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Global Challenges on Environmental Sustainability: A Reflection on Policies and Applications

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Abstract:

The study evaluates global environmental sustainability challenges placing emphasis on policy formulation and commitment to policy implementation among stakeholders. It is imperative for public assessment and reporting of progress and commitment towards environmental sustainability. It is believed that measuring progress on sustainable development with reliable information is a key ingredient of the democratic process. It makes governments more accountable and gives people a tool to participate more actively in defining and assessing policy goals. The study using mainly secondary sources and content analysis concludes that, not much seems to have been done; the world leadership is still not ready to live up to expectation given the constant, consistent degeneration and destruction of our planet earth in geometric progression. It has become a collective responsibility for all entities to purposefully strive using all means to attract requisite attention that would compel responsible authorities to live up to expectation.

Keywords: Sustainability, growth, global warming, environmental degradation, development

1. Introduction

There is growing concern over the rapid change of our planet earth largely due to the human impact on the environment and the subsequent back lashed it has on the world. The high rate of environmental degradation and climate change posited a serious problem world over. Air contamination, water pollution, soil erosion, water scarcity, deforestation and loss of biodiversity. These challenges are on the increase in geometric progression in spite of the commitment of nations at individual, regional and global level, as well as the private hands. The effort towards addressing environmental challenges at international level started in earnest as far back as the late 20th century, the progress led to the establishment of World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). The commission was later renamed the Brundtland commission in 1987, the Brundtland Commission is to unite countries to pursue sustainable development together. Thereafter, series of agreements and commitment were made in several parts of the world; these efforts were geared towards addressing climate change.

To strengthen global response to the threat of climate change, countries adopted the Paris Agreement at the COP21 in Paris which went into force in November of 2016. In the agreement, all countries agreed to work to limit global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees centigrade. As of April 2018, 175 parties had ratified the Paris Agreement and 10 developing countries had submitted their first iteration of their national adaptation plans for responding to climate change. However, in spite of the commitment by nations and private bodies alike, there exist a very hug gap between verbal commitment and practical commitment that requires engaging resources and human mobilization towards achieving environmental liberation and sustainability, several crucial constraints exist and need to be tackled. Governments do play politics in addressing and commitment to environmental issues in spites of the glaring impact and level of destruction from climate change with its attendant impact on the economies of many nations' and loss of lives innumerable. Other factor has to do with weak institutional capacity to deal with those changes. This paper therefore, is set to investigate global approach to environmental challenges; determine the effects and extent of commitment to environmental challenges and sustainability reflecting on policies formulation and commitment to their implementation.

2. Objectives of the Paper

The main objective of the paper is to examine global commitment to environmental challenges and sustainability emphasizing on investigating policies formulation in relation to growing threat to the environment and determining level of commitment to policy implementation among stake holders (Nations and private organizations).

3. Methodology

The study uses mainly secondary sources of data and qualitative content analysis, therefore, the data collection for the study was through secondary sources from books and other documentary materials and the internet.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Environment

The environment at the beginning of the twentieth century simply denoted limited condition at home or in the workplace. However, the concept gradually evolved to circumscribe the complete interaction between man's activities and all components of the natural environment. The modern application of the term encompasses ecological, economic, aesthetic as well as ethical concern. According to Acho (1998) environment refers to "the total set of circumstances that surrounds an individual or a community, these circumstances are made up of physical conditions such as air, water and climate and landforms; the social and cultural aspects such as ethics, economics, aesthetics and such circumstances which affect the behaviour of an individual or a community". This definition seems elaborate and encompassing but has not captured some of the socio-economic variables that are part and parcel of the environment. The definition offered by Bayode et al (2011) has addressed this problem. In their definition, environment is made up of biophysical components and processes of natural environment of land, water and air including all layers in the atmosphere, inorganic and organic matters, socio-economic components and processes of human endeavors. The implication of this definition is the symbiotic relationship of all the elements of the ecosystem and that any distortion of their natural state may have negative effects on economic activities of the people.

While the World Bank (1991) refers to environment as the natural and social conditions surrounding all mankind including future generations, the Federal Environmental Agency in Nigeria (FEPA) (1994) states that environment include water, air, land, plants, animals, and human being living therein and inter-relationships that exist among them. Environment was also defined by the National Conservation and Environment Protection Act (1987) to include the physical factors of the surrounding of human beings, land, soil, water, atmosphere, climate, sound, odour, taste and the biological factors of animals and plants. From these divers' definitions, the environment can justifiably be said to be the physical, non-physical, external, living and non-living situations and natural habitat of man with several components within which various kinds of activities and processes occur.

5. Sustainable Development

The term sustainable development began to gain wide acceptance in the late 1980s, after its appearance in *Our Common Future*, also known as *The Brundtland Report*. The result of a UN-convened commission created to propose "a global agenda for change" in the concept and practices of development, the report signaled the urgency of re-thinking our ways of living and governing (OECD, 2008). Morelli (2011) defines environmental sustainability as meeting the resource and services needs of current and future generations without compromising the health of the ecosystems that provide them, ...and more specifically, as a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity.

The idea of sustainable development centre on two essential facts. First, is the realization that economic growth alone is not enough to solve the world's problems: the economic, social and environmental aspects of any action are interconnected. Considering only one of these at a time leads to errors in judgment and "unsustainable" outcomes. Focusing only on profit margins, for example, has historically led to social and environmental damages that cost society in the long run. But taking care of the environment and providing the services that people need depends at least in part on economic resources. At the core of sustainable development is the need to consider "three pillars" *together*: society, the economy and the environment. No matter the context, the basic idea remains the same – people, habitats and economic systems are inter-related (OECD, 2008, 2). Similarly, Zhen and Routray, (2003), sustainability normally involves three dimensions: the social, the environmental and the economic dimensions. It is also known as the people, planet, and profit dimensions respectively.

In more specific and action terms, sustainable development encompasses the following;

- Help for the very poor because they are left with no option other than to destroy their environment
- Self-reliant development within natural resource constraints
- Development that does not degrade environmental quality nor reduce productivity in the long run
- The great issues of health control, appropriate technologies, food self-reliance,
- Clean water and shelter for all
- People centered initiatives as people are the resources in sustainable development.

Sustainable development has three dimensions; economic, environment and social. In a sense, these dimensions refer to sustainable qualitative improvements and integrated sustainable growth in the quality of life, the economy, society and environment

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (also known as the Brundtland Commission). In its report *Our Common Future* (1987), defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 43). Since 1987, there have been numerous definitions and interpretations of sustainability and sustainable development, reflecting the diversity of values and opinions on its theory and practice (Johnston *et al.*, 2007). Underscoring the many viewpoints is the interpretation that sustainable development is a long-term endeavour involving the integration of three interconnected pillars: environment, society and economy.

Sustainable development has great implications for how governments, companies and citizens perceive their activities, roles and responsibilities. The interconnected nature of sustainable development implies that these actors cannot pursue economic growth strategies without considering and integrating the social and environmental implications of their actions and decisions. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008) characterizes sustainability in three ways:

- A conceptual framework: a way of changing the predominant world view to
- One that is more holistic and balanced;
- A process: a way of applying the principles of integration – across space and
- time – to all decisions; and
- An end goal: identifying and fixing the specific problems of resource depletion,

Health care, social exclusion, poverty, unemployment, etc. (Ellis, 2013, 5).

6. The Relationship between Environment and Humanity

The environmental theorists are generally of the opinion that, people and environment are inseparable. Aristotle states that the two (people and environment) are affected by both geographical circumstances and political institutions, while Montesquieu and Jean Bodin pointed to various climatic factors that in their opinion influenced the political life of western Europe. Other theorists like Naorth are of the view that there is an inextricable relationship between population growth and resource demand as well as the linkages among resource factors, domestic growth and foreign policy. However, Harold and Sprout tend to emphasize multiple factors for analysis such as variety of environmental conditions and trends in addition to geography. They believe that man's relationship with the environment is imperative in-terms of analysis. They further explained that political behaviour cannot be fully understood without referring to the whole spectrum of environmental factors of human as well as non-human.

In one of their writing in 1965 Harold and Sprout had explained that the milieu (environment) affects human decisions in two simple ways when human perceived factors related to environment and when such factors can limit the performance or result of decision based upon perception of the environment. They view the environment as multi-dimensional system in which no one factor such as geography occupied a pre-eminent position and that resource distribution as well as geographical/climatic factors affects the power of the State. They also believe that if the environment affects behaviour, individual have the capacity to alter political behaviour by manipulating the environment. Morelli, (2011), stressed that, the human species while buffered against environmental changes by culture and technology, is fundamentally dependent on the flow of ecosystem services. Such services according to him include:

- Provisioning services, the products obtained from ecosystems, including food, fiber, genetic resources, biochemical, natural medicines, pharmaceuticals, ornamental resources, fresh water, and all forms of energy resources;
- Regulating services, the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes, including air quality regulation, water purification and waste treatment, pest regulation, disease regulation, climate regulation, water regulation, erosion regulation, pollination, and natural hazard regulation;
- Supporting services, including soil formation, photosynthesis, primary production, nutrient cycling and dispersal, seed dispersal, and water cycling; and
- Cultural services, the nonmaterial benefits people obtain from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation, and aesthetic experiences ("Ecosystems and Human Well-Being").

The strong relationship that exists between humans and environmental problems is so obvious; this is because reasonable environmental problems were intimately linked to economic conditions and problems of social justice. The relationship established that social, environmental and economic needs must be met in balance with each other for sustainable outcomes in the long term. It showed that if people are poor, and national economies are weak, the environment suffers. The human activities such as destructive logging of forest, overgrazing and over cropping of arable lands, strip mining, the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers in agriculture which enters the drainage system via run off and sewers to pollute the aquatic environment all of this has so much effect on the environment and are a reflection of the socio-economic conditions of a given society. Thermal power stations, burning of fossil fuels, exhaust fumes all these emit harmful pollutants like sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide etc. that cause acid rain, global warming and malfunctioning of human hemoglobin.

It is apparent that, without a sustainably productive environment to provide a resource foundation, it would be difficult or impossible to imagine having a sustainable society. Similarly, a sustainable economy depends upon a sustainable flow of material, energy, and environmental resources. Without it, economic systems will fail (Morelli, 2011)

7. Approach to Environmental Sustainability

In line with this understanding effort at achieving sustainable development began as far back as late 1980s..... The aim of the world commission on Environment and Development was to find practical ways of addressing the environmental and developmental problems of the world. Environmental sustainability therefore, is a set of ideas and practices with a long-term goal of conserving natural resources; minimizing waste, pollution, and other negative forms of human impact; and promoting global environmental and ecological awareness. In particular, it has three general objectives:

- Re-examine the critical environmental and development issues and formulate realistic proposal for dealing with them;

- Propose new forms of international cooperation on this issue so as to influence policies and events in the direction of needed changes;
- Raise the level of understanding and commitment to action of individuals, voluntary organizations, businesses, institutes and governments.

8. The Brundtland

The Brundtland formerly known as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), the mission of the Brundtland Commission is to unite countries to pursue sustainable development together. At the time, the UN General Assembly realized that there was a heavy deterioration of the human environment and natural resources. To rally countries to work and pursue sustainable development together, the UN decided to establish the Brundtland Commission. The Brundtland Commission officially dissolved in December 1987 after releasing *Our Common Future*, also known as the *Brundtland Report* in October 1987.

The Brundtland Report stated that critical global environmental problems were primarily the result of the enormous poverty of the South and the non-sustainable patterns of consumption and production in the North. It called for a strategy that united development and the environment – described by the now-common term “sustainable development” The Brundtland Report recommended urgent action on eight key issues to ensure that development was sustainable. These were: population and human resources, food security, the urban challenge, energy, industry, species and ecosystems, managing the commons, and conflict and environmental degradation. These eight key issues were identified as early indicators of sustainable development. Unsustainable development was attributed mostly to the limitations of technology and social organization, natural resources, and the ability of the biosphere to take up the cumulative negative impacts from human activities. Hence, both technology and human organization could be regulated and improve to pave the way for a new era of sustainable economic growth (WCED, 1987).

Trisoglio (1996) observed that, since the publication of the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987), the term *sustainable development* (SD) has become prominent in environment and development policy. It has been enshrined as a basic objective of several international agreements, including the Maastricht Treaty on European Union; the European Union (EU) Fifth Environmental Action Programme; the Rio Declaration; Agenda 21; the Framework Convention on Climate Change; and the Convention on Biological Diversity (Grubb et al. 1993). SD is widely debated among environmental policy researchers and non-governmental organisations, and it also appears within numerous corporate mission statements and environmental charters, notably the *Business Charter for Sustainable Development* (ICC, 1990a), which has been signed by over 1,500 companies (Trisoglio, 1996:22).

Fulton et al (2017) suggest the following as a working definition for environmental sustainability: “The avoidance, to the maximum practicable extent, of irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources. In this definition *Irreversible* is a term that describes the loss of future options. It applies primarily to the impacts of use of nonrenewable resources, such as minerals or cultural resources, or to those factors, such as soil productivity, that are renewable only over long periods of time. *Irretrievable* is a term that applies to the loss of production, harvest, or use of natural resources. (env.sus.2)

Broadly speaking, this concept of “environmental sustainability” might be seen as adding depth to a portion of the meaning of the most common definition of sustainable development, i.e., “meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs,” by taking on the general definition “meeting the resource and services needs of current and future generations without compromising the health of the ecosystems that provide them,” (“Our Common Future”).

9. Environmental Politics: Evolution and Development

Environmentalism, of course, is not simply the result of industrialization, urbanization and class formation. A growing volume of scientific research has provided evidence of important environmental changes and the probable impact of human activities. Yet, the focus of this research, and the political debates concerning these findings, are always embedded in political values and processes. Global environmentalism was really born during the 1960s. At this time a number of key environmental concerns emerged in developed countries, coupled with the publication of some important and influential books about environment. For example, Rachel Carson’s famous book, *Silent Spring* (1962) focused on the use of pesticides on ecosystems. For her, the ‘silent’ spring would occur when birds died because of a lack of food and the impact of pesticides on birds themselves. The discovery of large amounts of mercury poisoning in the Minamata region of Japan was linked to rapid industrialization. Oil and other forms of pollution in the Great Lakes of the USA/Canada and in Europe helped to inspire national environmental movements that in turn led to an increased consciousness of global problems and the connectivity between economic activity in some countries and environmental impacts elsewhere.

Global environmental problems are now on everyone’s minds. For many people, we are living in a time of crisis: urgent action is needed. At present, the most pressing public concern is anthropogenically induced climate change. According to Sir John Houghton, a senior scientist from the United Kingdom, ‘Global warming is now a weapon of mass destruction’ (Houghton, 2003). The 1990s were the ‘warmest decade for 1,000 years.’ Globally, 1997, 1998 and 2002 were the hottest years since records began in 1861. Possibly related to these trends, the US mainland was struck by 562 tornados in May 2003, killing 41 people and pre-monsoon temperatures in India in 2003 reached a blistering 49°C (120°F) – 5°C (9°F) above normal, killing 1,500 people. Another British scientist, Sir David King, said, ‘in my view, climate change is the most severe problem that we are facing today, more serious even than the threat of terrorism. This scientist specified

the United States of America as the primary blockage for a failure to address these concerns. The USA, he said, must take the threat of global warming more seriously.

Environmental problems, clearly, are a topic of major concern and have grave implications for international politics. But what are we to do to address them? And what form of politics might make action more effective? Environmental politics is concerned with the environment and its attendant problems. In recent years environmental politics has moved from a peripheral interest to a central concern within the discipline of politics. Environmental politics as a concept gradually evolved as a result of changes, manifesting in human surroundings.

Environmental problems at a global and international scale pose major challenges to the achievement of environmental sustainability. The distinguishing feature of an international environmental problem is that it does not respect national boundaries. Several transboundary issues, such as the conservation of endangered wildlife, natural habitats and marine life, have been around for many years. Some problems that were once predominantly regional or local in cause and effect, such as deforestation, desertification and water scarcity, now have international dimensions. A 'new' range of issues, including climate change, ozone depletion and biodiversity loss, are truly global in that they affect everyone. All states contribute to problems of the global

Warming and all suffer the consequences, although the extent to which each country is culpable for causing a particular problem and vulnerable to its effects varies enormously.

10. Environmental Problems and Their Implications

The effects of major environmental problems cannot be over emphasized. The major ones among them range from pollution (air, water and noise) to deforestation and atmospheric contamination etc. Each particular problem has a linkage effect with another, which tends to exacerbate the effects of others thus creating waves of anxiety, worry and concern for all lovers of the environment.

10.1. Pollution

This phenomenon occurs whenever potentially harmful substances are released into the environment. Pollution overall is caused principally by human activities, though it can also be a natural process. It is, usually classed according to the receiving agents of air as emissions, water as effluent and land as dumps and disposal (Ukpon, 1994). Pollution can be divided into three major categories via: air pollution, water pollution and noise pollution.

Environmental or air pollution arises from people's economic and domestic activities like modern agriculture, which required pesticides that pollute the atmosphere or enter water systems via run-off and sewage. Industrial activities are responsible for a wide range of pollution. Thermal power stations, burning fossil fuel and moving vehicles emit harmful pollutants like sulphur dioxides, nitrogen oxide and carbon dioxides that cause acid-rain, global warming and malfunction of human/animal hemoglobin.

Mba (1996) identified major sources of water pollution in Nigeria to include industrial plants, decomposed domestic waste, solid minerals mining activities as well as petroleum mining operations. In his own view, Odieta (1994) identified water pollution sources as arising from soil erosion, the discharge of industrial and household effluent wastes (untreated) into the water bodies and the growth of water hyacinth. Okorie (1992) identified the distribution of unchecked gully erosion as a source of water pollution, farmlands and development projects.

In addition to the above discourse, another major environmental problem is flooding according to UNDP (1995). Lagos flooding arises from rivers and stream overflowing their banks. The occurrence is seasonal, and is usually during and after rainy season. In some areas it is an annual occurrence. Rainfall has been identified as a primary causative factor for flooding. In addition, clay soil is more prone to flooding. Flooding causes destruction of property such as houses, markets and public buildings and in some severe cases leads to loss of human lives. Another major environmental problem is noise which is most often defined as unwanted sound. Noise is usually measured in decibels (DB) and is generated mostly in high density urban areas or even in the industrial areas that usually use industrial plants as their source of energy.

10.2. Global Warming

This is the continued buildup of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. These gases, which include carbon dioxide, methane nitrous oxides, and chlorofluorocarbons among others, block some of the heat radiated from the earth to cause greenhouse effect. According to an inter-governmental panel on climate change (IPCC), the last two decades of the 20th century are the hottest on record (UN, 1998).

Some of the major causes of increasing emission of greenhouse gases are the burning of fossil fuels for energy and transport, the clearing of forests, which reduces carbon dioxide absorption, cattle raising which produces methane emission as a by-product; and the use of technology that pollutes. Accordingly, this global warming led to the rise in sea water level leading to soil erosion, flooding and draughts. These are dangerous to both human existence and the environment.

10.3. Ozone Layer Depletion

The ozone layer is found at a height of about 20-30km above sea level. This ozone layer prevents the penetration of the sun's harmful ultra-violet rays. Dr. Joe Fanner's findings in 1985, has proved that the ozone layer depletion was even greater than predicted. The pollution of the atmosphere from the release of CFCS gasses causes the depletion of the ozone layer and this result in environmental degradation. According to Ukpong (1994), most of the skin diseases and low

productivity in agriculture are caused by ultra-violet rays. In addition, increases in ultra-violet radiation affects water bodies, disturbs aquatic life, which support the food chain and causes the death of fishes that feed us. It also causes deterioration of synthetic materials such as paints, and other products used in the building industry, invariably causing deterioration of housing delivery to our ever-increasing human pollution.

10.4. Land Degradation

Land degradation is one of the worst environmental problems facing people worldwide, over 40 million are affected in Nigeria. This has led to food shortages and health problems in Nigeria.

Some of the causes of land degradation as noted Ukpong (1994) include:

- Improper resources management
- Destructive logging of our forests
- Overgrazing and over-cropping of arable lands
- Flooding and wind erosion menace
- Strip mining
- Land degradation with pesticides and fertilizer
- Some known natural-landslides etc.
- Destruction of wetlands and marshes for development

Indirect causes of land degradation include the population growth, and population influx, property ownership issues, lack of control, enforcement measures and the use of inappropriate technology for farming and even producing manufactured goods.

10.5. Deforestation

Forest clearance on a massive scale for agricultural development, urban growth, industrial expansion and general pressures from increasing population has reduced the extent, diversity and stability of the Nigerian forest.

According to the estimate of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)(1983) Nigeria through circles of exploitation and husbandry destroy reforestation efforts of about 25.00 hectares a year representing about 4% of the loss. The constant deforestation attitude has caused the extinction of plants and animals in Nigeria. The constant practices of deforestation are caused by the shortage of building materials, the quest for fossil fuel energy, hunting and the gathering of natural products. All these have caused low productivity in agricultural productions in Nigeria attributing to the shortage of arable plants in our society today. The practice of cattle rearing, commercial plantation and commercial logging has been identified as one of the major causes of forest destruction as big companies pay large amounts of money in order to fell trees.

Some of the initiatives taken against deforestation are tree planting campaign that should be backed-up by public awareness campaign, and government enforcing appropriate laws and regulation that should deter the general public from contributing to the loss of vegetation and wildlife.

10.6. Desertification

This is the process where lands are reduced to desert like conditions and the areas mostly affected' by desertification is the Savannah (Ukpong, 1994). Desertification of an area is usually caused by natural and man-made activities. The natural activities include short rainfall and longer dry season while the man-made activities include over-grazing, over-cultivation, deforestation, bush burning and general environmental misuse. Some of the effects of desertification include loss of vegetation, soil erosion, famine and landslides. Again, government should enforce laws against the practice of bush burning and deforestation.

10.7. Atmospheric Contamination

Atmospheric contamination is the reduction in quality of the air in an environment; this is caused by natural and man-made activities. Some of the natural causes include volcanic eruption, whirl-winds, earthquakes etc. while the man-made causes are inappropriate solid waste disposal, gas flaring, oil exploration, industrial pollution, as well as coastal erosion etc. All these causes affect both aquatic and terrestrial lives and contribute to bio-diversity loss.

10.8. Water Pollution

It has been discovered over the years according to Vesilind and Pierce (1982) that various sources of water pollution are caused by: Organic wastes from industrial plants; Inorganic wastes from industrial plants; Heat from industrial discharge; Municipal wastes; Agricultural wastes; Sediment from land erosion; Acid rain; Oil spills and contributions from routine operation.

These lead to the contamination of water bodies and cause the spread of diseases communicable by water. It also renders the water usage dangerous for human consumption and affects the environment negatively.

11. A Global Approach: United Nations and the Environmental Question

Perhaps the biggest impetus for developing a worldwide effort to monitor and restrict global pollution is the fact that most forms of pollution do not respect national boundaries. The first major International Conference on environmental issues was held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972 and was sponsored by the United Nations (UN). This meeting at which the United States took a leading role was controversial because many developing countries were fearful

that a focus on environmental protection was means for the developed world to keep the undeveloped world in an economically subservient position. The most important outcome of the conference was the creation of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).

UNEP was designed to be "the environmental conscience of the United Nations", and, in an attempt to allay fears of the developing world, it became the first UN agency to be headquartered in a developing country, with offices in Nairobi, Kenya. In addition to attempting to achieve scientific consensus about major environmental issues, a major focus for UNEP has been the study of ways to encourage sustainable development - increasing standards of living without destroying the environment. At the time of UNEP's creation in 1972, only 11 countries had environmental agencies. Ten years later the number had grown to 106, of which 70 were in developing countries.

A growing number of international agreements have been reached in an effort to improve the world's environmental status. In 1975, the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) went into effect with the goal of reducing commerce in animals and plants on the edge of extinction. In 1982, the International Whaling Commission agreed to a moratorium on all commercial whaling. Perhaps the most important international agreement was the 1987 Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer. For the first time, an international pact was signed that set specific targets for reducing emissions of chemicals responsible for the destruction of the earth's ozone layer. The international community again came together in 1989 to limit the movement of hazardous wastes among countries.

Twenty years after the Stockholm conference, the UN conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, popularly known as the Earth Summit, this meeting was the largest gathering of world leaders in history. The conference produced two major treaties. The first was an agreement to reduce emission of gasses leading to global warming, and the second was a pact on biodiversity requiring countries to develop plans to protect endangered species and habitats. At the insistence of the United States, however, the final version of the global warming treaty was dramatically scaled back. The United States was also one of the very few countries that refused to sign the biodiversity treaty. United States representatives objected to a part of the treaty that specified that money to come from the use of the natural resources from protected ecosystems, such as rain forests, should be shared equally between the source country and corporation or institution removing the materials.

In 1992, agreement on global warming limits each industrialized nation to emission in the year 2000 that are equal to or below 1990 emission. However, these limits are voluntary and no enforcement provisions were included in the agreement. By 1997, however, the fact that the goals would not be met was clear.

At a follow-up conference in Kyoto, Japan, representatives from 160 countries signed a new agreement, known as the Kyoto Protocol. This agreement calls for the industrialized nations to reduce emissions to an average of about 5 percent below 1990 emission levels and to reach this goal between the years 2008 and 2012. The Protocol's first commitment period started in 2008 and ended in 2012. The second commitment period began on 1 January 2013 and will end in 2020. There are now 197 Parties to the Convention and 192 Parties to the Kyoto protocol.

A desire for environmental change led to the creation of various political parties around the world whose emphasis was largely on environmental protection. The first of these organizations, collectively known as green parties, was the value party in New Zealand, created in 1972. By far the most successful has been the green party of West Germany, die Grunen, which in 1983 won nearly 6 percent of the seats in the West German parliament. Green parties have developed in almost all countries that have open elections, but they have had the largest impact in those nations where proportional representation within a parliamentary system occurs. Thus, the green parties have not played a significant role in American politics. In 1993, 23 green parties from eastern and western Europe came together to form the European Federation of Green Parties, with the hope that together they would have the leverage necessary to demand that environmental issues such as pollution control, population growth, and sustainable development be more fully addressed by various national governments and international bodies.

12. Current Issues

In November, 1992, a document entitled warning to humanity was released, 1500 scientists from around the world, including 99 Noble laureates, a dozen national academics of science, the Pontifical Academic Science, and the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO), signed this alarm. The document was bold and clear, stating, "human beings and the natural world are on a collision course," which "may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain in the manner that we know."

The problems facing the environment are vast and diverse. Destruction of the world's rain forests, global warming, and the depletion of the ozone layer are just some of the problems that will reach critical proportions in the coming decades. Their rates will be directly affected by the size of the human population.

At the 21st Conference of the parties in Paris, Parties to the UNFCCC reached a landmark agreement to combat climate change and to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future. The Paris Agreement builds upon the Convention and for the first time brings all nations into a common cause to undertake take ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so. As such, it charts a new course in the global climate effort.

The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping the global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

On Earth Day, 22 April 2016, 175 world leaders signed the Paris Agreement at United Nations Headquarters in New York. This was by far the largest number of countries ever to sign an international agreement on a single day. The Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals are the foundations for global efforts to address climate change. The purpose of the 2019 Climate Summit was to challenge states, regions, cities, companies, investors and citizens to step up action in five areas:

Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, communities and countries dearly today and even more tomorrow. Weather patterns are changing, sea levels are rising, weather events are becoming more extreme and greenhouse gas emissions are now at their highest levels in history. Without action, the world's average surface temperature is likely to surpass 3 degrees centigrade this century. The poorest and most vulnerable people are being affected the most. Affordable, scalable solutions are now available to enable countries to leapfrog to cleaner, more resilient economies. The pace of change is quickening as more people are turning to renewable energy and a range of other measures that will reduce emissions and increase adaptation efforts.

13. Population Growth

Human population growth can be seen to be at the root of virtually all of the world's environmental problems. Increasingly large numbers of people are being added to the world every year. As the number of people increases, more pollution is generated, more habitats are destroyed and more natural resources are used up. Even if new technological advances were able to cut in half the environmental impact that each person had, as soon as the world's population size doubled, the earth would be no better off than before.

The population division of the United Nations predicts that the 5.63 billion humans alive in 1994 will increase to 6.23 billion in 2050. The United Nations estimate assumes that population will peak and stabilize at 11.6 billion in 2200. Others predict that numbers will continue to rise into the near future, to as many as 19 billion people 2500.

Although it is true, rates of population increase are now much slower in the developed world than in the developing world, it would be a mistake to assume that the population growth problem is primarily a problem of developing countries. In fact, the larger amounts of resources per person are used in the developed nations; each citizen from the developed world has a much greater environmental impact than those citizens from a developing country. Conservation strategies that would not alter lifestyles but would greatly lessen environmental impact are essential in the developed world.

Evidence now exists suggesting that the most important factors necessary to lower population growth rates in the developing world are democracy and social justice. Studies show that population growth rates have fallen in areas where several social conditions have been met. In these areas, literacy rates have increased, and women are given economic status equal to that of men and thus are able to hold jobs and own property; also, birth control information is more widely available, and women are free to make their own reproductive decisions.

14. Conclusion

A general survey of environmental theory indicates that political discourse, propositions and enquiry in this field have environmental (milieu) and human activities intrinsically linked. The environment is altered positively or negatively due to increase role human beings play in technological advancement. Accordingly, technology affects many aspects of human life especially in the areas of pollution, waste management, global warming, ozone layer depletion, deforestation etc. These key factors at the beginning of the 20th Century began to manifest in the political activities of many countries. Some writers appeal to their government in order to take stern measures towards converting the environment with a view to making it safer. All these appeals culminated in multi-lateral approach to environmental issues through the United Nations Organization. Not much seems to have been done; the world is still not ready to live up to expectation given the constant, consistent degeneration and destruction of our planet earth in geometric progression.

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