



NIGHTINGALE PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL

IGWEBUIKE AS AN IGBO-AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

Most people agree that human activity is dramatically altering many biological processes and environmental systems. Developments in science and technology also support the contention that these alterations are destructive and global in scale. Despite the unease generated by this knowledge, consensus on what to do about it is low. While some align with science and technology as the instrument capable of inspiring necessary changes in human behaviour, some others have given in to economic theories and political institutions in the quest for a solution (Kanu, 2011). But all these are similarly weak and have not been able to inspire the desired alteration in attitude, as many economic and political theories have actively supported environmental destruction. In the midst of all these, there is the perspective that

Abstract

Human activity is dramatically altering many biological processes and environmental systems. Developments in science and technology also support the contention that these alterations are destructive and global in scale. Despite the unease generated by this knowledge, consensus on what to do about it is low. However, the environmental problems currently afflicting the conservation and management of Africa's natural resources are fundamentally the evidences of the deep-seated long-term effects of centuries of colonial domination. This piece argues that the lasting solutions to these environmental concerns can come from within the African continent; while the ever-increasing influx of expatriate agencies and workers into the continent to fulfil contractual

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IJHSS ISSN: 2395-1789
Vol. 3, NO. 4

Obligations as dictated by their donors has been helpful, this work argues that Africa cannot benefit from such temporary arrangements. Africa, endowed with the richest diversity of human cultures, and being the mother of the human race, can develop a wholistic approach to the problem of the exploitation of the environment. Thus, this work has chosen Igwebuike as an African complementary philosophy for the preservation of the environment.

Keywords: *Igwebuike, Environment, African, Philosophy, Preservation, Igbo, Protection.*

Proposes religion as the belief system that is large enough to conceptualize on a cosmic scale the global nature of environmental concerns. This again is not without criticism (Kanu, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, this piece employs the Igbo-African word *Igwebuike* for the resolution of emerging environmental concerns. *Igwebuike* is the modality of being in African philosophy (Kanu, 2016a). It is taken from the Igbo language, which is a composite word made up of three dimensions. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population (Kanu, 2015 a&b). *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force (Kanu, 2015 c&d). Its English equivalent is 'complementarity' or 'harmony' (Kanu, 2016b). *Igwebuike*, therefore, understands reality, which includes the environment as complementary. Thus, to deal violence to the environment is to do

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violence to oneself, because the environment is part of the complete whole, which the human person is unavoidably part of.

The Faces of the Exploitation of Nature

The use of natural resources is an essential condition of human existence. Human beings use them to produce materials they need for their sustenance. However, in the struggle for survival and development, the human person has exploited these natural resources to the point of the destruction of the ecosystem and pollution of the environment. This exploitation, anchored on today's global economy dominated by a drive for capital accumulation, which intensified since the Industrial Revolution, has led to ecological problems such as species extinction, oil spillage, gas flaring, deforestation, soil erosion, coastal degradation, ozone depletion, ground water contamination among others. The most worrisome is the possible consequences of global warming, which is the consequence of a continuous flow of energy from the sun. This energy arrives basically in the form of visible light. Most of this energy from the sun passes down through the atmosphere to warm the earth's surface. The earth sends out the excess energy back into space in the form of infrared radiation. However, the Green House Gasses in the atmosphere block the infrared radiation from escaping from the surface into the space. This is known as the Green House effect, which contributes to global warming and climate change. This notwithstanding, the faces of the exploitation of nature can however be discussed under two broad headings: deforestation and the exploitation of natural resources.

1. Deforestation and the Environment

Aina and Salau (1992) defined deforestation as the process whereby trees are felled for several purposes without replanting to replace the ones felled. In the contention of Gutti, Aji and Magaji (2012), it is dangerous to the human person and animals, and can lead to erosion of soil, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, desertification, drought, flood, climate change etc. Ismawi (2012) avers that the deforestation of swampy forests can lead to a decrease in soil PHwater and soil macro-nutrients. From the deforestation data of Nigeria from 1990-2005, the

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forest loss in Nigeria is at the rate of 3.3% per year since 1990, thus 36% has been lost between 1990 and 2005. From the report of UN Food and Agricultural Organization (2005) Nigeria has the highest deforestation rate of natural forest in the world. Forests has been cleared for logging, timber export, subsistence agriculture and notably the collection for wood for fuel, which remains problematic in the whole of Western Africa. Below is chart showing the drivers of deforestation in Africa.

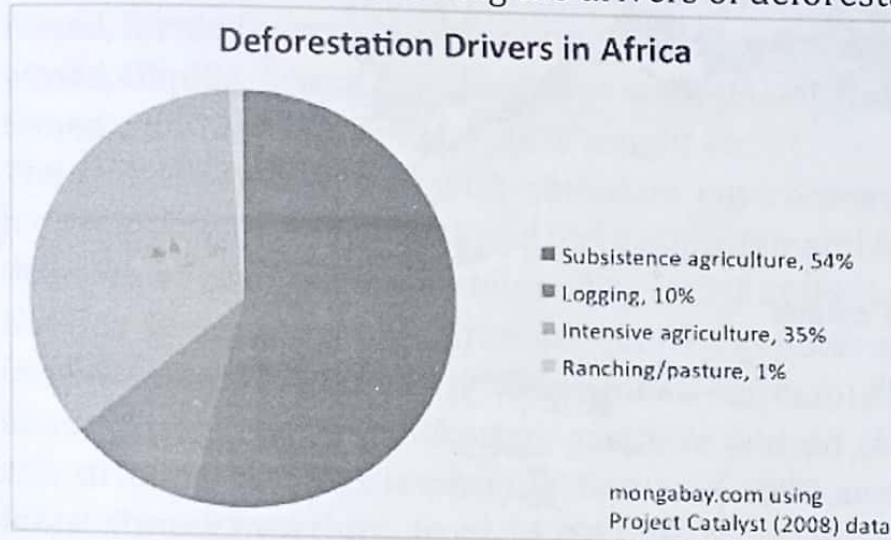


FIGURE: DRIVERS OF DEFORESTATION IN AFRICA

SOURCE: G. F. A. 2005

In 2005, the equivalent of 11,089,000 hectares of land had been deforested in Nigeria. Between 1990 and 2000, Nigeria has lost an average of 409,700 hectares of forest every year. The end result of deforestation is increased temperatures and decreasing rainfall, contributing to the desertification of the country. According to Akinbami (2003), the carbon emissions from deforestation accounts for 87% of the total carbon emission of the country. This will further affect the country's wide biodiversity of 899 species of birds, 274 mammals, 154 reptiles, 53 amphibians and 4,715 species of higher plants. Already, the number of rare Cross River gorilla has decreased tremendously. The diagram below from Global Forest Assessment 2005 shows the different deforestation drivers in Africa.

In the map below gotten from UNEP (1992), shows the degree of deforestation in Africa. Indicating areas that have been affected and the degree of this effect. And from the map, Nigeria is no exception.

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IJHSS ISSN: 2395-1789
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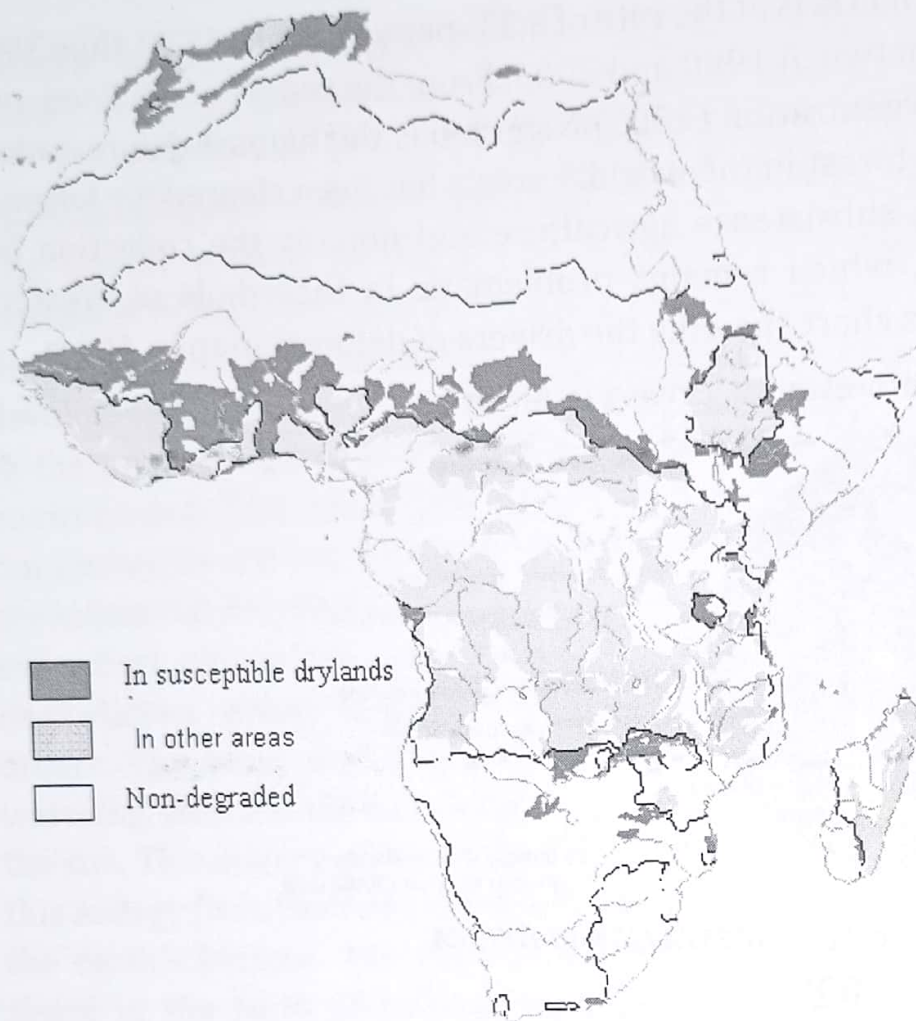


Figure: Areas Affected by Deforestation.

Source: UNEP (1992).

2. Mineral Exploration and the Environment

The 1970's in the history of Nigeria witnessed intensification in mineral exploration for the enhancement of economic growth. According to Matthew (2004), by 1976, twenty years after oil exploration in Nigeria, oil accounted for 84% of the GDP of Nigeria, 95% of total export and 80% of annual revenue. While Nigeria grew economically, the explorations led oil spills, deforestation, loss of farms, loss of soil fertility erosion, gas flare, contamination of streams and rivers, conflict between oil companies and host communities. And all these have impact on the ecosystem and human health. According to Igbo (2010), in communities of the Niger Delta, oil exploration has left a balance sheet of ecological and socio-physical disaster. The major constituents of drill cuttings such as barites and bentonite clays, when dumped on

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the ground prevent plant growth until natural processes develop new topsoil.

Mining on the other hand, according to Adekoya (2006), has also led to land degradation, habitat alteration, water and air pollution. According to Twerefou (2009), it can lead to socio-cultural problems such as conflicts, alcoholism, communal clashes and inequality. The negative effects are seen in places like Jos, where Tantalum and Monazite were mined, Birnin Gwari where Xenotime was mined, Ashaka where lead was mined, Okpilla, where Zinc and Silver were mined, Enugu where Tin was mined, and Lagos where Marble is sought etc.

The country is endowed with abundant environmental resources but high population growth rate and increasing demand for these resources threaten environmental sustainability (MDG 2005 Report). The United Nations Development Programme (2007), reports that Nigeria's rich environmental resources is undermined by deforestation (3.5% per annum), erosion, desertification, gas flare and oil pollution. Access to safe drinking water is improving. Between 2000 and 2010 the area of forest shrank by a third, from 14.4% to 9.9% of the land area. Similarly, access to safe water and sanitation is still a serious challenge for Nigeria. Little progress was made up to 2005 but improvements since then have brought the proportion of the population accessing safe water to 58.9% and the proportion accessing improved sanitation to 51.6%. In sanitation, efforts are falling short of the target, and rural-urban migration is adding to the pressure on sanitation infrastructure throughout the country.

Igwebuiké and Environmental Concerns

Igwebuiké is anchored on the harmony that exists in the African universe. It strongly believes that the protection of the environment is a collective responsibility since the protection of the environment is the protection of oneself. Being a weblike universe, once there is an ontological disorder on one part of the universe, it affects the entire African world. The African does not understand the world in a bifurcated manner- for reality is interconnected, and this explains why he speaks of trees and the earth as though he speaks of his relation. He

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treats these realities sometimes with great respect and even regards them as sacred: he speaks of trees as sacred, he speaks of animals as sacred, and even days as sacred. And these are part of his daily life and relationships. This relationship strongly contributed to the preservation of the environment in precolonial Africa.

For instance, the earth was regarded by the Igbo-African as a goddess and mother; and thus, she was treated with respect, love and solidarity. There were trees that were not cut, there were animals that were not killed, and there were days that people didn't go hunting, or fishing or farming, because these days were considered sacred. In one way or the other these events and relationships with nature helped in conserving her and saved her from exploitation. If one violated any of these, it was taken that the gods would bring punishment upon him or the community. As a result, one saw himself as being affected when nature was affected. It was a harmonious and the-other-centred relationship.

The Igbo strongly believes that the environment is inhabited by spirits. And to live in harmony with them is to guarantee his own happiness and well being. There were rules and customs in different communities for caring for the environments. According to Ugwu (2010), the community streams cannot be used every day; there was at least one day in a week (*Eke, Nkwo, Ori, Afo*) when people were forbidden to go to do anything in them. Such a day was reserved for the spirit that inhabits them. There were also days when people could not go to work on their farms because they are sacred days reserved to the spirits of the farmlands. There were animals that were never killed at all because of their association with the spirits. These rules provided ultimate measures that ensured that reality was in harmony.

The image of the earth as mother in Igbo-African ontology is very important. The relationship between children and their mother is characterized by respect, love and solidarity. And to exploit nature reveals the absence of these virtues. Love relationship brings in a personal face to the debate. Love-based relationships are lasting, respectful, sacrificial and not exploitative or selfish. With this concept of the mother earth, it was treated as though it had life within her and as such must be respected.

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The bifurcation of reality, which separates the human, animate, inanimate and spiritual worlds from one another, is at the heart of the exploitation of nature. However, the Igbo-African perspective which sees the spirits present in the abode of human beings, breeds respect for nature. When the environment is abused, the spirits therein suffer in solidarity with the environment, and from this context, to exploit the environment amounts to grieving the spirit. Thus, according to Wallace (2000) "the specter of ecocide raises the risk of deicide: to wreak environmental havoc on the earth is to run the risk that we will do irreparable harm to the Love and Mystery of God" (p. 60-61).

Conclusion

The environmental problems currently afflicting the conservation and management of Africa's natural resources are fundamentally the evidences of the deep-seated long-term effects of centuries of colonial domination. Achoka (2015) avers that:

Disruptive, materialistic foreign customs have resulted in the disintegration of richly endowed, indigenous systems of natural resource utilization, conservation and management enshrined in the multiplicity of Africa's ethnic nationalities. These complex relationships with nature, founded in diverse religious beliefs, taboos, myths and totems, were responsible for the maintenance of Africa's diverse and abundant biological resources for millennia. (p. 1).

This piece argued that the lasting solutions to these environmental concerns can come from within the African continent; while the ever-increasing influx of expatriate agencies and workers into the continent to fulfil contractual obligations as dictated by their donors has been helpful; this work argued that Africa cannot benefit from such temporary and short term arrangements. Africa, endowed with the richest diversity of human cultures, and being the mother of the human race, can develop a wholistic approach to the problem of the exploitation of the environment. Thus, this work has argued that

Igwebuiké philosophy, an African complementary philosophy, which sees the environment as a part of the complementary whole, can contribute greatly towards the preservation of the environment. For to understand the environment within the context of Igwebuiké, is to treat the environment with respect and responsibility.

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