

ISSN 1116-3305



**NIGERIAN  
JOURNAL  
OF  
SOCIAL STUDIES  
REVIEW**

**Vol 4 No. 1. June, 1995**

**Published by the National Association of  
Social Studies Educationists**



## INDICES OF "GREEN INERTIA" IN SUSTAINABLE NATION BUILDING: SOME BRIEFS FROM THE NATIONAL POLICY ON THE ENVIRONMENT

M. E. Inyang-Abia

### Contextual background and Objectives

Nation building is a difficult task. It involves more than national unity. It incorporates both forward and backward integration, interdependence, mutual trust and co-operative existence, functional interrelationship of all sectors and sub-sectors of the political, ecological and economic entities, diffusion of innovations and sustainable developmental efforts. It requires economic and political consistency which are capable of generating the feeling of oneness while enhancing patriotic spirit. Having similar positive concept about the national values and the readiness to protect such values even with the last point of blood clearly signify the seriousness of nationhood (Inyang-Abia, 1989). Perhaps these ideas inspired Herodotus (c 484 - c 425 BC) the great Greek historian and cited by Mallinson (1975) to point out that people who constitute a nation have similar patterns of behaviour, same institutions and identical artifacts. According to Mallinson (1975) Edmund Burke (1772 - 1797) echoed Herodotus' position but stressed in addition that living under a common government or in a contiguous geographical location is no good indicant of nationhood. Nationality, according to Burke in Mallinson (1975:263), is an expression of continuity in awareness of an extension of a people in time, number and space. It is the outcome of common political, legal and religious among other institutions and traditions which are "based on long continued uniformity of customs and manners." A nation can be constituted by a people or peoples that have lived and operated together for a long time and have shared a common historical past. The process of historical evolution consequently generates a distinctive national character. This, according to Ginsberg (1949:76), involves the "totality of the dispositions of thought, feeling and behaviour peculiar to and widespread in a people, and manifested with greater or less continuity in a succession of generations". Nation building therefore involves the process of evolving a national character. It determines and is a consequence of national policies and machineries. Geographical, economic, historical, ecological and political among other environmental variables have significant effect on nation building.

The obvious implication is that sustainable nation building for Nigeria requires clear and distinct positive national character to be inbuilt and nurtured for the Nigerians. Sustainable nation building demands positive attention to both global and local environmental concerns. It demands functional human interaction predicated on balanced environmental awareness, functional education, usable appropriate technologies, sound philosophical positions, stable political economy and international co-operation. Effective interplay of these variables can enhance human capacity to sustainably build and develop the nation, appreciate nature, live harmoniously with the ecological system, "build a free, just and democratic society, a land full of opportunities for all ... generate a great and dynamic economy and grow into a united, strong and self-reliant nation" (FRN 1981:8). But currently, available facts and data indicate the reverse. That is why this paper intends to:

- (a) discuss some indices of green inertia;
- (b) establish the consequences of green inertia on sustainable nation building;
- (c) analyse briefly the strategies of the national policy on the environment vis-a-vis sustainable nation building;
- (d) suggest feasible strategies and modalities to stimulate sustainable nation building through environmental education.

### 2. The Green Inertia, Its Indices and Effects on nation building

The continuous symbiotic relationships and chain effects of human actions, interactions, inactions and reaction on the environment at the individual, local, regional and global levels are significantly affected by the level of environmental activism. (friendly practical actions). Where deliberate efforts to create through



education, the minimal level of environmental awareness (the lowest level of the valuing process within the affective framework) is stifled such efforts are deprived of their inherent power of growth, juvenescence and resistance to passivity. That means even the lowest level of environmental awareness eludes Nigerians and continues in its steady state of rest and helpless inertness. The implications of all these is that the "green inertia" has overcome the environmental awareness (education) process. The consequences of such a state of helpless inertness on environmental education can be very damaging particularly to genuine efforts aimed at nation building. This is so because environmental problems such as pollution, erosion, flood, desertification, global warming or heat waves which are unknowingly generated by human environmentally hostile activities. Their damaging consequences such as increased hardship, poverty, diseases and death affect both the rich and the poor irrespective of location. Environmental problems also attract the vital life-support systems of the biosphere from where air, water and food are derived. Pollution or scarcity of these "life-supporters" very easily diverts attention from the task of sustainable nation building to that of personal survival, giving rise to indices of green inertia.

Among the many indices of green inertia the following very obvious ones can be very instrumental to a better understanding of the importance of environmental education in nation building:

- (a) **Poverty:** Nearly all the 75% of Nigerians living in the rural areas depend on their food, drink, fuel, fodder, fertilizer, building materials, medicine and meat collected directly and freely from their immediate environment. These "rubbish people" (O' Brien: 1991) practice the biomass - based subsistence economy" (Agarwal: 1985) not because they like it but because of the circumstances they have been compelled into, often by forces which they themselves can control but for ignorance. Most Nigerians especially on the rural areas live far below the poverty line. They had long realized that their means of livelihood and the life-supporting commodities are becoming scarcer and less readily available. Searching for fuel wood and the *Gnetum bucholzianum* (Afrang), hunting the bush meat or finding the fodder now takes longer time and entails going further into forest. They had long also realized that even the virgin springs have been raped so that clean potable water takes longer time to find. Moreover, owing to biodiversity loss the world is generally becoming poorer and poorer because thousands of valuable plants and animals are becoming extinct each year.

The millions who live in abject penury, degraded by hunger, diseases, illiteracy, malnutrition, the landless peasants, the rubbish people cannot accept the message of sustainable nation building easily. Any campaign against dependence on fuelwood, for example, that does not provide cheaper alternatives is a waste. They could even meet with hostile reactions, so also could any activity which tries to deprive the poor of their decreasing source of livelihood without any feasible alternative. Poverty therefore generates green inertia. It does not easily contribute to nation building because after being cheated for decades the "rubbish people" have become wiser.

- (b) **Systemic Inconsistencies:** Even a cursory look at some policies and their practical current political, economic and educational applications indicate government ambivalence and double standard approach to issues related to sustainability. Take a few cases associated with the environment: fuelwood versus cooking gas, environmental conservation versus environmental education and development versus the battle for political succession. It is needless explaining that pricing the cooking gas beyond the reach of the ordinary Nigerians without clearly defined available options exposes the environment to greater degradation: deforestation, erosion, flood, biodiversity loss, species extinction, among others. Educational policy which emphasizes citizenship education or introductory technology without making adequate personnel and material input available for such programme is not better than no policy at all. The battle for political succession too has stifled an avowed policy of implementing environmental education in secondary schools in Nigeria effective from 1991. The National Policy on the Environment (1989), to all intents and purposes, has not gone far beyond the setting up of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA).



Systemic inconsistencies are an awful index of green inertia. Were the policy makers and implementers environmentally literate they could have considered environmental matters when taking major and programme decisions. Systemic inconsistencies also conspire against effective nation building. A society where even the court of justice is neither independent nor protected against political abuse because of deliberate inbuilt inconsistencies in the socio-political system may find nation building an up-hill task owing to over-grown distrust. They create a vicious circle effect where single inconsistencies variable breeds more. Otherwise how can triple digit inflation, backbreaking debt burden (52.09% of 1993 annual budget), political instability and uncontrollable exchange rate be explained for a country most graciously blessed with abundant natural and human resources.

**Resistance by Vested Interests:** Some individuals and establishments whose activities heavily deplete, pollute or devastate the environment often resist environmental education programmes thus fuelling green inertia. Such people wished their prey remained perpetually ignorant of their environmental rights and obligations. With furtive suspiciousness they view environmental educators as agents of the neo-colonialists whose major activity is to actively retard the already stifled economy of the South. Usually they argue that the north, having acquired her unfair share of affluence, technology, political and economic stability along with other modernizing variables yet being responsible for major global depleting activities has now designed a new ploy to ensure that the thick forests of the South remain green to filter their polluted air, absorb the excess carbon monoxide generated by their vehicular traffic, provide them with steady sources of pharmaceutical and agricultural inputs for their sophisticated laboratories and continuously serve their selfish ends for recreation as tourist attractions.

This plausible argument can be debunked by the fact that the developing south is already facing both environmental and developmental crises deeply rooted in poverty, instability, poor environmental management, culture of waste and wasteful management among others. The vested interests must realize that environmental issues are complex and their solutions must also be multi-faceted, starting from the individual level through well articulated radical environmental education curriculum that can create the required awareness to assist in sustainable nation building, to the state and national levels.

**Socio-cultural Practices:** Some deep-rooted social philosophies and cultural practices including land use, religious idiosyncracies, marital practices, burial ceremonies and regal paraphenelia are replete with indices of green inertia. Socio-cultural philosophies and practices that encourage early marriage and large family size in the face of dwindling naira value, high cost of health care, rising prices of educational services, poor housing facilities among other social and economic problems are opposed to sustainable development of the nation and consequently nation building. Those practices which encourage bush burning, indiscriminate hunting spree or even wrong application of agricultural chemicals also point to green inertia. This is because such national reactions as erosion, species extinction, biodiversity loss, the green house, global warming, loss of fertile land and potable water, among other direct chain-effects can induce inter-ethnic conflicts rather than engender nation building. According to Inyang-Abia and Usang (1992) the socio-cultural practices that emphasize the ecosystem are opposed to the ecosystem and consequently indicative of green inertia. By extension therefore they jeopardize the task of nation building.

**Inadequate Educational Inputs:** Environmental awareness is the beginning of ecological wisdom and sustainable development. It occurs only when there is appropriate environmental education which focuses on the human positive attitude to environment. This should be far beyond the current cognitive-oriented curriculum implementation in biology, geography, social studies, agricultural science or any other subject for that matter. As an innovation in education, affective challenges



involving environmental friendliness, sustainable principles and ecosystems balance are important. But where teacher pre-service training, motivation, reinforcement and the general educational inputs do not reflect the current demands of environmental sustainability one wonders how the expected level of environmental awareness leads to continued "green inertia" and may deflate attempts at nation building.

- (f) **Illiteracy, ignorance and Superstition:** These triple variables of underdevelopment, unsustainability and green inertia can only be eradicated through well-articulated environmental education that uses culturally relevant ecological messages, varied communication modalities and local field experiences to drive some home truths to the masses. Many that are print-literate are environmentally illiterate, otherwise how can various environmentally hostile decisions taken in high (and low) places be explained? To become environmentally literate, ecologically wise and develop biocentric outlook the green concepts, green philosophy and the green curriculum must merge. They must functionally challenge the green inertia and thus facilitate sustainable nation building.

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1990) nearly 56 million Nigerians aged fifteen years and about will still remain stark illiterate by the 2000. The following table explains it all.

Table 1: Target population of non-literate adults

YEAR	POPULATION OF NON-LITERATE AGED 15 +
1990	40,791,884
1991	42,097,224
1992	43,444,336
1993	44,834,555
1994	46,269,260
1995	47,749,877
1996	49,277,873
1997	50,854,765
1998	52,483,117
1999	54,161,545
2000	55,894,714

SOURCE: Federal Republic of Nigeria (1990:15).

The table shows that given Nigeria's population of 88.5 million (1991 census) the literacy rate is still below 50% compared to 1985 when it was 54% (male) 31% (female) averaging 43% for Nigeria (Hutchinson 1989). Illiteracy is complementary to high level of ignorance, superstition and non-committal attitude. It is no wonder then that illiteracy constitutes a serious hindrance to the fast spread environmental education. It is another major source of green inertia. Because it leads to deprivation, marginalisation and disempowerment it can be also a major obstacle to sustainable nation building.

### 3. The National policy of The Environmental and Sustainable Nation Building

The Federal Republic of Nigeria Policy on the Environmental re-emphasizes Nigeria's commitment to sustainable development, social justice and self reliance which are vital factors for nation building. The document at its introductory statement emphasizes:

Nigeria is committed to ... sustainable development based on proper management of the environment in order to meet the needs of the present and future generations. This demands positive and realistic planning that balances human needs against the potential that the environment has for meeting them (FRN, 1989: 5).



The policy "aims to provide a rational, practicable, coherent and comprehensive approach to the pursuit of economic and social development in a way that minimizes contradiction and duplications while enhancing co-operation and effectiveness at all level's" (FRN, 1989:5).

This aim is further operationalized into the following five goals which the policy targets to achieve sustainable development in Nigeria. They are to:

- (a) secure for all Nigerians a quality of environment adequate for their health and well-being;
- (b) conserve and use the environment and natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations;
- (c) restore, maintain and enhance the ecosystem and ecological processes essential for the functioning of the biosphere to preserve biological diversity and the principle of optimum sustainable yield in the use of living natural resources and ecosystem;
- (d) raise public awareness and promote understanding of essential linkages between environment and development and to encourage individual and community participation in environmental implement efforts; and
- (e) cooperate in good faith with other countries, international organizations/agencies to achieve optimal use of transboundary natural resources and effective prevention of abatement of transboundary environmental pollution.

The fourteen strategies for achieving the policy goals include attention to the following:

1. Human population
2. land use and soil conservation
3. Water resources management
4. Forestry, wildlife and protected natural areas
5. marine and coastal area resources
6. Sanitation and waste management
7. Toxic and hazardous substances
8. Mining and mineral resources
9. Agricultural chemicals
10. Energy production
11. Air pollution
12. Noise
13. Working environment
14. Settlement, recreational space, greenbelt, monuments and cultural property

From the above listing it is obvious that almost all aspects of human activities have been properly taken care of by the policy. The fourth goal of the policy clearly indicates the educational function of awareness creation and environmental studies to back up the affective dimension. Studying this policy vis-a-vis the national Policy on Education (FRN: 1981) sections 1(3), (40), (50), (7) 6(49), 9 (58), (64) among others reinforces the commitment to environmental matters that Nigeria has exhibited since the early 1980's. They also reflect the needs expressed by Recommendation 96 of the first United Nations Conference on the Environment at Stockholm, Sweden in 1972 which focused on human environment. That conference emphasized the need to adopt both formal and non-formal educational strategies to create environmental awareness among the world population.



### Recommendations

Having indicated so much commitment to environmental matters and nation building at the policy level it is therefore important to put them to practice thus reverse the inertia that had long crept in. The following suggestions are not exhaustive by any means.

- (a) **A More Radical Curriculum:** The existing curriculum at all levels must be reviewed to richly include the green concepts which emphasize the affective, re-examine the conventional wisdom, better explore developmental, ecological and ideological basis, continuously expose learners to search for valid, viable, sustainable and reliable alternatives and ecological harmony. Such a curriculum must address the issues of inequality, poverty, famine, debt burden, political and economic instability, alternative economic and energy options among others as factors of nationality and nation building. The current citizenship education programme must be made fully functional.
- (b) **Culturally Relevant educational Inputs:** The radical curriculum must be backed up with culturally relevant educational inputs: well motivated personnel who are themselves adequately committed to both environmental sustainability and the nation, and relevant resources such as equipment materials, space and funds.
- (c) **Self-reinforcing Policies:** Policy contradictions and inconsistencies must be avoided. Environmental implications of various policies and programmes must be established at the initial decision level before their implementation.
- (d) **Sustained Environmental Education:** The national desire to create environmental awareness must be translated through sustained environmental education; formal and non-formal, at all levels of education. The existing citizenship education programme should be seen as an integrated approach to environmental education and nation building which require differentiation with increasing educational level.
- (e) **Enriched Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA):** Demands for EIA should incorporate the effect of projects, policies and programmes not only on the immediate but also the possibilities associated with nation building. When writing the impact statements it should be a requirement to emphasize the role of such impacts on sustainable nation building and national development.
- (f) **Reducing Population Growth Rate:** Population growth rate and its spatial distribution have significant impact on ecology, welfare and standard of living all of which impact on efforts aimed at nation building. Consistent effort to reduce the population growth rate through improved education of women and better co-operation of the men should be seen as an essential component of environmental education and nation building. By reducing the pressure of human number on available resources opportunities can be made for taking better care of the environment thus promoting sustainable nation building.

### Summary and Conclusion

Sustainable nation building, though an uphill task, is never a mirage, but a continuous striving for the ideal. Environmental education provides fertile opportunities for sustainable nation building particularly because it encourages the provision of both the national Policy on Education (FRN, 1981) and the National Policy on the Environment (FRN, 1989). But despite the policy provisions the green inertia had crept in thus stifling genuine efforts. The indices of such inertia include poverty, systemic inconsistencies, resistance by vested interests, some socio-cultural practices, inadequate educational inputs and the triple variables of illiteracy, ignorance and superstition. But the fourteen strategies enunciated by the National Policy on the Environment along with radical curriculum, self reinforcing policies and sustained environmental education among others can rejuvenate both environmental awareness and sustainable nation building.



**References**

- Agarwal, A. (1985). **The 5th annual world conservation lecture**. London; WWF.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (1990). **Blue print and action plan for the eradication of mass illiteracy by the year 2000**. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Education.
- Federal republic of Nigeria (FRN) (1981) **National policy on education**. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Education
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (1989). **National policy on the environment**. Lagos: FEPA
- Ginsberg, M. (1949). **Sociology**. London: O.P.T.
- Hutchinson, C. (1989). **The Hutchinson concise encyclopedia**. London: Guild Publishers
- Inyang-Abia, M.E. (1989). Promoting peace and national unity through media technology: Some socio-cultural responsibilities. **Journal of Education and Peace** 1 (1), 115 - 125.
- Inyang-Abia, M. E. & Usang, N. (1992) **Environmental Education for teachers**. Zaria: NIRVANA Pub. Ltd.
- Mallinson, V. (1975). **An introduction to the study of comparative education**. London: Heinmann.
- O'Brien, P. (1991). Political will is essential for sustainable development. In WWF (Ed.), **Environmental education for sustainable development**. Jordanhill: WWF.

*M.E. Iyang-Abia, teaches at the University of Calabar*