
CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE ERA OF THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA: A LEGACY OF THE
BRITISH COLONIAL EDUCATION (1925-1960)

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Abstract

The history of the 21st century would always remember the COVID-19 pandemic with regretful nostalgia. Owing to the inglorious birth of this disease in Wuhan, China, in the last quarter of 2019, life never remained the same again for the entire humanity, with the effect that human health, economic growth, the education industry were shaken to their very foundations. Normal human activities ceased to be normal, while a number of 'new normals' got introduced as a life-saving strategies. The world was then forced to adapt to a number of strategic life-saving 'new normals' which were intended to provide some semblance of normalcy, in order to escape the deadly claws of the dreaded COVID-19 virus, which knew no geographical boundaries, rejected all forms of racial discriminations, paralyzed all economic activities, and relentlessly spread through physical human contacts, leaving hundreds of 1000s of innocent victims dead along its tracks. Having kept the entire globe at a total standstill, and with more than a million lives already lost within the past couple of

months, the entire humanity is now challenged to adopt a number of stringent measures carefully designed to checkmate its continued spread and unnecessary loss of precious human lives. It is against this background that the need for strict environmental care, which is the focus of this paper, becomes quintessential. Basically, this would save precious lives, and reduce the spread of COVID-19 among Nigerian communities who earlier neglected this exercise. Owing to the complicated nature of this disease and its methods of spread among persons, there is strong need to care for our environments, which was a major colonial legacy acquired from the British colonial regime. With a focus on the period of 1925-1960 therefore, it is the understanding of this paper that with a proper care of our environments at this period of the pandemic, Nigeria could eradicate COVID-19 successfully from her borders in due course.

Key words: *Care, Environment, COVID-19, Nigeria, Education*

Introduction

It is without doubt that environmental care has been a major issue in the hands of the global community. Among different nations of the world, governments have found reasons to commit huge fiscal spending on the environment. In view of the enormity of the dangers associated with poor and badly managed environments on health, nations of the world, most especially the developed ones spare no fiscal bills on issues of effective environmental care. Because nations are fully aware of the fact that a healthy and properly managed environment generates good health of both mind and body, as well as supports plant and animal wellbeing, keeping the environments in strong states has continued to occupy outstanding positions in their fiscal priorities rankings. Thus, it continues to remain in the priority projects of most developed countries of the world to care for their natural environments without fail.

In view of these factors, it has been the position of authors that a healthy environment is a wealthy one indeed. This is an indication that a healthy environment supports healthy living, promotes good health, scares away diseases, and ensures the safety of human beings, animals, and even plants. By implication therefore, all human beings need healthy environments to live in, thrive, and conduct their daily activities. The same applies to plants and animals too who need healthy environments to survive and become useful to themselves and humanity as well. It is in consideration of this factor that Isife (2012) suggests strongly that “the environment provides all life support systems with air, water and land as well as the materials for fulfilling all development aspirations of man.”

Without a committing effectively to caring for the environment therefore, humanity is doomed. Without making resources available for environmental care matters and committing same appropriately to keep our environments in top form always, humanity is doomed. What can man do in life outside the natural environment? Can man actually survive with his environmental in dangerous conditions? Answers to these questions are quite obvious. Everyone needs a strong and properly cared-for environment. Every human being naturally deserves to live and work in a good environment. These have become highly crucial at this period of the COVID-19 pandemic which has literally ravaged the entire globe, exterminated more than 1000,000 precious lives, destroyed global economies, kept institutions under severe lockdown, caused terrible job losses, and reduced unnecessary physical human contacts. This leads Mohamedbhai (2020) to the conviction that “COVID-19 will leave no sector in any country in the world unaffected, and its consequences will be felt for years to come.”

As a matter of fact, the COVID-19 disease is virus-based, and spreads through forms of human contacts. Literally speaking, it is simply wingless, but depends of human agents for transportation from one community of people to the next. Its inglorious journey started in the city of Wuhan, China, in the last quarter of the year 2019. From that remote part of the globe, it has spread to every single nation in the world, and has succeeded in cutting lives short, destroyed world economies, and kept educational establishments

under total lockdown. Efforts to curtail its continued spread have not been an easy task, while maximum progress has been recorded too. However, it has been strongly recommended that one of the key strategies that could ameliorate its continued spread in communities is the maintenance of a good and healthy environment. Scientists and the World Health Organization (WHO) suggest strongly that through an effective care of the environment, as well as the adoption of proper hygiene, particularly during this pandemic, the spread of COVID-19 could be minimized. At that, its transmission among persons could be curtailed. Many more lives of infected persons could be saved (Afolabi, 2020).

It is against these backgrounds that the need for effective care of the environment becomes highly crucial. A good, clean, and healthy environment is definitely a manifestation of an environment that is properly cared for. As a matter of fact, such an environment is free from unnecessary contaminations, free from all forms of pollution, and maintained in proper hygienic condition. Within the vicinity of such an environment, people refuse to defecate in the open air. Rather, they do this natural act within the facilities of an enclosed toilet system. Within such environments too, community members reject all acts of unnecessary and careless dumping of any hazardous waste materials indiscriminately (Igwe, 2012).

Most importantly too, members of such communities avoid any forms of bush burning, for fear of their devastating effects on human life the entire eco-system. Above all, mining firms play by the rules and avoid all forms of open-air flaring of chemical gases and other hazardous products, even as construction projects are executed with damaging the natural environments through some reckless digging of open trenches, creation of gullies, and pulling down of trees that provide for the populations of affected communities. On the overall, our human environments deserve proper care and attention. Leaving in abandoned states of carelessness created by reckless human activities rather cause great environmental damage to life within affected communities, which consequently result to serious environmental degradation, among others (Aleke, 2007; Isife, 2012; Iwunna, Okereke, Dimonye, Okoro & Njoku, 2020).

Again, the cultures of proper environmental care recommend that dead animals must be properly buried under the earth, and protected from unnecessary infestations. It recommends that leaving animals unburied is dangerous to health and could create wide opportunities for the spread of diseases among community members. Indiscriminate burning of hazardous materials, which cause unhealthy smokes inhalation by people living within different human communities need to be discouraged. Above all, smoking of cigarettes openly is considered unhealthy, and must not be done in the midst of other persons or non-smokers. Thus, in this era of the COVID-19 pandemic, several environmental care regulations are being introduced by the WHO and Nigeria's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and taught through the news media. Nigerians are expected to learn those 'new normals' and comply strictly with them, to enable them curb the spread of the disease, enjoy healthy environments, and live their lives free from COVID-19. In support of the above then, Udezo (2007) contends that compliance with these natural behavioural demands is intended for our complete well-being and healthy living.

Thus, knowledge of these life-saving human activities in Nigeria, starting from the British colonial era did not just emerge from the thin air. The numerous healthcare lessons which came to the knowledge of Nigerian communities did not come from our illiterate ancestors. Rather, awareness of these health building environmental care attitudes were introduced to Nigerians through forms of colonial education, Christian missionary activities, and medical enlightenment programs provided by the British government and their numerous imperial agents during the era of colonial rule in Nigeria. Through school education, public enlightenment exercises, health education, and forms of medical training, Nigerians were exposed to the awareness of caring for their environments, and caring for the safety and wellbeing of their lives too.

Thus, following the adoption of the report of the Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British African Dependencies, also known as the Education Policy in British Tropical Africa, the project of making education a major activity in the hands of the then British government commenced in earnest, starting from 13th

March, 1925. The submission and formal adoption of this important policy document re-ignited and re-awakened the British government's interest and commitment to the educational development of its colonial territories in Tropical Africa, which included Nigeria. By that, investment in the education of the illiterate populations of Nigerians took off, even as Christian missionary agencies began to be enrolled as collaborators and participants in the project of educating various communities in Nigeria (Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies (ACNEBTAD, 1925; Iwunna, 2011).

The birth of this essential document and its formal adoption as a working policy paper in the hands of the colonial administrators in Nigeria impacted the educational landscape of the territory. Schools began to emerge in their numbers, most especially those established by various Christian missions. School-hungry pupils from various communities began to navigate their ways into the available schools where they could be accepted, without minding the long distances they trekked on daily basis, plus other inconveniences they encountered in their efforts to receive formal education. Teacher education took off, in an attempt to cater for the growing number of entrants who presented themselves in schools each day. However, the dire unavailability or abject improvisation of educational facilities and infrastructures impacted the quality of education pupils received at school, as well as affected the number of applicants that could be admitted during the academic year (Fafunwa, 1974; Omolewa, 2001; Iwunna, 2011).

Thus, in schools, the educational curricula presented to the young learners introduced them to a new world of knowledge and awareness, far from what their traditional environments earlier offered them. The curricula contents of the various subjects presented at school launched learners into new and forward-looking ways of handling issues, as well as re-configured their mindsets about the world they lived in. Thus, school subjects which included Hygiene, Nature Study, Arithmetic, Geography, English Language, History, and Religion, among others, were taught in colonial-era primary schools in Nigeria. Without doubt, the curricula contents of these subjects transformed the learners' perceptions of life and

living in their different localities, changed their thinking patterns, challenged them to re-examine their traditional ways of doing things and handling specific matters, which consequently injected fresh and improved knowledge into the ways they lived in their communities and handled their natural environments in their homesteads (Lugard, 1922; ACNEBTAD, 1925).

Remarkably, during the colonial period of school education, one of the key school subjects which influenced learners' attitudes to their environments at home, local community, and school environment was Hygiene. This subject, which was followed in all primary schools during the colonial and post-colonial years was designed specifically to influence and improve learners' dispositions to caring for themselves, their health conditions, and natural environments, all with the primary objectives of improving the quality of their health as human beings. Among others, the subject also introduced them to the different healthy techniques that could guide them care for their environments properly. It also empowered them with the knowledge on the numerous healthcare techniques that could enhance the quality of life provided by the natural environment.

By that, young learners, through the auspices of formal school education, and supported by numerous enlightenment and public awareness programs provided by the colonial regime through church programs, market organizations, local community groups, and traditional leaders, came to the knowledge that caring for the environment is as good as caring for oneself. Through these agencies therefore, communities were supported to appreciate the huge natural endowments which a healthy and properly protected environment could offer to humanity. In the process, persons and communities came to the realization that our environments genuinely deserve to be protected, cared for, and preserved with great caution, putting into consideration the enormity of the priceless healthcare benefits they offer (Aleke, 2007; Udezo, 2007; Isife, 2012).

It is against this background therefore that the question of caring for the environment becomes a crucial project in the hands of all Nigerians, and in fact the entire humanity, at this period of the

COVID-19 pandemic. The obvious fact that there is never a clean-cut division between humanity and his environment therefore presents us with the huge challenge of caring for the environment, not just as a social responsibility, but as a natural and God-given assignment, which must be performed with utmost caution and care. This then brings us to inevitable understanding that life begins from the environment. The environment one lives in influences the quality of life he or she enjoys. Confronted with a poorly maintained environment therefore, humanity is bound to play hosts to countless diseases and complicated health challenges, most especially at this period of the pandemic when COVID-19 seems to turn the world upside down.

Having made these clarifications, one then needs to add that Nigeria, located in the West Coast of the African continent, became a British colonial in 1861 when the territory of Lagos was forcefully overrun by Britain. This imperial seal of territorial ownership acquired by the British government over the Nigerian territories was formally endorsed at the conclusion of the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885, which was attended by major European countries, plus the United States of America. Among others, these key nations had vested interests in the acquisition of colonial territories in Africa. Following the successful amalgamation of the northern and southern territories into a single nation by the then Governor, Sir F.D. Lugard, which then came to be christened Nigeria in 1914, the British's governments aggressive exploitation of the abundant economic resources of the 20th century creation turned into a major imperial project. This was also followed by a comprehensive take-over of her entire educational processes, as well as the conversion of the peoples of the colonial territory, which was then estimated to number about 40 million into the Christian faith. These were authenticated with the imposition of an imperial rule which gave Britain full rights to govern the territory for almost a century, until political independence was secured on 1st October, 1960 (Lugard, 1922; Dike, 1956; Saro-Wiwa, 1989).

Thus, the era of the British colonial education in Nigeria was synonymous with the introduction of some alien environmental values and principles into the nation's educational system. It was

those key environmental lessons that formed the curricula contents of the education provided in schools during the period. On the strength of those lessons therefore, young learners began to imbibe the cultures of caring for their environments at home and in public places such as schools, churches, offices, market places, hospitals, recreational centres, rivers, etc. Empowered by the lessons learnt from these educational activities therefore, knowledge of proper environmental care spread from school children to their parents, community men and women, as well as other relations. At that, the activities of caring for the environment became a major issue of concern to all and sundry, with the effect that Nigerians then began to appreciate this project as a crucial step to the attainment of a healthy living within the community. Thus, it becomes quite obvious that without the involvement of the British colonial government in the nation's education sector, the cultures of caring for the environment could have remained a mere illusion in the minds of Nigerians.

Despite these huge benefits associated with proper environmental care, several Nigerian homes, communities, rivers, public spaces, and market places still encounter severe environmental degradation. Communities, farm lands, public water channels face terrible environmental disasters, largely created by human agents. Still, petroleum mining firms, and other registered explorers of natural resources in the country engage in some unprofessional activities which rather damage the environments, render affected communities uninhabitable, destroy the eco-system, exacerbate the spread of diseases, and make lives of affected communities miserable. To conclude this segment then, it is important to underpin the fact that Nigeria's environments need proper care and keen attention of all citizens irrespective of status, profession, or political affiliation. The project of caring for the environment requires the participation of Nigerians irrespective of their various locations within the geographical borders of this nation. Considering the huge benefits that healthy environments offer to humanity, it has become crucial that the entirety of Nigerians re-commit themselves conscientiously to effective care of the environment as a strategy to curbing the spread of the dreaded

COVID-19 pandemic in this country. By that, Nigerians could remain safe and uninfected by this terrible virus that has devastated many nations of the world.

With these in perspective then, the specific objectives of this paper come readily to mind. First and foremost, the subject of environmental care educates learners with the skills and techniques of caring for nature as an aspect of a healthy living habit. Secondly, caring for the environment equips community members with the techniques of curbing disease spread within their localities. This knowledge becomes crucial at this period of the COVID-19 pandemic when human communities are getting dangerously infected by the virus. More so, a good care of the environment prolongs life and contributes to the general wellbeing of individuals and communities. It is against this background that the need for strict environmental care becomes the ultimate thrust of this paper.

Concept of the Environment

For a clearer appreciation of this discussion, we consider it relevant to make a brief explanation of what the concept of the environment represents within the framework of this project. That being the case, the opinions of a few authors and researchers shall guide our understanding of this key element, which constitutes a fundamental variable in this analysis.

First and foremost, Udezo (2007) concedes the environment as “the totality of our surrounding.” This authors adds that this concept emanates from the Greek word ‘viron,’ which means “circle, surrounding, or circle around.” The indication here is that man is the key figure in all matters concerning the environment, and also occupies a central place in influencing the quality of the natural environment. By implication therefore, man has a crucial role to play on all matters concerning the environment.

Similarly, Nwaigbo (2004), in Udezo (2007), captures the environment in three distinct but related perspectives as the “natural world, as surrounding influences and as physical conditions.” Coming from this perspective, the environment makes direct reference to the natural world which the entire humanity shares with plants and animals. On the strength of this understanding

therefore, the questions of the environment goes beyond our immediate surroundings, but goes on to include those far away landscapes and oceans which house animals and breed plants as well. From this perspective therefore, man is situated as the natural advocate of the environment, who is also saddled with the natural responsibilities of caring for it, as well as protecting it from unwarranted destruction through any forms of human activities. From the perspectives of Onweluzo (2002), in Udezo (2007) too, the concept of the environment speaks of the physical or natural environments which God has planted into mother nature, which “includes air, water, land, climate, flora and fauna, the human (built), environment encompasses the fabric of buildings infrastructure and urban open space.” Based on this understanding too, it is quite obvious that the question of the environment goes far beyond our immediate surroundings. It is inclusive of all the numerous abundance of natural endowments God has beautified the universe with.

Finally, with these opinions as our guide, it might be relevant to add that human beings need the environment to survive. Human beings need the bountiful endowments buried within the bellies of the natural environment to make a successful and health living. Without the environment, life is obviously meaningless and most painful. Without a healthy, clean, and viable environment, human, animal, and plant lives turn into miserable place to thrive on. It is in view of these considerations therefore, that this analysis becomes crucial at this period in history when the unfortunate arrival of the COVID-19 virus has paralyzed the entire globe, placed all major human activities under strict lockdown, and still threatens to cut short more human lives. A conscientious adherence to proper environmental care could save the globe from total collapse

Environmental Care as a Colonial Legacy

Caring for the environment counts among the core colonial legacies acquired from the British government during their years of imperial rule in Nigeria. Starting from 1925 when the British government’s responses to the educational development of its Nigerian territory seemed to be taking some improved dimensions, following the

adoption of the report of the Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies, which included Nigeria, the imperial government's attitude to education within the territory witnessed some new dimension. Investment in the areas of education recorded some level of improvement. The government's commitment to the education of the people under imperial rule witnessed some upgrading, most especially as a number of missionary voluntary agencies received necessary approvals to collaborate with the government in the supply of education within the territory. More so, investment in the areas of teacher education received some boost (Lugard, 1922; ACNEBTAD, 1925; Dike, 1956).

These activities resulted in the establishment of schools in different towns and cities of Nigeria, enrolment of larger populations of learners, payment of grants-in-aid of education to approved participating agencies, and the introduction of a number of school subjects which were intended to improve the intellectual awareness of learners, as well as bring them to the awareness of the basic principles of caring for themselves and their environments. At that, the teaching of subjects such as Hygiene, Nature Studies, Agriculture, and Geography, among others, was intensified in primary schools. However, Ministry of Education (1950), and Ejifugha, 1999), in Ejifugha and Uwazie (2014) were of the concession that 'in 1948, the term Health Education was introduced in Nigeria as one of the school subjects in the southern provinces to replace Hygiene. A syllabus for Physical and Health Education emerged in 1950 for teacher training colleges.' Following these developments, supervision of schools by approved personnel from the education ministries of the British government were despatched on regular basis to different schools to monitor activities and compliance with the approved regulations (Panes, 1936, Dec. 31st; Phillipson, 1948).

Thus, the curricula of education on Hygiene and Physical and Health Education to be followed in primary schools were developed. In consideration of these developments, Ejifugha and Uwazie (2014) observe that the 'maintenance of optimal health has been a matter of concern to humanity all through the ages.' This source adds further that Hygiene education was primarily based on acquisition

and application of knowledge for the upkeep of personal health, hence environmental sanitation became an aspect of education for health. The major essence was to impart the principles of healthy living into young learners, their families, and larger community. These were also emphasized by the Chief Inspector of Education, Mr Panes, in his report on the activities of teacher trainees at the Uyo Elementary Training Centre. At that, enormous emphasis was made on the need for the maintenance of proper hygiene among learners in the homes and communities, while also encouraging them to adopt practical hygiene techniques in their daily activities, while also taking proper care of their environments (ACNEBTAD, 1925; Panes, 1936, Dec. 31st;

Putting these developments into perspective therefore, the lessons is drawn that Nigerians' awareness of environmental care and the maintenance of proper hygiene in their lives and communities were at the instrumentality of the colonial era school education. It must be noted that prior to these epoch making developments, Nigerians' attitudes to personal hygiene, environmental care, and responses towards the protection of our natural environments were quite regretful, most especially as cultures of open air defecation, poor burial attitudes, and reckless destruction of the environment through careless bush burning and pulling down of ageless ancient trees. Even at that, attitudes of living in filthy homes, poorly maintained home surroundings, and poor personal cleanliness drove Nigerians by the nose. Through the auspices of colonial school education therefore, better awareness of personal hygiene and environmental care techniques were acquired. These have, no doubt, influenced the low death rates recorded in Nigeria during this era of the COVID-19 pandemic, reduced the spread of this faceless virus, and encouraged Nigerians to adapt to the various 'new normals' that have been introduced by WHO and other concerned agencies in charge of tackling the disease at this pandemic period.

Lessons from the British Educational Era

Under the subheadings that follow, we shall now discuss some of the great environmental care lessons introduced to Nigerians through colonial education:

Culture of Tree Planting

There is no doubt that Nigerian communities have been affected by excessive environmental degradations within the past couple of years. Poor attitudes to tree planting and reckless felling of priceless ancient trees count among the key factors that exacerbate this situation. The implication is that uncontrolled cutting down trees, as well as the growing cultures of disinterestedness to tree planting among Nigerians has done more harm than good to the natural environment. Among others, these poor human activities, which include poor mining activities, unplanned infrastructural developments, and other expansion activities, lead to disease spread among communities, exacerbate water shortage, cause excessive desertification, and create rooms for aggressive erosion and flooding among communities. These influence the activities of climate change in Nigeria, and most especially in the Niger Delta areas where excessive mining activities have exacerbated the situation so tremendously (Udezo, 2007; Isife, 2012; Nzeadibe, 2015).

Owing to these crippling developments, communities face adverse food shortages, drought, and excessive climatic changes. Communities, persons, and the natural environments become terribly depleted, with the effect that the natural environment suffers severe damage. Thus, it was the colonialists, through their models of education, introduced Nigerians to the lessons of tree planting. In their own thoughts, tree planting around our homes and in communities, as well as the controlled cutting down of trees preserve nature, provide food for humanity, supply timber for construction projects, provide steady supply of precious herbs for the production of medicaments, create wealth to their owners and communities, offer employment to persons, purify the environment with clean air, and save communities from excessive erosions, floods, and devastating wind attacks. For instance, recently, there were reports of coming floods by the Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency

(NIHSA), which could hit some states in the country, which include Anambra, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Kwara, Nasarawa, and Kogi (Aleke, 2007; Isife, 2012; Akowe, 2020, August 26th).

By engaging in organized tree planting activities therefore, the natural environments are protected and preserved, with the effect that spread of diseases, most especially the COVID-19 virus could be militated. This has become the great task in the hands of Nigeria's Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA). Whether Nigerians have committed themselves to abide by the regulations guiding the cultures of tree planting and tree felling within and around their environments is a matter for another day's discussion.

Love for Beautification of the Environment with Flowers

Through the corridors of colonial education too, Nigerians imbibed the cultures of planting beautiful flowers around their homes, offices, and public places. For one thing, flowers elevate the aesthetic nature of the surroundings where they are planted, improve the air quality, attract friendly insects around, dispel dangerous animals and pests, as well as provide economic power to their owners. Flowers add quality and inner strength to the human environment, and create healthy between humanity and nature (ACNEBTAD, 1925).

It was in appreciation of these factors that public places such as parks, schools, healthcare facilities, offices, and other colonial establishments were bountifully adorned with beautiful flowers during the colonial era. This is a culture which has been fading away in some public spaces since these post-colonial years of unplanned human and infrastructural developments that have pervaded parts of Nigeria. Unfortunately, according to Onweluzo (2001), in Udezo (2007), Nigeria's colonial era beautiful flowers have been replaced with tar and cement concretes in parts of the country, most especially in the urban areas of the land.

Effective Water and Sanitation Exercises

As well, British colonial education introduced Nigerians to the cultures of proper water and sanitation exercises. Basically, these activities include regular clearing of our drainages, creation of water channels in our homes and communities, proper and regular

washing of the hands, careful disposal of all human wastes, as well as the erection of pit toilets in homes and public places. In the minds of the British government and their Christian missionary allies, these hygiene-driven practices protected the human environment from undue damage and pollution, aided persons to maintain clean practices, cut down on the spread and transmission of diseases among persons and communities, and guided citizens to maintain strong and healthy lives (Isife, 2012; Ejifugha, & Uwazie, 2014).

With these practices in place, Nigerians were supported to avoid all forms of open air defecation. Nigerians were motivated to wash their clothes, hands, and bodies regularly. They were also taught to engage in regular physical exercises, in order to remain in good and healthy conditions of life. In view of the recent developments connected with the pressure to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is every need to re-enforce these crucial lessons into the lives of Nigerians. There is the need to draw the attention of some 'doubting Thomases' among Nigerians that COVID-19 pandemic is real, and should never be conceded as one of those jingoistic slogans created by the government and some selfish politicians to create fear and havoc in the country. Healthy water sanitation exercises should therefore be taken more seriously in order to save more Nigerians from the deadly crutches of untimely death at this time when the entire globe is battling with the crippling effects of this pandemic.

Proper Planning of Construction Projects

Reports of building collapse, erection of structures on unapproved sites, incessant blockage of drainage lines, unprofessional channelling of water lines to residential areas, poor supervision of construction projects, unprofessional mining activities, as well as improper handling of construction jobs in parts of Nigeria, have become regular news in the country. These poor and unprofessional human activities have no doubt resulted to countless loss of human lives, depleted the nation's economic capacity, created opportunities for bribery and corruption among contractors, politicians, and government offices, as well as watered the grounds for the delivery of poor construction projects to the country. The regrettable

implication is that as these unprofessional activities are being executed, it is the environment that suffers the severe damage, even as communities and their members bear the ugly brunt (Aleke, 2007; Udezo, 2007; Isife, 2012).

This is therefore a wakeup call on Nigeria's professionals to stand up and be counted. At this period of the pandemic, shoddy construction jobs must never be approved and paid for, with the hard earned taxes of Nigerians. Mining and construction conglomerates must be held to account for the environmental catastrophe they create as a consequence of their numerous exploration activities in the Niger Delta areas of the country. Nigerians and construction firms who damage the country's drainage channels and approved waterways, as well as erect building structures on some unapproved sites should be made to face the laws of the land, irrespective of their political connections and monetary powers in the country. Professional quacks who parade themselves as managers and supervisors of construction projects in Nigeria, and specialize in securing their construction jobs through the backdoors, should be thrown out through the windows, and be prosecuted in the courts of the land too. By that, Nigeria's efforts to maintain healthy environments at this period of the pandemic, escape from the traps of untimely death in the hands of the COVID-19 virus could be made realizable.

Controlled Flaring of Gases, Hazardous Chemicals, and Dangerous Wastes

Uncontrolled and unprofessional flaring of gases into the environment constitutes another major cause of pollution in our environments. By that, mining conglomerates in Nigeria who pump gases and dangerous chemicals into the air, and also dump chemical wastes careless on the environment are culpable. Manufacturing industries, factories, as well as users of rickety machines and motor vehicles are also guilty of these dangerous human activities. Specifically, uncontrolled flaring of gases and chemicals into the open air create breathing difficulties in community members, most especially the elderly and persons with confirmed bronchial diseases such as asthma and tuberculosis. These cause severe physical and

ecological damage to the environment, destroys food-producing farmlands, pollutes the waters and oceans, and destroys wild life (Aleke, 2007; Ezeibe, 2011; Igwe, 2012; Isife, 2012; Aniche, 2016). The poor and dangerous human activities are detrimental to healthy living in communities, and must be discouraged with impunity, as was elaborately emphasized by the curricula contents of colonial education (Lugard, 1922; Ike, 1953, October 14th). The then curricula of school education emphasized in categorical terms that pushing dangerous chemical wares, fumes, gases, as well as the pumping of hazardous industrial waste products recklessly on the environment destroy nature, and make the environment uninhabitable for wild animals and aquatic plants. They expose human communities to the attacks of diseases.

These opinions were strongly supported by Nwankwo and Ogagarue (2011), in Aniche (2016), who confirms that communities that are affected by these dangerous activities, most especially in the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria usually record growing numbers of persons with asthma, cough, chronic bronchitis decreased lungs functions, difficult and painful breathing, and ultimately, premature deaths. In such communities, there are cases of acid rains, which are corrosive to metal roofs of buildings, acidified waters and streams, and destruction of the vegetation.

It is against these backgrounds that the ethics of proper environmental care reject and preach against all forms of uncontrolled flaring of gases and dangerous chemicals and industrial wastes, as well as the reckless dumping of dangerous chemicals on unapproved sites. These create catastrophic environmental situations in communities, and expose lives to great danger. In this era of the COVID-19 pandemic therefore, the perpetration of these unprofessional human activities should be discouraged and brought under strict control. It is by doing these that the numerous regulatory activities of the government, which aim at eradicating the Corona virus from Nigeria within the shortest possible time could be attained in practical reality.

Effective Sanitary Inspection Activities

In view of the enormity of the challenges and healthcare complications created by the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and at the global levels, there is need to commence strict environmental inspection activities in all communities of Nigeria. Specialized teams of health officials need to be created and positioned in all rural and urban communities in Nigeria, and charged with the responsibilities of inspecting and accessing the environmental situations of different communities. These motorized teams should be mandated to inspect the sanitary dispositions and facilities in homes, offices, and public places (Panes, 1936, Dec. 31st). This used to be the practice during the colonial and post-colonial era in Nigeria, and should be re-activated in homes, communities, and public places in view of the rampaging pandemic the country is battling with at the moment.

Such team of sanitary inspectors should be trained to mobilize and motivate, community members, as well as create wider awareness about the need to maintain strong hygiene at home and elsewhere always. To that end, Nigerians must re-commit themselves strongly to regular environmental cleanup exercises around their homes and workplaces without necessarily waiting until the official date approved by the government. The teams should also be assigned with the responsibilities of equipping their members with powerful knowledge of personal hygiene practices, and most especially, sensitize members of different communities on the dangers of open defecation. At that, strong sanitation teams should also be despatched to schools and educational institutions where they could interact with young learners who deserve to be properly informed and educated on the basic principles and ethics of caring for the environment, most especially at the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the post-colonial years in Nigeria, school children were given these quintessential lessons by their teachers, which formed part of the educational curricula (Ike, 1953, October 14th). In this era of the COVID-19 pandemic, these have become essential in view of the need to save the lives of Nigerians from this dangerous virus which seems unrelenting. In some parts of the globe, the disease continues to spread among communities, despite all the lofty efforts

made to bring it under control. The virus seems to defy medical efforts and scientific discoveries to bring it under total control. There is no doubt however that if the Nigerian government is able to push out a trained team of environmental inspectors into different communities, who should be mandated to educate citizens, as well as make on-the-spot assessment of the hygienic conditions of the environments, the country's efforts to minimize the spread of the disease, and possibly eradicate it from the country could be made realistic soon.

Conclusion

The ugly presence of the COVID-19 virus in Nigeria is real. Its effects and dangerous activities are real, and have been felt in different parts of Nigeria. The practical reality of this dreadful disease, as well as the life threatening attacks it has confronted Nigeria and the entire world with, within the past months which followed its inglorious arrival into the human community, is never an exaggeration. It is not even a political tool of manipulation created by politicians to pressure fear into ordinary innocent citizens of this country. The disease and its dangers are global catastrophes which must be dealt with appropriately. By abiding ourselves strictly to the simple basic regulations approved by the WHO and Nigeria's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the country could be spared from all further health challenges and untimely deaths which result from the attacks of this virus on our citizens.

Simple compliance to strict environmental care, adoption of strict personal hygiene, engagement in regular exercises, eating the right foods, as well as maintaining social distancing from our friends and loved ones, could see the nation through the woods. It is said that knowledge is power. At that, the truth becomes clearer that a practical application and adaptation of the knowledge we gain into regular life activities turns into a life saving apparatus. The vast wealth of healthcare knowledge which Nigerians have gained from renowned authorities since the birth of this infamous virus could assist Nigerians transform themselves, live healthier lives, create stronger wealth, and adapt the various tools of the modern electronic technology into powerful instruments of jobs creation and wealth

generation. Following the unfortunate birth of this crippling COVID-19 virus, invaluable lessons have been learnt, even as the inexhaustible powers of the electronic technology have been pushed to their peak levels, with the effect that the introduction of a number of 'new normals' have introduced the world to improved ways of maintaining life activities. At that, the education sector has been a great beneficiary, following the adoption and continued adaptation of the virtual learning technique all over the world at this critical period.

The Way Forward

Suggestions relevant for the advancement of Nigeria's environmental ethic include stricter environmental protection laws need to be enacted, and rigorously enforced in all Nigerian communities. Violators should be duly tracked down and prosecuted in the courts of the land. Environmental care sensitization units should be created in all local government areas of Nigeria, and should be mandated to embark on aggressive activities of sensitizing Nigerians on the need to take absolute responsibility for the care of their environments.

Environmental care should be incorporated into Nigeria's curricula of education, and should be made a compulsory study program for all learners at all levels of the education sector. Mining companies, oil and gas exploration firms, as well as factories should be held strictly accountable and responsible for their environmental pollution activities anywhere in Nigeria. They should be compelled to pay for any damages that are caused as a consequence of their deliberate and unprofessional activities in Nigerian communities.

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