

Ibadan Journal of Peace & Development  
Vol. 8 No. 1 February 2018 pp. 88-96

## **Environment-Conflict Nexus: Proffering Environmental Health Education for Sustainable Peaceful Co-existence in Nigerian Communities**

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### **Abstract**

*Occurrences of conflict between farmers and multi-national oil companies in the Niger Delta as well as that of farmers and herders due to scarcity of natural resources have become source of worries. This is because most often the conflict culminated into violent attack leading to the killing of farmers, herders and animals as well as destruction of crops and farm produce which is capable of jeopardizing food security of the nation. Hostility, insecurity, tension, mistrust and suspicion which characterize most communities continue to threaten peaceful co-existence. This paper examined environment induced conflicts in Nigeria; environmental factors causing conflict, environmental health education and sustainable peaceful co-existence. It was concluded that sustained peaceful co-existence can be achieved using the instrument of environmental health education. Therefore, resources both human and materials should be made available to implement environmental health education programme*

**Keywords:** (i) environment induced conflict, (ii) natural resources scarcity (iii) farmers and herders, (iv) environmental health education, (v) sustainable peaceful co-existence

## Introduction

Natural environment facilitates the availability of the resources required for human survival. In fact physical components of the earth comprising soil, air and water support and affect human being. Nature as a resource provides directly or indirectly material needs for food production, living space, health maintenance (including provision of medicine) and supply of energy and livelihood materials (Bob and Bronkhort in Bob 2010). Natural environment is super-ordinate to human beings. This is because wellbeing as well as social and economic prospects of a being largely depends and controlled to a greater extent by natural environment. Human beings are supposed to live within the dictates of the environment.

The jettisoning of the important role of nature in conditioning developmental activities has led to unrestrained use of natural resources. Thus, without recourse to the capability of the environment, human population continue to increase in exponential manner leading to urbanization and increased industrial establishments; the effluents which further pollute the environments continue to stretch beyond limit the capability of natural resources. Thus, in a way the ability of the environment to renew its lost resources has been negatively affected hence, dwindling resources which led to scarcity. Conflict ensues when the

individual or group desire to control the limited resources.

The struggle for the control of scarce resources of common interest result into conflict. Conflict according to Kilman (2014) is disagreement among groups or individuals characterised by antagonism and hostility. Environment scarcity has in most time led to conflict which eventually resulted into violence. Environment induced conflicts are the one triggered by scarcity of the much needed natural resources for human living. According to Libiszowki (2004) environmental conflicts are characterised by the principal importance of degradation in one or more of (i) overuse of renewable resources (ii) overstrain of the environment sink capacity pollution and (iii) impoverishment of the space of living.

Peaceful co-existence among community people is being challenged by occurrences of conflict around the globe. In many instances ethnicity, colour divides, religious intolerance, ideology differences including control of power over people have led to confrontation leading to violent attack. The consequences manifest in form of loss of precious lives and wanton destruction of properties. In the recent times environment induced conflict is at the forefront of factors threatening community peace most especially in the poverty ridden developing countries. Olabode and Ajibade (2010) explained the

complexity in environment-conflict nexus thus; the renewable resource scarcity can produce civil conflict, instability, large and destabilizing population movements, aggravate racial, ethnic or religious tensions and incapacitated political and social institutions.

The consequences of environment induced conflict can be immediate and long lasting. Many people maimed or killed could result into loss of manpower; damage to social amenities which may not be replaced immediately, disruption of educational activities will have negative effects on the products long after, also displacement of the people can have negative effects on social and mental health of the displaced persons. Also, damage done to health facilities as a result of violent attack can bring to a halt the health care delivery services thereby jeopardizing the health of the people. However, Kaur (2014) asserted that issues relating to environmental deterioration can trigger off a conflict in a region, but its capacity to provide a platform for co-operation and collaboration to meet common challenges should not be underestimated.

Education is a potent instrument for solving many problems including environment induced conflict. Ayotunde (2008) reported that the outcome of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro Brazil in June 1992 laid

serious emphasis on education as the reliable means of empowering the people to understand and manage the environment. Environmental health education is efforts directed at increasing the acquisition of people consciousness and understanding of environmental health matters, contributing to responsible individuals and group action (United Nations Habitat, 2004).

Environmental conflict is the bane of most communities in Nigeria. Occurrences of conflicts negate peaceful coexistence. Peaceful co-existence thrives when people embrace tolerance and contentment. Also, a deep feeling of security of lives and properties promotes peaceful co-existence. Peaceful co-existence is desirable because it paves way for poverty reduction, as well as economic, educational and political development. Perhaps the much needed peaceful coexistence that can be sustained over a long period can be achieved using the instrument of environmental health education.

#### **Environmental induced conflicts in Nigeria**

Conflicts by the reason of environment have increased in leaps and bounds almost across the nation. Onduku (2001) after reviewing the United Nations Environmental Programme report of June 1999 identified two environmental issues causing conflict to include water related which are water flow, diversion, salinization, flood and

pollution and resource depletion issues like deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, flooding and pollution.

The Niger Delta conflict started with the discovery and eventual exploration and production activities of oil companies. In the first place site of oil and gas reserves is fertile land which the traditional occupants depend on for their agricultural activities. The activities of oil production have led to loss of freshwater needed by the residents for survival. The environmental degradation of land used for farming and fishing owing to oil spill increase poverty level. The problem often led to bloody confrontations in many occasions between Niger Delta people and oil multinational companies.

The problem of insecurity of life and property caused by farmer-grazer conflict is a burden to Nigeria. This is because the problem constitute threat to peaceful co-existence between herders and host communities. The problem is widespread as almost all the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria are affected. The migration of herders from the North as a result of scarcity of natural resources is to look for greener pastures in other parts of the country. However, the fact still remains that the communities they migrated to also depend on the same resources such as land and water they desire for their livelihood. Hence the struggle from both groups for the possession of limited resources.

In Nigeria conflict involving farmers and herders appears to be assuming wider proportion. Conflicts resulting from cattle-grazing actually accounted for 35 percent of all reported cases between 1991 and 2005 (IPCR, 2017). According to Conroy (2017) Nigeria Watch data base indicates that land conflict as a whole account for 2,846 violent deaths in Nigeria from 2006 to May 2014 while cattle grazing deaths in particular account for 609 violent deaths. According to IPCR (2017) out of reported 389 incidents of herders and farmers conflict from 1997 to 2015, 371 had occurred in the North-Central states of Benue, the Federal Capital Territory, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Kwara and Plateau. Olabode and Ajibade (2010) concluded in a study that frequent causes of conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Odo-Owa, Oke-Ero Local Government of Kwara State is competing uses of resources and this is often so when the resource in question is land which can be put into different productive uses. IPCR (2017) identified the recurrence of farmers-herders clashes in North-West zone as well as South-East zone, especially Enugu State.

It is imperative to organize effective intervention as regards the problem more so that Conroy (2017) raised alarm that conflict between farmers and herders is likely to increase as farms continue to grow in size to feed a growing population, pastoralists continue to move further into new territory

seeking fertile lands to graze their cattle, and climatic changes negatively impact both livelihoods. However, Bronkhort and Bob (2010) suggested specific approach to effectively address environmental conflict or manage environmental impacts of other forms of conflict to include environmental education programme among others.

### **Environmental Factors Causing Conflict**

**Land Scarcity:** Land is an important factor of production. It accommodates all economic activities of mankind. In fact everyone needs land for various reasons that can include build house, industrial establishment and agricultural activities. However, increase in population and industrialization have implications for land availability. Land is a natural environment resource that is finite. The portion of land that suffer degradation and depletion remain unsuitable for farming and continue to increase scarcity of land for agricultural activities. The struggle that comes with attempt to control the available space results in conflict. Muhammed, Ismaila and Bibi (2015) identified expansion of farmlands and dwindling pastoral land as principal causes of conflict.

**Water Security:** Water is of paramount importance to both the farmers and herders. This is because farmers need water to grow plants so also the herds need to drink water to

stay alive. However, water is becoming scarce due to increase in human population with the attendant high demand, climate change, contamination, industrial use and poor water management. Tension and anxiety that come with scarcity of water are capable generating conflict.

**Climate Change:** Burning of fossil fuels is the activity of man that contributes to the buildup of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere leading to the rise in the global temperature. This phenomenon known as global warming together with its adverse effect which include drought, strong wind, sea level rise and extreme heat condition refers to climate change. According to Bronkhorst and Bob (2010) climate change is likely to undermine human security by reducing the natural resource base and limiting access to existing natural resources which are central to sustainable livelihoods. A decline in water supplies for drinking and migration, a decline in agricultural productivity as a result of changes in rainfall, temperature and pest pattern and large economic and human losses attributable to extreme weather events will all take their toll on the global system as a whole which could lead to rise in conflict in the environmentally and political vulnerable state (Johnston, 2008).

**Natural disaster:** A disaster is a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources (Adikari and Yoshitani, 2009). According to Ferris, (2010), disaster create grievances that lead to conflict by causing mass disruption, impacting individual behaviour, community and political organization and the power relationships between individuals, groups and the organisations that serve them.

#### **Environmental Health Education as a strategy for Environmental Management.**

Education is the experience of a person or group of persons in and outside the school which leads to change in knowledge, attitude, skill ,values including behaviour all of which impact the society. Countries of the world most especially the developed ones have and still using the instrument of education to solve their environmental related problems. Education as a potent instrument to get people to have the knowledge attitude and practice of better environmental management gained prominence as a result of widely publicized report of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) otherwise called the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1972.

Environmental Education is concerned with providing the necessary information about the environment so as to enable people to be much aware of how to handle environmental problems around them (Ayotunde, 2008).

Education about the environment and how it affect the health of human beings is known as environmental health education. Samson-Akpan (2008) posited that environmental health education can be used as a tool for creating awareness on issues relating to environmental conservation and degradation impact on health, welfare and indeed human survival in the environment. The fact that both the farmers and pastoralists must exist to produce food for human consumption suggests that there must be peaceful coexistence. In order to achieve this, environmental resources must be well managed. Environmental health education is a reliable tool that can be used to influence knowledge, attitude and practice of environmental management among community people.

Symbiosis as a pattern of living in the contemporary society as being advocated by environmental health education is imperative, given the fact that we all depend on natural environment that s all of us with means of livelihood. Again, environmental health education is capable of bringing about the needed awareness of the activities of human being such as fossil fuel burning which can

bring deleterious effect of climate change. Environmental health education could help the farmers to be aware of and use modern technology in agriculture to derive the best from the environment while avoiding their health hazards. There is the need for the protection of the environment through proper disposal of waste in order to avoid land, air and water pollution with their hazardous consequences. The aspect of health education that could promote effective improvement in knowledge and attitude including practice of individual regarding environmental sanitation is environmental health education.

### **Sustainable Peaceful Coexistence**

Peaceful co-existence is when a group of people irrespective of any divides live together in a space devoid of rancor or settled amicably when it occurs because there is love, respect and trust. Peaceful coexistence should be sustained for a long period of time for it to produce sustainable development. Izueke, Okoli and Nzekwe (2014) pointed out that it is only under peaceful condition that people can invest in economic ventures, participate in social and political activities and think about future generations. This suggests that peaceful co-existence is a precursor to the achievement of the popular sustainable development described by WCED 1987 as the development that meets the needs of the present without

compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.

The relationship between the environment and peaceful co-existence is a complex one. In regions where several communities are dependent on shared resources like water or land, concerted and co-operative endeavours to successfully manage such resources can act as drivers of peace consequently building mutual faith and trust between conflicting parties. (Kaur, 2014). Peace can stabilize community economic endeavour as well as social interactions. It is a statement of fact that stable environment brought about by environmental health education is crucial to sustainable peaceful co-existence.

### **Conclusion**

The struggle for scarce environment resources is the main cause of conflict between two opposing groups in Nigeria. In Niger Delta attempt to control land and water between farmers and multi-national oil companies often led to conflict. Also, conflict results from the struggle for control of land between farmers and herdsman. The conflict each time it occurs led to violent attack. In Niger Delta land and water which the local people depend on for farming and fishing have be rendered polluted by the activities oil exploration and production. The livelihood of both the farmers and herders depend on

access to land. In most time conflicts occurring from the struggle is magnified by political and religious influence. There is need for symbiotic relationship between the farmers and herdsman. The climate change brought about by the activities of man has been identified to be largely responsible for scarcity of natural resources. Environmental health education is apt to foster stable environment and promote peaceful co-existence among community people.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are given to give prominence to environmental health education as reliable strategy for providing in the population knowledge, attitude, skills and self-efficacy individually and in groups for better management of the environment.

1. Environmental health education should be strengthened in terms of provision of enabling laws, funding and personnel in order to be truly functional.
2. Government at all levels should encourage global best practice in peace building through effective environmental management using the instrument of environmental health education.
3. Effective management and monitoring of initiatives and funds meant for the activities of environmental health education programme.

4. Government and non-governmental organization should support capacity building for environmental health education programme.
5. Electronic and print media should help to publicize the activities in environmental health education programme.

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