



REVIEW ARTICLE

The Effect of Anthropogenic Activities on Environment

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ABSTRACT

Gradual and Massive destruction of our environment is rampant throughout the world. However, the situation is more pathetic in developing countries. Anthropogenic activities which include but not limited to random or indiscriminate tree felling, farming operations, among others are major causes of environmental degradation. Though the world (inhabitants) needs more food and more protein, unfortunately we may not have it unless we stop the destruction of our environments. With the present destruction/pollution of our environments, photosynthesis is impaired, streams rivers etc. are polluted, the green scenery (aesthetic) changed, clean air is non-existent, human life endangered, aquatic life harmed, wildlife drastically reduced, therefore the quest to reduce world's hunger becomes but a mirage, a phantasm, a hallucination.

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INTRODUCTION

Destructive effect of anthropogenic activities on our environment dated back to centuries. However, the environment is so catholic that people do not know that they are destroying it. The destruction could be so micro that the destroyer considers it so minor but still causing destruction-for example a forester that lights a cigarette in the forest where other workers are not only pollutes the environment- air and human beings but may create a macro destruction by causing forest fire, forest fire does not respect boundaries but may spread to the cities.

Survey on some countries betrays how the environment is being changed for the negative. Table 1 presented the forest situation of Costa Rica where the author served as Food and Agriculture Organization consultant.

By 1977 only 31% of this country was under forest cover. It is generally believed that the area of Costa Rica covered by forest in 1987 when the study was undertaken was about 25-26%. This showed that the forests are continuously being depleted, and this calls for a better utilization of the forest Resources (Nnabuife, 1987). Who, therefore, are depleting these forests? The answer is simple- human beings- in their bid for urbanization, in their bid for forest products. The sorry thing here is that these harvests from the forests are not maximally utilized. A lot of percentages of trees (forest) are in the forest or even mills and factories as wastes and residues.

Table 1: Forest situation in Costa Rica 1950-1977

Period	area covered by dense	% of national territory	Forest, KM ² covered %
1950		27.100	53
1961		23.100	45
1977		15.900	31

Source: Costa Rica Project Paper- Natural Resources Conservation (Nnabuife, 1987).

Residues accrue in the forests from logging operations. Because of the type of equipment used for the logging in most developing countries (including Nigeria), high level of residues/wastes occurrence is evidenced, for example, the logging waste in the Philippines is estimated to be 80%, 60% for Thailand and Indonesia (Nnabuife, 1984).

In a typical plywood industry in Peninsular Malaysia, it is estimated that only 44% of the log end-up as plywood (Table 2).

The so called residues occur in many other sectors of the forest and forest based industries. Similarly residues occur in our farms privately or publicly owned, citing just one example. It is known that the Southern Agricultural Development Corporation in Ethiopia in 1980 produced over 175,000 tons of wheat straw. These were left as residues and utilized (Nnabuife, 1982). We have taken time to discuss these so called residues. Nnabuife (2000) reported that "Forest and Agriculture Residues may not be wastes" because of the various use the so called residues could be put in. The various Nations have clearly shown

Table 2: Average Conversion Factors for Estimated Residues in Plywood Mills

Item	Production by Volume %
Long trim	4.4
Cores	5.9
Undried veneer	24.1
Dried Veneer	8.5
Sander dust	2.1
Total wood residues	45.0
Back Residues	11.0
Plywood	44.0
Total log	100.00

Source: Proceeding of National Seminar at University of Pertanian Malaysia (1984)

that there is a gulf of difference between Residues and Wastes. If these residues could be profitably utilized, less demand would be made on our forests, if we cut down fewer trees, the world would be greener. Other aspects of environmental destruction include:

Petroleum and petro- chemical industries

There is no gainsaying that the above has contributed tremendously to the growth of Nigerian economy, in fact to the economies of all the countries that are rich in oil. However, the second order effects are quite noticeable.

Oludare *et al.* (2002) observed that statistically, oil spilled has been the most severe contaminants of the environment that is caused by corrosion effect, sabotage/theft, equipment failure and natural cause as in rain storms, flooding and lightning. All these have devastating effect on the environment.

These effects are noticed both on lands and in aquatic life. Such have been reported in Nigeria, U.S.A. etc. Human lives have been lost and aquatic life have been lost, potable or drinking water made scarce or completely unavailable, and the general scenery of the environment drastically changed.

Chemical Residue in our Environment

Besides pollution from petroleum/petro-chemical industries, pollution emanates from other sources. Ogbuagu and Igbokwe (2002) wrote that our society is now a toxic environment, and that there is a great number of known chemical- many highly hazardous used or spewed on agriculture, manufacturing, power generation and other human activities, The sum of their investigation is that we have a "chemical time bomb" and its eventual explosion would devastate the already devastated environment, It should be recalled that animals including human beings are parts and parcel of the environment, and anything that affects them affects the environment. It is observed that even synthetic detergents, herbicides, fungicides, insecticides alter the environment for the worse in one form or the other. This harmful effect has been observed in both terrestrial and aquatic animals. Have we not heard of dead fisher floating on Amansea River in Anambra State, Nigeria or a family having been wiped out after a meal of grass-cutter killed or found dead in a rice farm?

Pollution

A simple case observed is where industries are sited where they should not be. The smokes from these

industries pollute the air and sometimes cover the leaves of plants. The concomitant effect is that photosynthesis is retarded and food scarcity in that area is triggered off. Also the green scenery of the leaves is changed to powdery or blackish scenery. On a very local and scale, ascending the hill of the Government House towards Arroma junction, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria haven't we noticed, the trailers carrying heavy loads sluggishly and reluctantly ascending this amicable hill puffing out smoke with reckless abandon and an unwelcome impurity, the odour equally nauseating.

Disasters

Some of these disasters are man-made and avoidable, examples erosion caused by our unscientific farming method or wanton destruction of our forests. Wars caused by human beings- cats, goats etc don't go wars. The world is collectively and singularly massing weapons of mass destruction.

USA and Russia have enough Weapon/technology to destroy the world more than 10 (ten) times, but there is only one world to be destroyed, so why worry to destroy it 10 (ten) times. The other aspect of what is destroying our environment lies beyond our control e.g earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunami etc. However, Nigeria is not prone to these natural disasters. What would be our fate if earthquakes or volcano should happen in Nigeria. The answer is not far-fetched. We shall be killed until the disaster is either tired of killing us or by the intervention of God, the disaster decides to have sympathy on us.

Let me now summarize on who or what are causing the destruction of the environment. From the discussion so far, we have established or at least attempted to establish that who are causing the destruction of environment are mainly human beings-from our fore-fathers in the Garden of Eden to the present generation. Human being destroys the forests in their bid for urbanization or industrialization. Most of these could have been avoided if they had utilized the products more profitably thereby minimizing the generation of wastes/residue. Human beings by their use of chemicals deteriorate our environment producing toxic elements that are lethal to plants, animals both terrestrial and aquatic.

Industries sited unreasonably by human beings contribute their quota in the destruction of environment. Industries (inanimate) themselves do not directly destroy our environments but human beings who site them wrongly are responsible for the destruction.

Pollution caused by vehicular movement is very common. The vehicles themselves are not guilty but the human beings who operate them wrongfully without obeying the emission control regulations. The mechanics, the welders and other artisans who pour condemned oils into gutters also need to be mentioned.

Human being through wars and strife including Boko Haram attacks are also partakers in the destruction of environment. Even recently, aircrafts slamming into residential building or into moving automobiles have become active participants in the destruction of the environment.

Finally, we are aware that natural disaster- may not be aided and abetted by human beings-cause

environmental destruction, but the bulk of environmental destruction is caused by human beings.

The consequences of such destruction

The consequences attendant to the destruction of environment have been clearly stated in this write-up, and no further attempt would be made here to over flog the issue. We have given some insights into what can be done to alleviate the destruction of environments. But in a nutshell they include:

- (1) By making less demand on our forests, this can be achieved by minimizing the generation of waste/residues more economic and technical utilization of residues.
- (2) By utilizing our agriculture residues-rice-straw, wheat straw, bagasse could be used for the production of pulp for fibre board, paper, particleboard manufacturing. This would reduce the demand on forests, minimize wastes and probably create cleaner environment. It is known that there are pulp mills in India running on straws.
- (3) Planting more trees-reforestation projects following FAO action plan.
- (4) The tree planting campaign carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture in Anambra State of Nigeria is commendable.
- (5) Authorization should be granted before trees are cut i.e. government regulation.
- (6) Emission control regulations should be instituted by the Government for cars, motorcycles etc.
- (7) Sites for industries should be approved by Government after detailed and educated studies/assessment. The second order effect of any industry should be known, for example, in 1971 the Londoners refused and successfully resisted the siting of a second air-port in London (UK, 1971).

- (8) Local streams and gutter pollution by mechanics and other artisans should be checked by the Government.

Conclusion

The world (inhabitants) needs more food, more protein, unfortunately we may not have it unless we stop the destruction of our environments. With the present destruction/pollution of our environments, photosynthesis is impaired, streams rivers etc. are polluted, the green scenery (aesthetic) changed, clean air is non-existent, human life endangered, aquatic life harmed, wildlife drastically reduced, therefore the quest to reduce world's hunger becomes but a mirage, a phantasm, a hallucination.

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