PERSPECTIVES ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE SDGs IN FOCUS THROUGH A GEOGRAPHER'S LENS

Akpezi Okiemute Edewor
Department of Geography and Regional Planning, Delta State University, Abraka

Abstract
This paper examined the geographic view point on environmental and social justice with special emphasis in combating every form of environmental and social injustice. The major concern of the geographer in this regard is to ensure equitable distribution and allocation of social amenities and infrastructure, in line with the social development goal (SDG's) for a better and fulfilled life. The paper surmises that peace can only reign where there is social justice and equitable spatial distribution and allocation of resources. The role of the geographer in the clamour for social justice was highlighted. Major hindrances to the lopsided development in the socio-economic, political and environmental matters are a major indicator of injustice and inequity. The geographer and environmentalist therefore have a crucial role to play in restoring an equitable balance into the distribution of resources. In the wake of the geographer's effort, there also seem to be a silent coup against the geographer to subdue this clarion call from diverse interest groups.
Keywords: Geographer's Perspective, Environmental and Social Justice

INTRODUCTION

The geographer in combating all forms of social and environmental injustices in the society and those targeted towards the society and the geographic discipline are enormous. This research article therefore converges with the desire of scholars in the geographic discipline and their roles in combating all forms of environmental injustices in the society. In the 21st century, there exist a serious affront on environmental quality through indiscriminate disposal of wastes, harmful emission of poisonous gases, indiscriminate logging, unwholesome agricultural practices, oil spills, silting up of waterways with bandwagon effects that manifest in erosion, destruction of terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Spoonley et al: (2005) opined that social justice is a major instrument for social cohesion for both the human and the physical environment. In the same vein, Grosskurt: 2009 corroborated this view stating that regional sustainability is a major outcome of equitable special distribution and allocation of resources.

Justice is the quality of being right and fair (Umozunike 2007). In other words, to treat fairly, equity should be guaranteed. Geography and Regional planning is a discipline that focuses on man and environment (Pattison 2014) defined environment as the totality of all conditions surrounding him which includes forces of nature and of plants and animals surrounding him. There are two overwhelming views about man and its environment (Fedaku 2018) which are the deterministic and possibilist theory. The concept of environmental possibilism is of the view that man activities are controlled by the nature of the physical environment. For instance, people who live in water ways are constrained to build canoe whereas those who inhabit desert or rocky environment would not consider ideas of building canoes. The school of thought in geography is popularly referred to as the concept of "Environment Deterministic".

On the other hand, the possibilist, is of the view that though the environment offers possible courses of action, man is a major factor in altering the forces of nature to his own taste and preference. This implies that man can transform a desert into a forest or provide heat in extremely cold areas and make unconducive areas to be conducive. This is referred to environmental possibilism. The relationship between man and his environment has been examined to extreme case by two schools of thoughts. This has given rise to a third school of

thought which submits that man has his freedom of choice but only within the confines of the environment. The thrust of the probabilism theory is that "physical conditions are determinants of the probable course of actions but the ultimate decision is left with man's own will. The extent of environmental modification and control man wields on the environment is dependent on the nature of the prevailing physical, social, economic and political circumstances.

The inter-relationship between man and his environment for mutual co-existence for sustainable development is the major concern of the geographer (environmentalist, welfare social geography) and other spheres of the discipline which ensures equitable spatial distribution of population, exploitation conservation, and management of natural resources.

The general agenda adopted in September 2015, by the United Nation General Assembly for 2030 agenda as encapsulated in the seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNO 2015) emphasizes on the principle of leaving no one behind on the train of sustainable development. Social justice therefore plays an integral role towards the realization of the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The seventeen (17) sustainable development goals to transform the world are;

Goal 1	No poverty
Goal 2	Zero Hunger
Goal 3	Good Health and well-being
Goal 4	Quality Education
Goal 5	Gender Equality
Goal 6	Clean water and sanitation
Goal 7	Affordable and clean Energy
Goal 8	Decent Work and Economic Growth
Goal 9	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
Goal 10	Reduce inequality
Goal 11	Sustainable Cities and Communities
Goal 12	Responsible consumption and Production
Goal 13	Climate Action
Goal 14	Life Below Water
Goal 15	Life on Land
Goal 16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
Goal 17	Partnership to Achieve the Goal



United Nations Organization2015)

Technically and practically, the social development goals recognize and address every aspect of human existence and man's environmental interaction. The demand for social justice is therefore indispensible. Especially in mitigating the current affront on human rights through hazardous emission of gasses, gas flaring, land and water pollution and other unfriendly environmental practices that affect human existence and the environment negatively, without commensurate remediation strategies.

In a situation when the distribution of a social amenities and economic resources are intended to serve a group of people better, the set of persons who feel a sense of deprivation, are likely to demand justice for equitable distribution of resource. The government is the principle distributor of social amenities and also the extraction of resource of the environment. If the government is insensitive for the outcry for justice, this may lead to exasperation, civil disturbances, agitation, riots and other forms of social dishonesty in the environment especially where people feel a high sense of deprivation through excessive exploitation of the natural resources, without commiserate reward for their degraded, polluted and impoverished soils. This is one of the major reasons for social unrest and constant aggressive agitations in the Niger Delta (Edewor: 2016)

The peace and conflict resolution aspect of environmental studies connotes that peace cannot reign where justice is denied (Nnimmo: 2013) and the SDG 16 of the SDG's emphasis on peace and justice strong institutions. The clamour for social and environmental justice, which is a precursor for peace and national development is therefore appropriate in an era of civil disturbances and unprecedented violence such as kidnapping, insurgencies, environmental degradation, and outbreak of pandemics, as well as other environmental hazards induced by poor environmental management such as flooding, erosion acid rain, ocean acidification, hurricanes, tsunami and other environmental mishaps.

Since geographic discipline is such that focuses on man and his environment, and the distribution of social amenities in space, the geographer and environmentalist therefore has a role to play which includes advisory role to the government and for those who make and implement decision; it also addresses the issues of mitigating and remediation of lopsided development. Stiglitz: 2007 opined that hostilities and tendencies of breakdown of law and order are rife in societies where there exists a wide gulf of dichotomy between the rich and the poor, especially when the resources are collectively owned.

Malfunction of Social/Spatial Structures in Nigeria

In most parts of Nigeria, the social infrastructures on ground function below expectation as a result of poor maintenance, as experience in bad road network in nearly all part of the country. Others include lukewarm attitude to work and poor work ethics, which may also be orchestrated with poor working employment. While there is a seemingly general concern that the economic and political situation is presently at its lowest ebb, amidst the recant challenge of combating the recent outbreak of covid-19 pandemic currently ravaging the world. These challenges of inequity could be surmounted through proper management that could yield better result than it is at present. Justice demands that tax payers should reap the appropriate dividends of the social amenities and facilities for which they are taxed.

The situation across the country is that of stress and distress resulting from ailing and failing social amenities such as electricity, portable water supply, poor road network, health facilities, education and government industries. Environmental hazards continue unabated to disturb the citizenry of the country. Recent introduction to this environment imbalance also include the sprawl of poorly maintained internal displaced camps (IDP's) in Northern Nigeria, resulting, from *Boko Haram* insurgencies. The common man will constantly demand justice as per the reliability and functionality of the organizations charged with the responsibility of addressing environmental problems if not functionary, it is permissible to demand from justice on how taxes and other tolls are being spent.

Edewor (2016) noted that environmental degradation in the Niger Delta is real but that the demand for justice is reactionary with outright emotional outburst and political undertones. Furthermore, (Crushner and Brislin: 1997) corroborated this assertion and view point stating that the call for social amenities, clean environment, and social infrastructures is justifiable as it forms the basis on intercultural infractions. In Nigeria, industrial location in most cases runs counter to the dictates of the Weberian philosophy hence their constant malfunctioning. Alfred

Webers model of industrial location ensures that industries are located near the source of raw materials. Some colons in this regard are the steel plant in Delta State and other failed industries when the sighting of industries is preceded and beclouded with political undertones amidst tribal considerations and sentiments. There is bound to be uprising, dissatisfaction, friction and acrimonies. Wrong location of industries may also raise the cost of production considering the distance of movement of raw materials. The general populist who depends on the finished goods would also bear the brunt of the cost of production. These multiplier effects of wrong location of industries have been amply explained by Alber and Gould (1976), Davidson (1975), Lloyd Dickson (1972) and Inch 1986.

It is quite worthwhile to however state that the distribution of Health and Educational facilities has a better spread in the country when compared to industries and other basic infrastructures. For examples, the location of Central Hospital in Delta State in Asaba, Agbor, Sapele, Warri and Abraka are good intervening opportunities and complementary to reduce physical distance and friction experienced by referral patients.

The settlement zones for low income people/common man that are concentrated in slums and shanty town especially in areas like Lagos and Abuja remains a stinking eye sore even in the presence of functional industries, the presence of government is never felt. The geographer clamor for Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), Social Impact Assessment (SIA), and Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) that could possible X-ray the impact of location of industries are subtly ignored. This really calls for social justice.

On the contrast, the basic social amenities for decent life style in the reserved and preserved areas of the likes a functioning. A retrospective perspective at the history and the tortuous pathway to Nationhood in Nigeria has witnessed the common man in cities as rejected and dejected. It is suffice to say that those in the country side are forgotten.

Government reserved areas around cities are areas units for bourgeois in political or special government employs, who up in their balconies look down with disdain on the ill-fated common man, who struggle in the congested slums, where there is absolute dearth in basic social amenities with a vivid picture of deprivation and abject poverty.

The Niger Delta environment is not level out in this state of depression and deprivation as frequent oil spillage and illegal bunkering (modular refineries) always lead to land pollution, water pollution and other attendance health hazards as state by Ayouba (2004). (Harvey 1976) in his work on "Social Justice and the City" highlighted the features and indices of inadequate supply presence of basic amenities and the need for social justice in the urban and rural areas. The imbalance in the distribution of social amenities makes the common man to be transfixed in questions of how judicious the taxes and tolls collected are expended. Social and environmental justice has the answers to this rhetoric.

The Role of the Geographer in Correcting Social Spatial Structural Malfunctioning

Welfare and social geography is the branch of geography that maps out social and spatial variation in the quality of life as in puts in planning procedures and means of monitoring policies aimed at imploring the wellbeing of people Sada (1998), Mabogunje (1976) also opined that mapping of social amenities in space with a view to understanding the characteristics exhibited which could be ameliorated with field information that could proffer solution to ensure that mean equity distribution of social amenities is achieved. This would also ensure sustainable cities and communities as clearly indicated in the eleventh (11) Sustainable Development Goals.

In Nigeria a good numbers of scholars have been ever the years, have research on appropriate models and frame works for near equity distribution of social amenities. Notable among them are Mabogunje (1976) Sada (1988) and Harvey 1976, all these are talented towards a healthy mechanism to safeguard and presence the welfare of the Nation. Studies and data collected from researches on welfare variation and distribution of social amenities in space would

provide relevant data for implementation of findings from geographers. This will also help the government to implement such findings.

The Silent "Coup" Against the Geographers in the field – The Need for Justice

The role of the geographer in heralding the need for judicious allocation of social amenities is paramount in societal development. Based on this premise, the geographer should not be oblivious of the radical revolution that resulted in the paradigm shifts in geography in the 1950s (Awaritefe 2013). In this new age of the 21st century, the revolution should be such that would project the geographic discipline in the lime light, in tandem with the trendy Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), whose major focus is on a cleaner environment, safer environment and equitable distribution of social amenities. Peace can only override comfort when there is equitable distribution of resources.

As a world acclaimed spatial science, the geographer's role is key to spatial restructuring and organization; because it is a dynamic and active discipline. In spite of this grim reality about the discipline, there exist a "silent coup" against the geographer and even some geographers are major contributions to the state of affairs as identified below:

Some specialized professionals in the field of geography would not want to associate with Geography after being certified in Postgraduate programs as population experts, town planners, environmentalist, and cartographers. There is need for justice, therefore irrespectively of ones area of specialty, there is need to congregant to chant a common course; if not some egocentric persons may deliberately hijack our roles in the labour market under the guise that geography is passive whereas, it is an active disciple that is al embracing.

Photographs of Unethical and Inimical Environmental Practices



Fig. 1, Indiscriminate dumping of refuse
Uromi, Edo State



Fig. 2, Silted water cause (water hyncent)
Edjeba, Warri, Delta State



Fig. 3, Menace of water proof (sachet water)
Osubi, Warri, Delta Stat



Fig. 4, Sand Dredging
Oviorie, Delta State



Fig. 5, Indiscriminate Bush Burning
Abbi, Delta State

The geographers view point on environmental and social justice in tandem with the social development goals is a summation of the twenty-first century clamour for sustainable development and equitable distribution of resources which is a precursor to peace and National development.

Peace can only reign supreme in a country where there is social justice and equitable distribution of social amenities and where the citizenry are contented with prevailing quality of life.

References

Awaritefe, O.D. (2013). *Quantitative Methods in Geography: Statistical and Spatial Techniques*, Abraka, Delsu Publishers.

Ayouba, A.T. (2004). *Human Induced Soil Degradation in Africa. 8th ISCO Conference*, New Delhi, India.

Cushner, k. and Brislin, W. (1997), Improving Intercultural Interactions (vol. 2) London, Sage

Edewor, U.N.O (2016). Ibie'ka (Ideographs): Developing Visual Signs for Expressing Contemporary Niger Delta in an Era of Petroleum Oil Exploitation. An International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH), Vol. 5, No 19, Pp 136-148.

Fadaku, K. (2014). The Paradox of Environmental Determinism and Possibilism: A literature Review, Journal of Geography and Regional Planning 7(17)

Gould, P. eta all (1976). Spatial Organization: The Geographer's View of the World. London, Prentice/ Hall International.

Gruscurt, B. (2009) Regional Sustainability: Tools for Integrated Governance, Maasrtricht University, Maastricht

Harvey , D. (1976). Social Justice and the City. London, Harap

Mabogun, A.L. (1976). Regional Mobility and Re4source Development in West Africa (MCG.71), Queens University Press.

Mustiya, E. (2018). People, Peace and Partnerships, the Nexus that will Shape Africa's Prosperity. Foundation day Lecture, Oshun State University, Oshogo. Osun University Press.

Nnimmo, B. (2013). To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and Climate Crises in Africa. Cape Town, Pambuzuka Press

Odu, C.I.I. (1986). Oil Pollution and Environment. Bulletin of Science Association of Nigeria, 13(2).

Sada, P.O (1998). Development and Environment: A Conceptual Framework on Environmental Management. Ibadan, Evans Brothers Publishers LTD

Spoonley, P. et. Al (2005) Social Cohesion: A Policy and Indicator Framework for Assessing Immigrant and Host Outcomes. Social Policy Journal of New Zealand (24),

Stigltz J.E (2007). Rich Countries, Poor People? Wiley online Library

United Nations Organizations (UNO) (2015). Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution adopted in the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 (A/Res/70/1), New York