



Assessing the Roles of Pressure and Vigilante Groups as Environmental Variables for Sustainable Environmental Development in Nigeria

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Received November, 2019, Accepted January, 2020, Published March, 2020

Abstract

This study examined the role of pressure and vigilante groups in promoting environmental quality. The objective is to justify the pressure/vigilante groups as variables affecting the environment. The objective of the study is achieved by examining the concepts of environment, environmental variables, pressure and vigilante groups and the relationship between the environment and pressure/vigilante groups. Base on the identified role of pressure and vigilante groups in protecting environmental sustainability. The paper after examining these concepts, established that pressure groups and vigilantes are environmental variables. It is therefore concluded that pressure/ vigilante groups as environmental variables can be manipulated towards the promoting environmental sustainable. In view of the justification of pressure groups as environmental variables, the strengthening of environmental related pressure groups is suggested as a strategy toward the attainment of sustainable environment.

Key Words: Environmental variables, pressure/vigilante groups, environmental Sustainability.

Introduction

Environment, be it physical, social, economic or political is dynamic. It keeps changing over space and time depending on the variables operating within the environment. In a physical environment, biotic factors and anthropogenic factors may be responsible for the change, whereas, in a social environment, the culture, attitudes, government policy, and institutional structures may be the factors responsible for the changes. The changes in any environment are only possible when the stress afflicted in the environment is so great that the ecological balance is distorted. Man has been identified as the major agent of environmental change. Man in his effort to enhance his welfare has harvested the earth resources through his technological and industrial drive.

Consequently, exotic substances have been introduced into the environment which gradually degrades the environment. It is common to have widespread erosion (sheet and gully), acid rain, polluted waters and deforestation in many regions of the world.

The changing environmental conditions at regional, national and global levels have attracted attention of many individuals, groups and governments because of the consequences of the change. Issues concerning desertification, global warming, ozone depletion uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, environmental pollution etc. have attracted the interest of many individuals, groups and governments globally. However, the most vocal in drawing attention of the dangers of unsustainable environmental practices are the pressure groups. Some of these interest groups have metamorphosed into non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These pressure groups/vigilantes have influenced environmental policies all over the world as they promote environmental consciousness and play other roles. The role played by pressure groups and vigilantes in the promotion of environmental sustainability prompted the question, can pressure groups to be regarded as environmental variables?

It is the aim of this paper to examine the role of pressure groups and vigilante as environmental variables. Accordingly, the concept of pressure and vigilante groups as well as the concept of environmental variables would be examined. Finally, the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of pressure groups as environmental variables would be presented to enable objective conclusions to be drawn.

Pressure Groups and Vigilantes Concept

Burns, Macgregor, Peltgason & Croin (1981) defined pressure group as an interest group where members share certain common attitudes. Political scientists view pressure group as a group of people who have common philosophical values or objectives which they pursue using force or dialogue with a view to achieving their goal. Sharma (2017) stated that pressure groups are interest groups and organizations distinguished by two traits-claiming to speak for the disadvantaged and the powerless segments of the society and placing heavy reliance on tactics like sit-ins, protest marches, demonstrations, civil disobedience and riots, all intended to dramatize their constituent’s

plight and to force concession and even support from the government or establishment. Pressure groups according to Durah (2001) are protest groups. They all protest (publicly objecting to) and urge the ending of certain government actions or inactions that they consider inimical to their interest. Oyovbaire (2001) in identifying the mode of operation of pressure groups stated that it is one but only mode of political actions that a group may use in pursuing its objective. The group may adopt various techniques to achieve what they want including the use of public demonstrations, hunger strike, industrial action, lobbying, civil disobedience, riots and sponsorship of members into sensitive public offices to win favour from established institutions.

People in every society belong to different types of groups some of which play significant roles in the governing process. The groups may be aggregate of individuals, like consumers association, sharing one or more common characteristics. An interest group may have members who are conscious of their common characteristics and who to some extent, direct their behavior to promote the values or interest arising from those shared characteristics. Example is the Disable Association of Nigeria (DAN). An interest group may exist as a single formal organisation (Ibeanu, 2000). The group may be responsive to both internal and external relations to maintain economic and political current that flow across the nation.

Pressure groups are often organized around a vast array of issues. According to Balyer & Erkan (2019), pressure groups may be environmental, religious, professional, civil reform, ethic or racial bias. In Nigeria there are arrays of pressure groups that may fall within the underlisted groups;

- a) INTEREST GROUPS include the Nigerian Manufacturers Association (NMA), the National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS), the Consumers Association of Nigeria to mention but a few.
- b) PROFESSIONAL GROUPS include Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), the Forestry Association of Nigeria (FAN) etc.

- c) RELIGIOUS GROUPS includes the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) among others.
- d) GENDER GROUPS include National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) and others.
- e) ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS include the Forestry Association of Nigeria (FAN), Nigeria Conservation Foundation (NCF), Nigerian Association of Geographers (NAG) etc.
- f) CIVIL REFORM GROUPS include Civil Societies of Nigeria and NADECO among others.

Vigilante Groups:- There is no much difference between pressure groups and vigilante groups. The Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary defines vigilante groups as a group of people who try to prevent crime and disorder in a given region. This means that vigilante groups are useful in promoting peaceful atmosphere in any given area (Ihonvbere 1993). Vigilante groups tend to be more militant in approach. Their technique according to Onimode (1996) is the use of force to achieve their objective. Their actions are often spontaneous and short lived. The members who join the group respond to selective incentives that appeal to their particular values and when ever the incentives lose their appeal or their personal resources fail, they drop out voluntarily. Vigilante groups are in most cases restricted to certain localities (Oyovbaire, 2001). Vigilante groups are a common feature in the Niger Delta Region. Examples of these groups include, Egbesu Youth Council, UAD, BAYOF, IJCHR, IJA and OJF to mention a few. The main objective of the groups was for resource control and fundamental transformation of the Niger Delta as could be seen in their manifestoes (Ifeka, 2000). The vigilante groups emerged as a response to the perceived deprivation of the region in the mist of environmental degradation arising from oil exploration and exploitation. Some of these groups play advocacy and mediatory roles in environmental matters (Selden, Forest & Lockhart, 1999).

Pressure groups and vigilante groups play important roles in promoting good environmental standards. They sanitize the populace on environmental matters. They serve as “watch-dogs” in environmental matters and draw attention to the consequences of some environmental practices. At global level some pressure groups have metamorphic into Non-Governmental Organisations

(NGOs). At that level they play vital role in influencing global environmental policies and thus promoting compliance to environmental standards.

Environmental Variables:- Schandi, Hatfield-Dodds, Wiedmann, (2016), stated that a variable is a mass or element or a process which is capable of influencing the behavior of a phenomena. It is an element or feature that is liable to vary or change when manipulated. A variable may have a direct relationship with another variable and consequently influence the behavior of the other variable. Variables therefore may be dependent or independent. In any relationship, any element whose behavior depends on external conditions is referred to as a dependent variable. While the element or mass that influence the behavior of the other variables is known as independent variable (Taner, 2014).

Environmental variables can be explained as elements (actions) which are capable of causing a change in the behavior of a given environment. In other words, any process or activity which is impacting positively or negatively in the environmental process to the extent of changing the original form of the environment is referred to as environmental variable. The question one may ask is what constitutes environmental variables? Schandi et al (2016) and Montgomery (2000) have argued that socio-economic factors have greatly influenced different environments of the world to the extent that primary environment is no longer existing anywhere in the globe. Trista and Trista (2015) further stated that there are different types of environments which include; physical, social, political, economic and cultural environments. Environmental variables therefore vary according to types of environment. Binder & Neumayer (2005) and Nelbel (1987) identify the following as environmental variables, climatic elements, location, attitude, relief among others; these variables are termed physical variables. Other variables such as social and cultural variables include; attitude of people and level of technological or industrial development. Generally, the human variable is a potent factor in environmental change. Man's actions have accelerated environmental degradation at regional, national and international levels. Impact of man on the environment cannot be ignored in environmental management (Smith and Connelly, 1999).

Justification of Pressure Groups and Vigilante as Environmental Variables

The school of thought known as environmental determinism viewed the environment as having a dormant influence on man to the extent that humans are completely living according to the dictate of the environment. This concept believes that man's behavior is entirely dictated by the environment. The environment is said to determine the culture, technology, settlements pattern, type of farming, occupation and mode of transportation of the people. The imperative of the environment on human was acknowledged by Gourou (1966) in the book tropical world. This school of thought emphasized that only environmental variables can cause a change in the ecology of a given region. Recent events in the world have proved this notion wrong.

Another school of thought opposed the idea of environmental supremacy and argued that, the environment is not so compelling to man. Rather, man has the ability to overcome environmental constraints. The environmental possibilism argued that humans have the ability to change or modify the environment to suit their purpose. Proponents of this concept have outlined instances where man has influenced the environment to include, deforestation, construction of underground tunnels under ocean floors, irrigation and dam construction to provide water in arid regions, land reclamation projects, redirecting river channels, excavation and refilling of some areas. Man is able to achieve these through technological advancements. The impact of man has been very pronounced since man's first appearance on earth. Hence, man has been regarded as a potent variable in environmental change. Consequently, the two schools of thoughts have provided a frame work for determining whether man is an environmental variable or not.

Pressure Groups as Environmental Variable

As earlier defined, a variable is any element or event which is capable of changing the behavior of another Schandi et al (2016). On the other hand, a pressure group is an entity whose members influence or even initiate a change in a society. Pressure groups and vigilante groups have been noted for influencing environmental policies at regional, national and international levels (Shiro, 1991). These groups achieved their objectives through dialogue, confrontation with

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established institutions. Oyeshola (1995) in acknowledging the role of pressure groups in promoting environmental consciousness asserted that pressure groups concern for global environmental problems led to the first ever United Nations Conference on the environment convened in Stockholm in 1972. The conference adopted the action plan for the Human Environment, resulting in the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1973. In this way a platform was created for the expression of environmental concerns. These concerns eventually influenced human perception of the environment and the need for sustainable management of environmental resources. This approach by the pressure groups and non-governmental organizations greatly influenced man's attitudes towards the environment and its resources. Okali (1989) argued that pressure groups as environmental variable have created environmental awareness among the populace such that citizens now know the dangers of environmental abuse within their communities.

Pressure groups and vigilante groups with environmental coloration have strived to improved environmental quality. Some interest groups have taken up the fight to stop the indiscriminate destruction of the environment through poor farming techniques, industrialization and over grazing. For instance, youths' protest which swept through the Niger Delta region in the 1990s has its source and tragic dynamism in the multiple environmental disorders (Gas flaring, oil spillage and non - sustainable resource exploitation) and skewed federal fiscal policy which favour non-oil producing majority ethnic nationalities, (Ibeanu 2000). The interest groups may protest over the degradation of their environment without adequate compensation from the multinationals and the federal government. Such a protest is a cry for justice as well as observance of environmental standards.

Pressure/vigilante groups at various levels have insisted on formulation of sound environmental regulations to control the exploitation of natural resources as well as control emission and discharges into the environment. Emission standards have been set such that ecological threshold would not be exceeded. These regulations have influenced the various ways

the environment is being exploited today, such regulations tend to control bush burning, gas flaring, industrial waste discharges, surface water exploitation as well as environmental pollution (air, water and land). These regulations have promoted environmental quality and practices.

In addition to the above, the actions of interest groups have enhanced international cooperation among countries of the world leading to the signing of treaties and environmental agreements. For instance, in 1990 through an agreement of contracting parties, UNEP agreed to accelerate the phase out of chloroflouro-carbons and other harmful compounds and to set up a fund of at least \$160 million over three years to help developing countries switch to less harmful compounds (Binder and Neumayer, 2005). These treaties have encouraged countries to take up environmental matters collectively. This is important because environmental hazards/problems such as atmospheric pollution or water pollution have no geographical boundaries.

Environmental groups such as the Green-peace, Friends of the earth, World Wild-Life Fund have grown into international sophisticated corporation. These bodies are capable of conducting research, embarking on political lobbying, carrying out effective media communications and actively policing the environment. These activities have influenced the way the environment is being used. Some of these non-governmental organizations emphasize on environmental monitoring with a view to promoting “clean environment”, Ukpong (2003).

Pressure groups and NGOs have played major roles in conservation and preservation of the environment. Hence, National Parks are established in many nations to conserve forest, watersheds and wildlife. Conservation and preservation of the environment have in turn protected biodiversity (flora and fauna) as well as the endangered species. The influence of pressure groups and vigilante in the environment are varied. Some are positive while others are negative. The critics of pressure groups opined that they represent only narrow, special and selfish interests (Balyer & Erkan, 2019). Secondly, Wolfgang (1993) argued that the more powerful the pressure groups are the less consideration is given to public interest. The proliferation of pressure groups in the Niger Delta region (the MOSIEND, MOSDOP, MOSI, MORETO etc) is a nuisance to the environment. The

scenario in the Niger Delta region is created by an environment which has suffered from deprivation, poverty, environmental degradation arising from oil exploitation (Ibeanu, 2000). Accordingly, as the pressure groups influence the environment so as the environment influenced the way the pressure groups operate.

Conclusion

Environmental variables are varied as the factors affecting environmental conditions. The list of environmental variables cannot be exhausted as they vary in time and space. While physical environmental variables may be identified to include, relief, attitude, location, humidity, soil type and fertility, the anthropogenic factors may have over bearing influence on all the physical variables. Hence, man is the most potent agent of environmental change. The attitude of man, his institutional arrangements, his quest for human welfare through harnessing of the earth resources have impacted on the original environment. Even the disposal of the bi-products of the resources (emissions, discharges and effluence) have contributed in polluting the air, water land and atmosphere to a scale that their thresholds are being exceeded.

Pressure/vigilante groups in pursuing their objectives have contributed immensely in promoting environmental awareness, conservation, preservation, protection and research. Accordingly, pressure groups have most often advocated for better environmental quality by insisting on stakeholders to keep to sets environmental standards and regulations. They serve as environmental watch-dogs, monitoring environmental activities and crying out when abuses are observed. Through the above activities and roles, pressure groups, vigilantes and non-governmental organizations function as environmental variables and are justified to be referred to as environmental variables.

The modes of operation of these groups are on the other hand influenced by the social, political, economic and cultural environments in which they operate. In areas facing deprivation, the pressure groups may be militant and regional based. If the deprivation is against women, the dormant groups will be gender bias. Generally, as pressure /vigilante groups are affecting the

environment so also is the environment affecting pressure groups mode of operation, roles and members. In all, it can be concluded that environmental pressure groups have been the most effective force for progressive environmental change and sustainable environmental management.

Recommendations

To improve the quality of the environment, the following recommendations are proffered;

- i. The activities of pressure and vigilante groups and their impact on the environment should be identified with a view to promoting environmental sustainability.
- ii. The activities of environmental and vigilante related groups should be regulated and monitored with a view to removing bias in their agitations towards the promotion of environmental friendly practices.
- iii. There should be international collaboration in the activities of environmental pressure groups with a view to promoting international best practices.
- iv. A large scale studies on the impact of pressure/vigilante groups on the environment should be conducted to enhance policy formulation.

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