. Enlightening the congregation on the need to respect and protect the environment.
2. Appealing to their conscience to comply with the environmental laws of the state.
3. Revealing to them the implications of their unfriendly environmental behaviours on their health and wellbeing.
4. Informing them of their roles as Christians in environmental protection.
5. Relating with and appealing to the government on some vital environmental issues.

Role of the Media

The great potential of the media as regards the provision of information, the construction of knowledge and the cultivation of skills and attitudes, has been proven scientifically over the years (Saneh,2018). The media helps to shape the culture, politics, and social life of people in a given geographical location. It is an effective method for bringing environmental issues to the public's attention and raising awareness. It can play an immense role in contributing to a sustainable society. The print (offline) and online (social media) media are some of the best channels for disseminating the state's environmental news.

The media focus on three key issues: to inform, educate and entertain. The different types of media can be categorized as:

- Print Media which includes newspapers, Magazines and advertisements;
- Broadcast Media which includes television and Radio;
- Social Media (New Media) which includes Social Media and the Internet

The environment cannot speak for itself. The general people need to be made aware of the reality that when we hurt the environment, we also harm ourselves. This could be achieved easily by media practitioners. Environmental issues need to be placed on the social agenda. Journalists and other media practitioners can significantly help transform the environmental status of a place if they consistently and promptly discuss and publish issues related to the environment. This would not only provide a link between the government and the governed but also help the government to achieve their goals easily.

Any government cannot accomplish sustainable growth at its level until the general public participates in it. It is only when the public is aware of ecological and environmental issues can there be public participation (Saneh, 2018). For instance, the public must be made aware of the negative environmental effects of polythene littering for the government's campaign to outlaw it to be successful. In other words, the public must understand the environmental and health implications of indiscriminate disposal of polythene bags before the government can successfully ban the littering of polythene (Saneh, 2018).

Environmental reporting can contribute a lot to awareness. Media practitioners have not devoted enough space to the topic of the environment in the media in Anambra State. If they devout half of the space and time allotted to politics to environmental issues, there would be a high level of environmental awareness. A few print and broadcast media have offered columns and feature programs on the environment but more efforts in this regard would be very helpful in environmental protection. This is not done for the government alone but for ourselves and our children both born and unborn.

Online communication methods using social media have become increasingly popular. On social networks, users post movies, photos, and blog entries as well as write comments,

share, and embed them. Social networks provide a medium for informing users about the environment and a platform for sharing ideas and debates. Social media might be a platform for spreading environmental awareness, which is one of the best ways to protect the environment because environmental deterioration is a problem that is now affecting everyone in the world. A variety of media-supported environmental education projects can be initiated in the state in conjunction with the relevant MDAs

Journalists are implored to have a serious interest in environmental issues. The umbrella body of all media practitioners can approach consultants to furnish them with some materials that could help them to be better "environ-gelical" media practitioners. Better still "Environmental Journalism Training" workshop could be organized.

Conclusion

It is only through the care of the environment can the livelihoods of those most dependent on it be sustained. The government should perform its responsibility by creating a forum where seasoned consultants can educate the clergy and the media on how they may support her efforts to address the state's environmental issues.

In issues that border on the environment, no effort should be spared and all hands must be on deck because according to the former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, during his comment on People's Climate in 2014, he remarked that in dealing with environmental issues *"There is no 'Plan B' because we do not have a 'Planet B'.* Hence, the CBOs and environmental NGOs are implored to assist the government in convincing all and sundry to be environmental evangelists, in other words, enthusiastic advocates of environmental protection wherever we find ourselves notwithstanding.

This paper makes a compelling case for everyone, especially clergy and media professionals to mobilize their efforts to protect the planet, which is our only home.

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