

Chapter Nineteen

ROLE OF THE PRESS IN CURBING ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL

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Executive Summary

This chapter focuses on the role of the press in curbing ecological crisis in Nigeria. It observes that ecological problems are global in nature; hence the entire globe is making attempts to address them. World leaders and indeed nations are in agreement on the need to stem the tide. The press has been globally recognized as a critical stakeholder in keeping the public informed on current happenings. Ecological problems have not been properly captured by the press across the world. Although TV, Radio, Newspapers have given occasional attention to these issues, however, most focus on other sensational areas of news other than the environment, focusing mostly on. Most media reports regarding the environment amplify problems and conflicts, rather than solutions; in other cases the media covers environmental issues and fills such with a barrage of skewed uncertainties and misinformation. This, however, should not discourage coverage.

Keywords: Mass Media, Press, Ecology, Africa, Nigeria, Environment, Drought, Erosion

Background

The discourse around ecological problems ranging from drought, desertification, soil erosion, deforestation, land and

water pollution, air pollution, solid waste disposal, etc., have assumed prominence globally. This has called the attention of the world to the need to preserve, protect and maintain a stable and healthy environment (Ezeonyejiaku, 2018). These ecological problems are now compounded by the emergence of other environmental challenges which are global in nature and whose impacts threaten the very survival of humanity.

These global environmental threats will have a far reaching effect on Africa and thus the need for the nations of the world to join forces in the search for solutions to ensure the survival of the ecological system. The activities of human beings have also contributed to the bad ecological situation in many countries of the world including Nigeria, environmental specialists and indeed all stakeholders remain concerned about such activities that have the potential to endanger the environment (Ezeonyejiaku, 2018). Buttressing this position, Oyeshola (2008) pointed out that human beings are now introducing an unacceptable negative influence that the earth's ecosystem may not be able to accommodate if its continuous existence is to be guaranteed.

The environment which houses both living and non-living things has become increasingly tenuous. This in turn has begun to threaten the quality of life, both for humans and nonhumans on the planet (Oyeshola, 2008). There is, therefore, the need to involve all critical stakeholders in the quest to address the ecological crisis the world and in particular Nigeria is confronted with. There is a growing demand from the public for more and more information on environmental issues and a great link between awareness and action. Environment and environmental news and information have become prominent topics of

discussion for the public and elites. Hence, mass media plays a significant role in covering news and information on environmental incidences, issues and problems (Pompper, 2004). The mass media has been credited with the capacity to reach a large section of the population, hence their capacity to keep the public informed and enlightened on pressing national issues including environmental issues. Soola (1993; in Ezeonyejiaku, 2018) maintained that "The mass reach and simultaneity of the mass media have remained unparalleled by any other medium." This stresses the importance and pivotal role of the mass media in addressing national problems including ecological problems. Nwosu (2005; in Ezeonyejiaku 2018) stressed this point when he posited that the role of the mass media is informing the people, mobilizing the people, harnessing their resources and championing the course of development.

The mass media has the capacity to disseminate relevant information that can create awareness on the need for a healthy and sustainable environment through their various public affairs programmes (Owuamkam, 2016). This places a great responsibility on the media to provide veritable channels for human beings to be better informed and educated on principles and practices that can protect the environment from degradation (Ezeonyejiaku, 2018).

Conceptual Spadework

a. Press

The traditional press (or the media) is made up of Newspapers, Magazines, Radio, Television and their likes which play a key role in society. They disseminate information to the society by performing three key functions which include surveillance on the environment, correcting the society and transmitting social heritage from generation to generation. These functions can be carried out in various ways in form of news reporting, editorials,

criticism and commentaries of government activities (Audu & Yibeikas, 2019).

b. Ecological Crisis

According to Balasubramanian, (2019), ecology refers basically to a branch of biology. It deals with study of interactions among organisms and their biophysical environment. This biophysical environment includes both biotic and abiotic components. The biophysical environment in which all interactive mechanisms happen is called ecosystem. Ecology deals with organisms, populations, communities, ecosystems and the biosphere. The place of living is the organism's environment. Hence, ecology is sometimes called as environmental biology. In general, ecology is recognized as one of the natural sciences. It is considered to be a science concerned with the nature and interrelations of living world. The term ecology has been derived from the Greek word "oikos" meaning "habitation" or "house" or "living place."

Taylor (2009) describes ecological crises as rapid and largely unexpected changes in environmental quality that are difficult if not impossible to reverse. These changes usually occur over a period of time; mostly immediately noticed or noticed in the long-term. Examples would be major extinctions and significant degradations of an ecosystem.

Theoretical Framework

a. Agenda Setting Theory

The agenda setting theory was made popular by the quote of Bernard Cohen (1963), saying that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is successful in telling its readers what to think about". There is plenty of evidence that the media have a strong influence on

people's perception of which issues are important and which problems they want their government to do something about. The influence of news mass media increases when the need for orientation among the viewers is much. The need for agenda setting in democratic issues is necessary here. On the other hand, the agenda setting effect is lower for unpleasant issues that people can observe directly, as well as for other issues that the audience is well informed about.

The media have little power to set the agenda when people have sufficient political knowledge to counter-argue the claims made by the media. Therefore, the agenda-setting effect is stronger for concrete issues that are easy to visualize than for abstract issues. Agenda setting for issues of democracy must be concrete and result oriented not issues that are products of sentiments otherwise the audience may be dissuaded from accepting the news (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002; Yagade and Dozier, 1990; Yengar et. al, 1982).

b. Agenda Building Theory

Lang and Lang (1983) contributed a study on the relationship between the press and public opinion in the Watergate crisis and discovered that the original notion of Agenda Setting needs to be improved upon in development communication. The theory by Mcvail Driving from Everrette Roger's Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Daniel Lerner's Modernization Theory sees media and communication as propelling modernization and modern physical and economic development in their environments and societies (Wole- Abu, 2018).

The innovation and diffusion theory pounded by Everrette Roger's in 1986 proposed using communication and diffusion to transfer technology and innovation from development agencies

to clients which raises the appetite in them for change through creating modernization among members of the public.

c. Framing Theory

The basis of the framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. The theory assumes that the media draws the public attention to certain topics, it decides what people think about; the journalists select the topics. This is the original agenda setting “thought.” Framing theory and the concept of framing suggests that how something is presented (the frame) influences the choices people make. Communication itself comes with a frame.

The elements of the communication frame include: A message, an audience, a messenger, a medium, images, a context and especially, higher-level moral and conceptual frames. The choice of language is, of course, vital, but it is vital because language evokes frames – moral and conceptual frames. Baran and Davis (2009) explain that the framing theory examines the idea about how people use expectations to make sense of everyday life. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning.

Literature Review and Discussion

a. The Press in Nigeria: Its Role and Duties

According to Audu and Yibeikas (2015), Audu and Yibeikas (2019), the 1999 Constitution (as amended 2010); Chapter 2, Section 22 states “The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the

people.” According to the code of ethics for Nigerian Journalists (1998), item (2) – Accuracy and Fairness

A journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information. Where such information has been inadvertently published, prompt correction should be made. A journalist must hold the right to reply as a cardinal rule of practice. In the cause of his dailies, a journalist should strive to separate facts from conjecture and comments.

Also, item (12) - Social Responsibility states that a journalist should promote universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace and international understanding (Audu & Yibeikas, 2015; Audu & Yibeikas 2019).

b. Press-Coverage of Environmental Problems

Scholars have alleged that news coverage is poisoned by inconsistencies, distortions, cyclical and sporadic attention, and a misrepresentation of data (Adler 1992; Boyle 1993; Greider 1992; Nitz, Jarvis 1998; Shanahan, McComas 1997; Nitz, 2001). While some media outlets employ a reporter on environmental beat, a "rule of least effort" seems to be generally applicable to the large majority of environmental issues (Griffin, Dunwoody 1995: p 281; Nitz, 2001). In an effort to be sensational, timely, and simple, the media tend to underemphasize risks and over-dramatized spins on disputes in environmental reporting (Sachsman 1991; Nitz 2001). Most media reports regarding the environment amplify problems and conflicts, rather than solutions (Jaehne 1990; Nitz, 2001). Most agree that the media often cover the environment with a barrage of skewed uncertainties and misinformation (Cantrill 1993; Chepesiuk 1993; Stavins 1995; Nitz, 2001).

Audu and Yibeikas (2019) further elaborate on the position of critics complaining that media as the watchdogs are barking of

the wrong things. As a result, many fears are exaggerated which often lead to unnecessary measures and legislation which culminates in “gonzo justice” in the parlance of media (Kadiri et al. (2015). Furthermore, media critics have not only criticized the media of wrong doing in many other areas of social endeavor including democracy, health and even the environment. For example, many media have suppressed information about the health hazards of smoking due to pressure from advertisers (Cirino, 1973; Audu and Yibeikas, 2019).

Manifestation of Ecological Crisis in Nigeria

Salau (1993) captures what he describes as major local ecological problems. This accordingly captures the Nigerian situation as follows; (a) Drought and desertification, (b) Soil erosion, (c) Deforestation, (d) Land and water pollution (e) Air pollution, and (f) Solid waste disposal. Ezeonyejiaku (2019), went further to divide these ecological problems into two broad classifications, namely urban and rural. Drought, desertification, soil erosion and deforestation are ecological problems predominant in rural areas while land, water and air pollution (with the exception of Niger Delta areas), solid waste disposal are ecological problems predominant in urban areas.

a. Drought and Desertification

Desertification in Nigeria is currently most prominently manifested in the semi-arid zone of the country which is a transitional zone between the humid areas to the South and Sahara Desert to the North (Salau, 1993 & Ezeonyejiaku, 2019). This area is populated by more than 28 million people and 58 million livestock and includes substantial parts of Borno, Kano, Katsina and Sokoto states and a small portion of Bauchi state (NEST, 1991).

The problem of drought is countrywide and not restricted to the northern part like desertification. Drought constitutes an important factor of desertification with its variable nature of rainfall from year to year. There is an evidence of cyclical pattern of climate in Nigeria with alternating years of paucity of rainfall when the natural vegetation suffers a great moisture stress than usual. Records indicate that droughts had occurred frequently in the past in different parts of Nigeria with some of those especially in the 19th century resulting in famines.

From the beginning of this century rainfall data indicate great fluctuations in rainfall received in the different parts of Nigeria with many years receiving amount below average. According to Ayoade (1988), progressive decline in rainfall became noticeable; resulting in the drought affected mostly the extreme northern parts of Nigeria and resulted in wide-spread crop failures and death of thousands of livestock and herds.

Drought has also led to a drastic lowering of the water table, considerable drop in the levels of major rivers like Niger and Benue, contraction of Lake Chad and large scale migration of people from the North and rural areas of the South and urban centres respectively. At the end of the 1982 harvest season, the New Nigeria Newspaper reported that about five million metric tonnes of grain valued at N4.2 billion would have been lost to the drought of that year. In 1988, the Punch Newspaper reports that several villages were buried by sand dunes in Borno State (Salau, 1993).

b. Soil Erosion

Soil erosion is another ecological crisis in Nigeria considering the number of states that are affected by it. Erosion is disastrous not only in the havoc it is able to cause but also in the fact that it can go on unnoticed until it is too late for its effects to be reversed.

There are many types of soil erosion in Nigeria. The gully types are the more obvious because of their remarkable effects on the landscape. According to a study (Ofomata, 1981), 70% of South-Eastern Nigeria is affected by one form of erosion or another. Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Imo States are the worst affected areas where gully erosion reportedly washed away many farmlands totalling over 25,000 ha and homes which caused few deaths (Aladejana and Adesiyan, 1982). Ezeonyejiaku (2019) confirms this position and identifies more areas to include Ebonyi, Edo, Ondo, Jigawa, Kebbi, Gombe, Sokoto and Zamfara as additional states most affected by gullies.

There is also substantial evidence of land degradation by mining and quarrying activities in various parts of Nigeria. Tin Mining in Jos Plateau with its open cast mining operations which started in early 1900 has caused the existence of large earth mounds, dried out ponds, puddles and open reservoirs rendering large areas virtually useless for agriculture. Mining of limestone in Nkalagu (Anambra State) and Odukpani (Cross Rivers State) as well as dredging/quarrying of sand and gravels along river banks, particularly in the Southern parts of Nigeria deprive the soil surface of its vegetation and contributing to slithering, slumping and gully development resulting in land degradation. World Bank (1987) places Nigeria's annual mean soil loss through erosion estimated to be 25 million tonnes. In Jos Plateau area alone, it is estimated that about 100 million tonnes of soil must have been lost within a period of 10 years. General decreases in soil fertility and diminution of cultivatable land have also been noticed as a result of sheet erosion and the occurrence and expansion of gullies. According to a World Bank and I.M.F. report, soil erosion in parts of Nigeria has reduced maize yields from 6.5 tons a hectare to 1 ton (World Bank, 1987).

c. Deforestation

Deforestation is a very serious problem in Nigeria. Although the issue of deforestation in the tropics has assumed large political significance on the international level due to the role of the tropical rain forest as a natural sink for greenhouse gases (particularly carbon dioxide), to the average rural dweller the problem of deforestation relates more to the scarcity of firewood for cooking. Although the extent of deforestation in Nigeria is unknown due to lack of data, fragmentary information from many sources paints a rather grim picture. According to the World Resources' 1990-1991 Report, the rate of deforestation in Nigeria in the 1980s is estimated to be 400,000 hectares annually while reforestation was merely of the order of 32,000 hectares. This translates to the rate of forest loss of 2.7% annually. If that trend continues, it means that all our forest would be gone before the middle of the next century. At present, the country is estimated to have only 30% forest cover (about 277,132 sq.km).

According to Nwoboshi (1986), there were 60 million hectares of forest and woodland in 1897 which had been reduced to about 9.6 million hectares by 1986. One of the factors responsible for the high rate of deforestation is the uncontrolled cutting of wood for firewood and charcoal. Shortages of firewood which were very critical in most northern states particularly Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi, Bauchi and Borno have now become national. In the North where 75% of the total cooking fuel is derived from plants, annual deficit of fire wood is put at about 5-8 million cubic metres. Another factor is the indiscriminate bush burning by farmers and others. For example, in 1982/83 dry season over 1700 hectares of forest plantations were burnt in the country.

There is so much pressure on the forest, due to rising demand for fuel wood, pulpwood, poles, and other types of wood for

building purposes. The Federal Government estimated that the annual harvest of sown timber from the high forest was 1.5 million cubic meters in 1975 and at that rate would take between 25 to 30 years to denude the forests of mature timber (Aina and Salau, 1992; p. 36, Ezeonyejiaku, 2019). Nigeria's forests are of very important socio-economic and ecological significance. The forests have traditionally provided three important economic benefits: timber exports, traditional hunting and non-wood product gathering and fuel wood. Timber products still make an important contribution to GDP, representing about 7% of the agricultural product for the country but exports have declined drastically while domestic demand has risen considerably (World Bank, 1990).

A major effect of deforestation is the depletion of wildlife and loss of biodiversity. Biodiversity refers to the variety of all species of plants, animals, and microorganisms, their genetic make-up, habitats and ecological processes. Saving biodiversity is very important to us all as the utility of the various species is increasing and the fact that it is crucial to the intricate connections that nature has established. It is estimated that in Nigeria there are more than 4600 plants species of which about 205 are endemic (that is they cannot be found elsewhere.) Of these, about 484 plants in 112 families are threatened with extinction. Many animals and birds are also threatened with extinction (Salau, 1993).

Deforestation has also been associated with aggravating other ecological problems such as soil erosion, desertification and flooding. Forests constitute a major factor in carbon exchange with the atmosphere and, after the oceans, are the biggest sink in

which atmospheric carbon may be stored. Thus the importance of conserving our forests cannot be overemphasized.

d. Land and Water Pollution

Land and water pollution exist in all parts of Nigeria though to a varying degree. In view of the incipient stage of industrialization in Nigeria, pollution of land and water by industries is still a minor and spatially restricted problem. Pollution from industrial effluents and urban sewage disposal have been of significance especially in the major industrial centres like Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, Aba and Port Harcourt. Hardly any of the cities has a central sewage and effluents disposal. Most residents in the low income areas depend on pit or bucket latrines. The materials from the pit latrines seep into the ground water without obstruction and may pollute nearby sources of drinking water especially wells.

The waste materials from the bucket latrines are usually disposed raw into nearby streams or rivers. In the middle and upper areas, most houses are provided with septic tanks (Salau, 1993). Almost all the industries discharge their effluent without prior treatment into rivers, lagoons, streams, or the sea. This is due to the fact that there is no effluent discharge guideline in the country until recently. Many industrial effluents are toxic as they include mercury, dyes, cadmium, etc. Some of the dyes used in the textile factories are believed to be carcinogenic (Salau, 1993).

e. Oil Spillage

One of the major factors of land and water pollution in Nigeria is the oil exploration and exploitation. This is a very serious problem but it is restricted more to the areas of operation of the oil companies. The Niger Delta particularly has experienced the worst environmental impacts from the oil industry (Salau, 1993 & Ezeonyejiaku, 2019). Some of the effects of the oil industry on

the environment include (Osuno, 1982): (a) destruction of vegetation and farmlands during exploration and for sitting of locations as well as laying of pipelines. (b) the continuous presence of light, heat, noise and in some cases sooty emission from flares (c) oil pollution of the environment through accidental blowouts, leakages of oil pipeline and storage tanks and effluents from production and refinery operations. There have been many incidents of oil spillage in the eastern portion of the Niger Delta. These spillages and blowouts had occurred both on- shore and off-shore. The causes of the spillages are numerous with the most important being due to: (a) break-up of, or damage to oil tank or storage vessel, (b) damage to leakage or leakage of oil pipeline (c) overflow of oil storage tank. (d) rupture or failure of loading, floating or underbuoy hose and (e) human interference, carelessness, or sabotage of oil pipelines.

According to Osuno (1982) within six months after the spillage, mangrove vegetation started dying, and in the contaminated waters, crabs, molluscs and periwinkles died. The damage from this incident also resulted in a compensation of over N12 million being paid to affected individuals or groups. Oil spillages have caused tremendous damage to fishing and farming which are the primary occupations of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta. The resulting pollution often affects rivers, creeks, ponds and wells from which people obtain water for drinking and other purposes.

f. Air Pollution

There has been little concern for monitoring the quality of the air in Nigeria because of the belief that this is still a very minor problem. As the scale and tempo of industrialization increase, the direct health effects of gaseous particles are becoming more

obvious. However, there are many other sources of air pollution in the country and among these are (a) the flaring of natural gas (b) exhaust emission from automobiles and (c) noxious gases (oxides of nitrogen, sulphur dioxide, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, etc) from furnace and industrial machinery and from refinery wastes. Air pollution is fairly intensive at the oil and gas production stage.

Atmospheric contaminants from refinery are affected with the flaring of gas as is happening in most Nigerian oil fields. It was estimated that by 1986, the country was flaring 16.8 billion M3 of natural gas per year resulting in annual emissions of 2.7×10^6 kg of particular matter, 1.6×10^5 kg of Nox oxides with attendant environmental consequences. Perhaps more important is the finding in a study of the impact of gas flaring on the environment which revealed that there was about 100% loss in yield in all crops cultivated about 200 metres away from the Izombe station, 45% loss for those about 600 metres away and about 10% loss in yield in all crops cultivated about 200 metres away from the Izombe station, 45% loss for those about 600 metres away and about 10% loss in yield for crops about one kilometre away from the flare (Okezie and Okeke, 1987; Salau 1993). Bush burning which is very rampant in Nigeria is another veritable source of air pollution. It is estimated that about 260,000 hectares per year of forest and 10,000 hectares per year of Savanna are burned annually (Osemebo, 1988).

g. Solid Waste Disposal

Heaps of refuse and garbage have become common sights in most Nigerian urban centres. According to a Federal Government publication, the problem of solid waste disposal has today become the number one serious environmental problem facing the country with its consequent effects on the pollution of water, air and land, not to mention its hazards to health and

other natural resources of social and economic importance (Salau, 1993 & Ezeonyejiaku, 2019).

The ineffective solid waste disposal system has often resulted in wastes being indiscriminately dumped on open plots and even streets and roads, converting them into unsightly junk yards, unsuitable for almost any use and promoting destructive flooding across the country.

Factors Responsible for Ecological Crisis

The factors responsible for the current ecological/environmental problems in Nigeria as in most developing nations are many, complex and interrelated. However, the genesis of the problems and the reason for their aggravation cannot be fully comprehended unless our analysis is placed within a broader and historical context. An analysis of the environmental heritage which encompasses attitudes, structures, and behavioural patterns in relation to the natural environment is a starting point at uncovering the reason for the current problems.

a. Globalization

The transformation from the pre-colonial period to the present has been identified as a major factor (Aina and Salau, 1992). During the pre-colonial period, the level of environmental awareness of the people of Nigeria was much higher. As the people relied more directly on the nature for their sustenance, the relationships with the environment was in the direction of conservation, respect, good husbandry and efficient use of natural resources. The clearest evidence of this was to be found in traditional land use and human settlement patterns, in folklores and rituals, and in various technologies that rely on environmental resources. In most communities, land was

regarded as sacred with each generation holding it in trust for the succeeding generations.

Although each has the right to beneficial usage, no member of the family has the right to alienate any portion of it to others. Folkloric taboos and rituals were also used as tools of conservation. The regulation of hunting, fishing and fuelwood collection, and the linking of these activities to festivals or some cultural rites were other devices for conservation of natural resources. Individual and collective behaviors towards the environment were regulated by the community. The cleaning of individual homes and their surroundings were the responsibility of the household while communal grounds were maintained collectively. Because of their close interaction with their surroundings, the people had an intimate knowledge of the natural environment and thus were able to devise simple but effective technologies distilled over centuries.

Traditional management techniques were also utilized to safeguard the natural resources. Examples of such management techniques to improve the land for cultivation such as rotational system, legume seeding, intercropping, ridging and heaping, agro forestry, and alley farming once spurned or labeled as "primitive" are now well appreciated.

b. Colonial Exploration

Colonialism effected a major change in environmental awareness and existing relationship of the people with the environment. A notion of development whose major thrust was the exploitation and resources; primarily for the benefit of the colonial rulers was introduced (Salau 1993).

c. Organized Employment

There was a mental shift in the perception of natural environment from being a factor to work with to secure sustenance to being a factor that had to be overcome, subdued or transformed to promote human welfare. Further, the introduction of a monetized economy weakened the effectiveness of communal approaches to using environmental resources, while new imported religious ideas undermined traditional beliefs and the bases for many protective practices towards the environment. Colonization in particular affected land use. Land became just another commodity with the result that previous measures and practices which are environmentally compatible became less important. Land was turned into open access resources with no management or control over use by individuals.

Within the exploitative logic of the colonial enterprise, it was not surprising that the British colonial regime in Nigeria placed the environment on a very low level in its priorities vis-a-vis economic exploitation and political pacification. It was equally not surprising that the colonial state, in its bid to maximize its extraction from the colony for export to the British metropole, emphasized a state-centric planning strategy. Unfortunately the post-colonial period has seen the continuation of the strategy and ethos of development of the colonial administrators (Salau, 1993).

d. Industrialization

The development styles adopted by the governments were based on the quest for faster rate of economic growth and industrialization in particular. In the process little attention was paid to some section of the population which became

increasingly marginalized. The style of development and the accompanying sectorial policies have also undermined food production and environmental management. The rural areas lost the initiatives and became less and less important in the scheme of things. More of the lands in the rural areas are being converted to urban and industrial uses or to cash crop monoculture. Energy and water go to rich urban users or expensive irrigation projects. Development policies have also promoted demographic imbalance, rural exodus, exponential urban growth, and increasing population which is putting so much pressure on the natural resources base (Salau, 1993 & Maaketstad, 2016).

e. Technology

The adopted style of development has also placed undue emphasis on technology. Technology engendered the feeling that man could totally dominate his environment at no cost. The result is that technological solutions are often applied to problems which are more social or economic in nature or origin. For example, big dams are built for; among other reasons, providing water for irrigation but these have often drawn attention away from the real problems of poor land management and archaic land tenure system. In another sense, the transfer of technology to developing nations has been found to have negative effects on their social and natural environment (Farvar and Milton, 1972).

Widespread adoption of mechanized farming and the application of new inputs like inorganic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides have precipitated in the long run other environmental problems. The ideology of man over nature bred by technology has also discouraged the traditional methods of coping with the environment. Ecologically sound traditional

practices were thus spurned in favour of ill adapted western technologies (Salau, 1993 & Maaketstad, 2016).

c. Rapid Population Growth

Population dynamic is now regarded as important factor in environmental degradation (Salau, 1993 & Maaketstad, 2016). Although there is no simple correlation between population growth and the state of the environment, there is no doubt that the exploding rate of population growth puts tremendous strain on the natural resources. The population factor cannot be ignored especially in the case of a country like Nigeria with a relatively large and rapidly growing population. With respect to the size, although the country's total population is now estimated at about 90 million, the rate of growth is one of the highest in the world.

Three important aspects of the demographic variables in this respect are the rate of urbanization. The rate of urbanization is now estimated to be over 5% per annum. The urban segment of the population currently estimated at 30% is expected to increase to about 50% by the year 2000. The rate of population growth and urbanization has continued to outstrip the rate of economic growth. A unique feature of the demographic structure in Nigeria as in most developing nations is the high proportion of young age group (under 15 years and who have to depend on the shrinking working age group).

The pattern of population distribution is another source of concern. While there is under -population in few areas, there is an over-population in other areas. Population pressure has also been identified as an important factor in desertification. The northern semi-arid areas are believed to be overstocked with

animals. The pressure on land use due to increased population in the length of fallow period has led to impoverishment and loss of top soil (Salau, 1993 & Maaketstad, 2016).

Application of Theoretical Frameworks

Within the context of the Agenda Setting Theory, the mass media can set the agenda about the state of Nigeria's environment and the ecological crisis it is confronted with and they will become a major issue. This will create the much needed attention for the raging ecological problems. Akeeni et al (2013) sees the ability of the media to order and organize our world for us as one of the important effect mass communication has on our society (Audu & Yibeikas, 2019).

The Agenda Building Theory shows how the traditional media can be used to support development programmes by disseminating information that will stimulate participation and support for projects that impact on salvaging the environment (Audu & Yibeikas, 2019).

Agenda Building Theory shows how the field of meaning created by the media can have an effect on the audience's beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, by connecting a particular meaning or interpretation on an issue (Audu & Yibeikas 2015; Audu & Yibeikas, 2019). Hence the media can ensure that the public have the right attitudes regarding environmental reports by focusing on the main issues that were not made known to be of importance.

Conclusion

Ecological problems are global in nature; hence the entire globe is making attempts to address them. World leaders and indeed nations are in agreement on the need to stem the tide. The press has been globally recognized as a critical stakeholder in keeping

the public informed on current happenings. Ecological problems have not been properly captured by the press across the world. Although TV, Radio, Newspapers have given occasional attention to these issues, however, most focus on other sensational areas of news other than the environment, focusing mostly on. Most media reports regarding the environment amplify problems and conflicts, rather than solutions; in other cases the media covers environmental issues and fills such with a barrage of skewed uncertainties and misinformation. This, however, should not discourage coverage. There is a convergence of arguments as regards the importance of factual and accurate reportage for action.

Recommendations

There is need to provide funding and packages for ecological reporting. This would be attractive to Media Houses and Media Practitioners towards promoting ecological news. There is also need for town hall meetings and partnership symposiums to engage government and media practitioners to ensure that the media takes ownership and responsibility of ensuring that proper ecological information is disseminated to the public in order to mobilize them to support efforts that would curb current ecological crises. Proper consultations should be made to help media practitioners cover ecological problems within unsafe and inaccessible regions like the North-East and the creeks of the South-South.

There is need for close partnership and cooperation between the media and security agencies to ensure that status reports for ecological sites within crises areas are forwarded and made available to media practitioners for proper reportage. The media must pay more attention to development issues relating to

environmental protection rather than focusing on environmental crises alone. The media needs to diversify their information sources on the ecological stories they report. The media must also develop a watchdog role by monitoring progress on developmental projects aimed at mitigating environmental degradation by government and report to the public when the government is not living up to its responsibilities.

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