PROFILE

Government Policy and Environmental Protection in the Developing World: The Example of Nigeria

BOYOWA A. CHOKOR
Department of Geography & Regional Planning
University of Benin, P.M.B. 1154
Benin City, Nigeria

ABSTRACT / Environmental protection is a topical and controversial issue of contemporary Third World development. As a result of the growing crisis of environment and development as well as issues of global environmental balance, divergent views and proposals have been put forward by external governments, international agencies, and environmental groups in resolving the environmental degradation problems of the developing world. However, very little appraisal has been made of the efforts by indigenous Third World governments in facing up to their environmental conservation issues. This article examines the role of past and recent government environmental control policies and programs in Nigeria. The article analyzes three aspects of environmental protection: (1) the theoretical economic bases of environmental protection and the Nigerian approach to environmental protection, including traditional values and modern institutional control measures, the latter embracing nature conservation efforts; (2) environmental considerations in national development plans; and (3) the evolution of a federal environmental protection agency and a national policy on environment. Finally, the article discusses the future challenges and directions for environmental policy.

For some time now, considerable debate, especially in Western industrialized countries, has focused on the politics of environmental protection. Among ecologists and environmental economists, there is little consensus over ways of achieving a balance between environment and development and for protecting the aesthetic ambience of both contemporary and historical man-created landscapes (although the concept of sustainable development has been proposed; see OECD 1990, O'Riordan 1985a,b). While much of the debate has had an exclusively Western focus, in the last decade or so, some attention has shifted to the politics of preserving representative natural areas in developing states. Western conservationists and environmentalists have argued that most Third World states have been slow in initiating a clear agenda for environmental protection. The emerging view is that such states may be encouraged or even constrained to show greater interest in preserving representative natural areas if Western industrialized countries apply the right economic incentives or appropriate pressures, for example, linking development aid or debt relief measures to identifiable programs of environmental conservation (Cartwright 1985, Walker 1985, O'Riordan 1981).

Although such views have helped to focus greater attention on conservation issues and the growing crisis of environment and development in the Third World, the impression too often may have been conveyed that developing states are making little or no contributions at all in protecting their environment. Western reports may have overstressed the environmental consequences of natural resources use and economic development while ignoring the role and efforts of Third World governments and public-spirited groups in facing up to the task of heritage site and natural habitat protection. Thus Westerners know very little of environmental conservation efforts in the Third World.

Additionally, an appraisal of the environmental policies and programs of individual states is certainly desirable if a broader understanding of the problems and prospects of environmental protection in the developing world is to be attained. As Cartwright (1985, p. 179) rightly opined, the ultimate decisions on whether to preserve natural ecosystems rest with sovereign Third World states and the people themselves. The central purpose of this article, therefore, is to review the nature of indigenous government policies on environmental protection in Nigeria, with a view to highlighting the achievements and limitations. Such a review could facilitate the identification of the areas of

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cooperation with international agencies and other national environmental groups that are interested in environmental protection in the developing world. The role of nongovernmental organizations in environmental conservation had already been reviewed by Chokor (1991).

Environmental Protection and Economic Development: The Theoretical Content

Environmental quality is undoubtedly a theme of contemporary global concern. In the past, emphasis on environmental quality was readily associated with less interest in economic growth and development. However, with the sustainability debate of the 1970s and 1980s, this view has given way to a more holistic concept of the symbiotic relationship and interchanges between environment and economy. In the context of the developing world, aside from the issues of rapid population growth, emergent industrialization, and air, land, and water pollution, one of the most prominent environmental issues that have attracted attention in the recent period is the destruction of lowland tropical rain forests through human activities. The global interest in this issue has been spurred by three major factors: first, the role of deforestation in global weather change, most especially its contribution to the greenhouse effect; second, the loss of valuable natural habitats, wild plants, and animal species (Barbier 1989, Conable 1989, Barbier and Burgess 1989, Conway and Barbier 1989, Pearce and others 1989, 1988); and third, the biodiversity of tropical lands together with the high potential of the virgin tropical forests in preserving world's environmental heritage.

In recent times, as part of the overall effort to stimulate greater interest in environmental protection in the Third World, the concept of sustainable development has been pushed forward by Westerners and a number of international agencies and research/study groups as a viable ecological basis for more effective natural resource use and conservation and for achieving a balance between environment and economy (see, for example, Pearce and others 1990, Conway and Barbier 1989, World Bank 1990). Although the concept has generated a lot of controversy, with over 70 definitions and meanings (OECD 1990), the underlying goal is to ensure that there is a nonnegative change in the stock of natural resources and environmental quality over time. As Pearce and others (1990, p. 1) point out, this implies "a set of minimum conditions for development such that there is constancy of natural capital stock."

Most policies aimed at achieving sustainability have depended largely on a range of analytical and valuation techniques, including cost–benefit analysis (Bain 1973, Cooper 1981), the indirect assessment of the value of environmental resources through indicators of the negative impacts of exploitation, and as well as direct procedures using surrogate markets or asking people directly how much they are willing to pay (WTP) for certain environmental services. This latter approach relies on hedonic price assessments, time-travel cost analysis, and contingent evaluation (Pearce and others 1989, Barbier 1989). Such techniques help to ensure that natural resources and environmental services are assigned appropriate market values. Recently, for example, Aylward and others (1991) have argued that because environmental resources were traditionally not marketed, there was the tendency for gross underpricing and consequently the onset of external diseconomies and market failures. Environmental economics with associated evaluation techniques has thus developed as a field to focus the challenges of contemporary environmental degradation. While most of the techniques of evaluation are designed to assess the social costs of the environmental component of development as well as the costs of effecting corrective policies, for example, in the area of technology, project design, and the development of substitute products, the ultimate goal is to arrive at some set of policies aimed at minimizing the level of environmental pollution and enhancing resource integrity. Globally, but particularly in the West, this has meant the adoption of number of broad policy packages in the area of population growth control, setting scientific and legal limits on pollution levels, providing a range of subsidies and incentives to those industries adopting clean technologies, imposing pollution charges and a range of taxes including Pigouvian taxes on industry to ensure some optimal or acceptable levels of pollution, and redefining property rights such that environmental damage costs that previously were external now become internalized (Obadan and Chokor 1991, pp. 2–3, Pearce and others 1988, 1990).

In light of the preceding discussion, a major goal of policy evaluation will be to examine the contexts in which environmental policies and programs have been formulated and implemented in the developing world and the extent to which sustainability and the new environmental economics have been embraced. The rest of the article will therefore review the relationship between environment and economic development in Nigeria and in relation to the theoretical and practical policy issues raised thus far.