Reversing the Trend of Environmental Pollution in Nigerian Churches: Ijebu-Ode as a Case Study

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Abstract

Environmental pollution resulting from human activities in Nigeria is hazardous to the health and wellbeing of the populace and must be curbed. The objective of this study is to identify the ways the church in Nigeria pollutes the environment and how, as a major instrument of societal transformation, can reverse the trend. The study finds that churches engage in the following acts of environmental pollution: disobedience to building and town planning regulations, noise, emission of generator and vehicle fumes, traffic congestion and illegal parking of vehicles, failure to plant green vegetation after completing building construction and unscientific methods of disposal of waste. Using Ijebu-Ode as a case study, this paper adopts the empirical method of research. It recommends that churches should engage in advocacy and training of her personnel and adherents on obeying laws on protection of the environment and invest in the scientific methods of waste disposal.

Keywords: Reversing the trend, Environmental Pollution, Churches.

1. Introduction

The environment is one's surroundings or external circumstances collectively, the aggregate of all external and internal conditions affecting the existence, growth, and welfare of organisms, Read, (2004). While environmental pollution has to do with the contamination of air, water and

land substances that harm us or our interest, Omidiwura, (2009). Human activities impact on the condition of the natural world and raises environmental concerns rightly referred to as environmental pollution because the air, water and land substances are contaminated. Leaving these activities unchecked harms man's interests though the initial intention of man in exerting pressure on the physical environment is to eke out sustenance and habitation. These activities correspondingly result in gains for man and pollution of the environment when not properly managed. The individual and various groups are responsible for polluting the environment.

Churches represent one of those groups. By the composition and nature of their programmes, they exert enormous pressure on the environment. A large number of persons concentrate in a restricted space or place within a particular time frame and this is repeated with regularity. The land is now being used for more than what it has being zoned for. Place of worship is used also for residential and economic activities simultaneously. Excessive noise is made, generator and vehicle fumes released and wastes generated not properly diffused. Adebayo (2013) opines that while the increase in number of devotees of religions is good, the adverse effects on the environment must also be considered. Utuama (1990) surmises that; this chaotic use leads to pollution if this pressure is not reconciled and diffused. It could lead to environmental pollution and hazard which are inherent in a chaotic use of land. Zoning schemes that separate contradictory socio - economic activities on land while putting conforming uses together have not been complied with. After all, needs of the moment take precedence over preserving the environment for future generations.

Despite the biblical regulations on the protection of the environment, some Christians believe they have a license to dominate nature and use the environment at will because the bible provides that man was created to be master over the rest of creation. In addition, they also disobey the Nigerian

Laws on environment protection. This attitude of churches impacts negatively on the environment and they must take action to redress the situation, otherwise, environmental pollution will continue unabated because churches who are agents of societal change instead of protecting the environment are also guilty of contributing to environmental pollution. Regulations on the protection of the environment were prescribed by God because he took time and special effort to put the environment in place and he appreciates what He created and does not want it abused. Some of the biblical provisions are;

i). In order to prevent deforestation that leads to global warming, Deuteronomy 20:19 provides that- When thou shall besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shall not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shall not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in siege. Iyede, (2009) avers that this regulation is both ecological and social, is very relevant in the face of today's mass deforestation. Tree preservation is one way of reducing the atmospheric temperature by assimilating the carbon-dioxide, while deforestation promotes global warning.

ii). In respect of air pollution, two regulations are relevant. Deuteronomy 21:23 on burial of corpses, that provides that: His Body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shall in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance. While Deuteronomy 23:13 on proper disposal of feaces provides that: And thou shalt have a paddle upon thy weapon; and it shall be, when thou wilt ease thyself abroad, thou shalt dig therewith, and shalt turn back and cover that which cometh from thee. The above prescriptions and the burying of other human wastes prevent air pollution, so that air that is necessary for breathing would perform its function.

iii). Sabbatical and fallow rest for the land preventing degradation are provided for in Exodus 23:10-11 and Leviticus 25:1-5 that the land must observe a Sabbath of rest which is the seventh year in which there must be no organized farming, sowing, weeding or reaping. The land after being farmed for six years must be left fallow in the seventh year. The fallow is advantageous in that it allows the land to recover itself after resources have drawn out of it for six years. The essence of this arrangement is to prevent degradation of the land through excessive farming which is a form of environmental pollution.

2. Nigerian Laws on Environmental Protection

In the Nigerian context, the following are the major laws on environmental protection;

i). The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999. The environmental objective of the government is enshrined in Section 20 which provides that: The State shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air, and land, forest and wild life in Nigeria. From the above, it is evident that the government will do everything within its power to prevent environmental pollution and on this basis; structures have been put in place to actualize these objectives.

ii). Land Use Act, Cap 202 Laws of The Federation of Nigeria. This law regulates the transfer and use of land by removing absolute ownership from individuals and conferring it on the State Governor who holds it in trust for the people and controls transfer and use of land. The law also assists in protecting the environment and prevents pollution when the provisions are adhered to. Section 9(4) provides that; The terms and conditions of the certificate of occupancy granted under this Act and which has been accepted by the holder shall be enforceable against the holder and his successor in title, notwithstanding that the

acceptance of such terms and conditions is not evidenced by the signature of the holder or is evidenced by the signature only or, in the case of a corporation, is evidenced by the signature only of some person purporting to accept on behalf of the corporation. The purport of this section is that terms and conditions are provided in the certificate given to the holder of the occupancy in respect of use and transfer and these protects the environment when complied with, and any violation attracts penalty.

iii). Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act 1988. The objective of the government in setting up this agency is in Section 4 that listed the functions of the Agency. The main function is the protection and development of the environment in general and environmental technology, including initiation of policy in relation to environmental research and technology. The agency is to also advice the Federal Government on national environmental policies, prepare periodic master plans, cooperate with similar bodies in other countries, cooperate with Federal and State Ministries and Local Government Councils.

The most important aspect of this law are in Sections 15 to 20 where the Agency establishes National Environmental Standards that must be complied with. Section 15 prescribes that of water. Section 16 is on effluent limitations which deals with concentration of chemical, physical, biological or other constituents discharged. Section 17 deals with air quality, Section 18 is on ozone protection, Section 19 is on noise control, while Section 20 deals with discharge of hazardous substances. Under Section 24 of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency Law, States and Local Governments are to set up their own Environmental Protection Bodies for the purpose of maintaining good environmental quality in the areas of related pollutants under their control.

iv). Urban and Regional Planning Laws (Town Planning Laws of the various States): They indicate the types of building that can be constructed in specific locations and the conditions that must be met.

v). Monthly Environmental Sanitation Laws of State Governments: Usually last Saturday of the month and a specific day during the week. These are exercises designed by law where it is compulsory for the populace to clean up their environment on specific days thereby preventing environmental pollution.

3. Churches Culpability in Environmental Pollution.

Defining the church, Dusing, (2000) posits that, the church comprises those who have been called out of the world, out of sin and isolation from God, and through the redemptive work of Christ have been gathered as a community of faith that shares in the blessing and responsibilities of serving the Lord. According to Ngewa, (2006) the church is placed on earth for a mission and the believers are called upon to stop the world's moral decay and to point people to the true light who changes lives. The need to gather and be instructed becomes imperative and church can refer to one's local fellowship or denomination. This regular gathering together of people in churches contributes to environmental pollution in the following ways:

i). Interpretation of Genesis 1:28 by Christian leaders. Abogunrin, (2009), surmises that this verse is interpreted as if God has given man the mandate for a tyrannical control of nature. They suppose therefore, that this gives believers a license to dominate nature and to damage the environment at will because man was created to be master over the rest of the creation. This claim to divine authority by Christians to dominate other men and nature in order to meet their needs leads to exploitation and wrong use of the environment.

ii). Deforestation: Most churches (and other organizations) clear the forests for purposes of construction without replanting trees and other green vegetation in order to preserve the environment. This is contrary to Deuteronomy 23:13-14, this leads to air pollution, because air is no longer performing its primary aim of providing source of life for the living. Ottuh (2018) avers that churches must engage in tree planting on their landed properties as replacement of the ones cut down. Iyede (2009) posits that burning of grasslands and forest also contribute to pollution and elevated levels of carbon-dioxide in the atmosphere, this leads to Global Warming which is the increase in the average temperature of the Earths near-surface air and oceans in recent decades and its projected continuation.

iii). Failure to comply with Town and Country Planning Laws. Churches and denominations particularly those with large membership holding both indoor and outdoor programmes regularly contribute directly to environmental pollution by their chaotic use of land. Overcrowding results where large number of people congregate in a place for worship and prescription of minimum plot size and room dimension for places of worship are not complied with. Utuama, (1990) avers that the prescriptions of minimum plot size and the room dimensions for every type of building whether in residential, commercial, industrial, mixed-used, educational, medical institutions or places of worship is an important device for checking over-crowded urban neighbourhood. The concept of zoning in Town and Country Planning Laws which is to separate conflicting uses of land is not complied with by some churches. The consequence is that land is used for worship, economic and residential purposes all at once. If this pressure is not reconciled and diffused, it could lead to environmental pollution and hazard which are inherent in chaotic use of land. Some churches do not undergo Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before being established in their location and eventually their presence impacts

negatively on the environment. Ayantayo, (2009) surmises that Environmental Impact Assessment is a formal process of evaluating how the activities of people in an environment affect everything therein in the given environment, this helps to fashion environment policy that would enhance good environment desirable for all.

iv). Traffic Melee. Large number of vehicles heading in the same direction conveying worshippers to attend religious programmes usually result in traffic melee or bumper to bumper movement of the vehicles and a large and steady release of vehicular emissions into the atmosphere polluting the air. It is beyond dispute that the chief source of air pollution is the motor vehicles, Akanki (1990). The slow movement of vehicles causes them to overheat and brake down on the congested roads and further compound the problem. Neighbours of religious houses experience inconveniences because most do not comply with town and country planning laws by having parking spaces, but park their vehicles on the roads and heighten traffic congestion. The churches in addition to polluting the air with vehicular emissions also do the same with the use of generating sets. According to Adesanya (2011), exposure to carbon monoxide could lead to asthma, bronchitis, lung and heart diseases and respiratory allergies.

v). Noise Pollution. Some churches are in the habit of making excessive noise particularly in the wrong places by the nature of their activities. Noise produced by human activities should not be out of tune with the character of the neighbourhood, such that noise suitable for an industrial area is produced in a residential area. Ononugbo and Avwiri (2019) surmises that noise pollution is an unwanted or undesirable sound in peripheral environment and some of the adverse effects on man are impaired sleep and behaviour, work efficiency, heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory rate. Ayantayo, (2009) avers that continuous exposure to such excessive noise through the use of

microphones and loudspeakers causes irreversible hearing loss, disruption of normal activity and general annoyance.

vi). Disposal of Wastes. Activities of Christian bodies that engenders a large gathering of people spanning long periods, some amounting to days and weeks, of necessity produces wastes that pollutes the land, because they are unwanted materials or wastes on land. According to Omidiwura, (2009) they include; paper, cardboard, pure water and biscuit packages. Others are food leftovers, fruit peals, cans, bottles, plastic and nylon. What the churches do is merely a transfer of pollution from one point to another and does not solve the problem of pollution. Burying of wastes that can decompose as provided in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 for dead bodies is appropriate but technological advancement has produced materials that refuses to decompose such as bottles, cans, plastic and nylon. These materials can be recycled, but the churches are not yet equipped to do that. Most religious organizations are equipped with toilets that properly dispose of human faeces. Apart from burning, the most common method accepted to dispose of waste produced by church programmes is by dumping; on the contrary the same dumping is responsible for land pollution.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The objective of this paper is to investigate the involvement of churches in environmental pollution in Ijebu Ode and how the trend can be reversed. Therefore copies of questionnaire were administered in Ijebu Ode, 96 in all. In order to have an even spread, Ijebu Ode was divided into 4 zones; north, south, east and west, (using Arigbabu Roundabout as centre point, Folagbade Road/Ibadan Road for North and South division and Abeokuta Road/New Road for East and West division) while churches were divided into 4 groups namely; (i) Mainline (Anglican, Methodist and Catholic Churches). (ii) Pentecostal (Assemblies of God Church, Redeemed

Christian Church of God and Foursquare Church). (iii) African Indigenous (Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Celestial Church of Christ and Aladura Church). (iv) Evangelical (Baptist Church, Evangelical Church Winning All and Seventh Day Adventist Church). Each church pastor or representative of the 12 churches mentioned above received a copy of the questionnaire in each of the 4 zones in Ijebu Ode making a total of 48 and a church neighbour of the 48 churches also received a copy of the questionnaire, totalling 96 copies. Of the copies retrieved, 92 were found good enough and used for this paper.

Biographical data of the respondents
Males were 54 while 38 were females. Clergy were 39, self-employed 29, office workers 18 and 6 were students. With respect to their ages, 28 were 20 – 40 years, 48 were 40 – 60 years and 16 were 60years. Church representatives were 44 while church neighbours were 48.

Below are the responses according to the Research Questions;

i) The perception of people in Ijebu Ode on environmental pollution. A total of 95% responded positively that environmental pollution is contamination of air, water and land substances. On whether human beings are responsible for this contamination, 97% responded positively. A total of 94% responded positively to the fact that the contamination affects the health of human beings negatively. The positive responses show that the people in Ijebu Ode understand the meaning of environmental pollution.

ii) The ways the environment is polluted in Ijebu Ode. The fact that in Ijebu Ode refuse is dumped in gutters, roads and unapproved dump sites received 98% positive responses. The use of generators and vehicles which release carbon monoxide into the atmosphere is another way of polluting the environment received 98% positive

responses. A total of 90% positive responses were received to the statement that some do not replant vegetation when a piece of land is cleared for building construction. The statement that some use residential buildings for churches, shops and schools at the same time received 96% responses. A total of 93% responded positively to the statement that the use of loudspeakers disturb the sleep of some people. The positive responses received to the above statements confirm that in Ijebu Ode, the environment is polluted through dumping of refuse indiscriminately, use of generators and vehicles, failure to replant green vegetation, using a building for more purposes than only residential and using loudspeakers.

iii) How churches in Ijebu Ode are involved in environmental pollution. The statement that church premises in Ijebu Ode are used for worship, residence, schooling, and trading at the same time received 87% positive responses. A total of 87% positive responses were also received to the statement that churches disturb the environment with the noise of generators and loudspeakers. The statement that some churches pollute the environment with fumes of generators received 79% positive responses.

A total of 92% agreed that church premises are without parking space and their members park vehicles on the road. The statement that churches dispose of their refuse by burning and also dumping in unapproved dumpsites received 67% positive responses. A total of 95% responded positively to the statement that churches paste posters of their programs indiscriminately across Ijebu Ode. The positive responses confirm the following as methods where by churches in Ijebu Ode pollute the environment; using church premises for more than one purpose, noise of generators and loudspeakers, fumes of generators, parking vehicles on the road, burning refuse and also

dumping them in unapproved sites and through indiscriminate pasting of their posters.

iv) The effects of environmental pollution caused by the churches in Ijebu ode. A total of 96% responded positively to the statement that people do not have good sleep because of noise pollution. Illegal dumping and disposal of waste causes epidemic disease like cholera received 96% positive responses. The heat that makes people uncomfortable is caused by environmental pollution received 78% positive responses. A total of 83% agreed that overcrowding of premises leads to people contacting diseases like tuberculosis. It is agreed that the effects of environmental pollution caused by churches in Ijebu Ode are; people not having good sleep as a result of noise being made, epidemic disease like cholera results from illegal dumping and disposal of waste, heat that makes people uncomfortable and people contacting diseases like tuberculosis because of overcrowding of premises.

v) How can the activities of churches in Ijebu Ode in polluting the environment be reversed? The statement that churches are agents of positive change in the society and the members should be educated in carrying out that duty received 100% positive responses. A total of 95% agreed that churches should engage in advocacy and training of their members on how to protect the environment. The statement that churches should obey the law on the protection of the environment received 98% positive responses. A total of 96% responded positively to the statement that churches should engage in scientific methods of waste disposal. Therefore, the churches in Ijebu Ode can reverse their activities in polluting the environment in the following ways; churches being educated on their roles as agents of positive change, churches training their members on how to protect the environment, churches obeying the law on environmental protection and finally churches

must engage in scientific methods of waste disposal instead of indiscriminate disposal of waste.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Churches are culpable in the environmental pollution saga through their disobedience to environmental protection laws, chaotic use of premises, and lack of mechanisms for scientific disposal of wastes. It is imperative that they desist from further polluting the environment and engage in trend reversal processes being agents of societal transformation. They must inculcate in their members and the society at large the proper use of the environment in ways that enhances its protection. It is recommended that:

i. Church leaders should be given proper theological training in order to carryout correct biblical interpretation so that errors such as misinterpreting Genesis 1:28 will be corrected and the church will see herself as manager of God's resources and not a destroyer.

ii. There should be enlightenment of both Clergy and Laity on environmental concerns through preaching, lectures, seminars, television and radio programmes and journals thereby making Nigerian Christians change their negative attitude to the environment to a positive one.

iii. Churches must be involved in the campaign against environmental pollution and support government, private initiatives, international policies and laws on the care of the environment.

iv. Churches should be law abiding

v. Churches must expend labour and finance to make nature and environment safe by complying with town planning laws such as the use to which the land can be put, approved size, provision of parking

space. They should make use of large buses to convey members instead of each family attending programmes with their personal vehicles. They must comply with the approved noise level, plant trees and green vegetation on their premises, and dispose their refuse in approved dumpsites. Where possible, engage in scientific methods of waste disposal including recycling and turning them into useful materials.

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