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Challenges and Opportunities of Environmental Governance in 21st Century Nigeria

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Abstract: The 21st century has brought unprecedented environmental problems to the fore, with Nigeria facing so many struggles in enhancing social development, economic growth and environmental sustainability. Therefore the purpose of this study is to determine the complexities of environmental governance in Nigeria, revealing the tensions between federal and state authorities, the role of civil society, and the impact of international agreements on national policy. In this research, secondary method of data collection was utilized by conducting a critical analysis of existing literature and policy frameworks. This study reveals key problems such as, inadequate institutional capacity, corruption, and conflicting interests, as well as opportunities for innovation, community engagement, and sustainable development. The findings shows the need for an inclusive and more effective governance framework that integrates environmental concerns into the strategies of national development, promotes stakeholder participation, and utilizing technology and international cooperation to address the pressing environmental challenges facing Nigeria. This research contributes to the broader discourse on environmental governance in developing countries, as it offers insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers seeking to ascertain the complexities of sustainable development in the 21st century.

Keywords: Environmental Governance, Sustainable Development, Nigeria, Stakeholder Participation

I. Introduction

Nigeria's environmental governance challenges in the 21st century are multifaceted and complex, stemming from a combination of factors that hinder the country's ability to manage its natural resources sustainably. Poor water governance affects millions of Nigerians, with 63.7% of citizens reporting experiencing water scarcity constantly, while 69.2% have suffered health issues from lack of clean water (Wilson, 2022). The situation is particularly dire in northern and central regions, where rainfall is scarce and borehole drilling is widespread and unregulated, leading to rapid depletion of aquifers and land subsidence. Climate change further exacerbates these challenges, with erratic rainfall patterns, rising temperatures, and extreme weather events like droughts and floods undermining Nigeria's hydrological stability. The 2012 flood disaster, as opined by Nwankwo (2023) displaced over 2 million Nigerians and caused losses of NGN 2.6 trillion. The environmental system in Nigeria suffers from ineffectiveness, lack of public participation, unenforceable and non-implementable laws and policies, and a weak and uncoordinated institutional framework. The lack of public participation in environmental governance is a significant challenge, with marginalized communities often excluded from planning and oversight. This is compounded by population growth, which puts increasing pressure on already-fragile water systems. The combination of these factors has severe consequences for the environment, human health, and the economy. The environmental governance challenges in Nigeria are further complicated by the country's dependence on natural resources, inadequate infrastructure, and weak institutional oversight. The situation is critical, and urgent attention is needed to address these challenges and promote sustainable development in Nigeria.

According to the United Nations (2020), sustainable development and environmental sustainability have become increasingly important in recent years, as the world grapples with the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. The concept of sustainable development is defined by the United Nations (2020) as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 1). Lemos and Agrawal (2019) note that environmental sustainability refers to the ability of the environment to support economic and social development while maintaining its natural resources and ecosystem services. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021) highlights the importance of sustainable development and environmental sustainability in addressing the challenges of climate change. As the world's population continues to grow, the pressure on natural resources and the environment increases, leading to issues such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change (IPCC, 2021). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018), environmental degradation and pollution can have serious negative impacts on human health, including increased risk of respiratory diseases, cancer, and other health problems. The World Bank (2020) emphasizes the economic importance of sustainable development and environmental sustainability, noting that environmental degradation and resource depletion can have significant economic costs, including loss of productivity, increased healthcare costs, and damage to infrastructure. By promoting sustainable development and environmental sustainability, countries can reduce these costs and promote economic growth and development that is sustainable and equitable (World Bank, 2020).

Furthermore, the United Nations (2020) highlights the critical role of sustainable development and environmental sustainability in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving the SDGs will require significant progress on sustainable development and environmental sustainability, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting natural resources, and

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promoting sustainable livelihoods (United Nations, 2020). Sustainable development and environmental sustainability are therefore critical for ensuring that economic and social development is achieved in a way that is environmentally sustainable and equitable for future generations.

Statement of the Problem

Environmental governance in Nigeria is expected to be one where the country's natural resources are managed in a sustainable and equitable manner, ensuring the well-being of both current and future generations. Effective environmental governance would involve a robust institutional framework, strong policies and laws, and active participation from all stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities. However, the current situation in Nigeria is far from ideal. Environmental governance in the country is characterized by weak institutions, inadequate policies and laws, and a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. This has led to widespread environmental degradation, pollution, and loss of biodiversity, with severe consequences for human health, economic development, and sustainable livelihoods. The effects of poor environmental governance in Nigeria are numerous and far-reaching. Environmental degradation and pollution have led to increased health problems, including respiratory diseases, cancer, and other health issues. The loss of biodiversity and ecosystem degradation have also had significant economic impacts, including loss of productivity, increased healthcare costs, and damage to infrastructure.

Despite efforts to address these challenges, the situation persists and remains problematic. Previous initiatives have been hampered by inadequate funding, lack of coordination, and limited capacity. For example, environmental policies and laws have been enacted, but their implementation and enforcement have been weak. Additionally, civil society organizations and community groups have raised awareness about environmental issues, but their efforts have been met with resistance from powerful interests. Despite the existence of environmental policies and laws, environmental governance in Nigeria remains weak, and the country continues to experience severe environmental degradation and pollution, with significant negative impacts on human health, economic development, and sustainable livelihoods; hence, the need for the study.

II. Objective of the Study:

The general objective of this study is to ascertain the challenges and opportunities of environmental governance in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. The problems of environmental governance in Nigeria

2. The opportunities associated with environmental governance in Nigeria

Research Questions:

Based on the objectives, the following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the problems of environmental governance in Nigeria?

2. What opportunities exist for improving environmental governance in Nigeria?

III. Literature Review

Environmental governance in Nigeria

Environmental governance in Nigeria is a complex issue that has garnered significant attention in recent years. According to Lemos and Agrawal (2019), environmental governance refers to the system of rules, practices, and institutions that shape the interactions between humans and the environment. In Nigeria, environmental governance is characterized by a weak institutional framework, inadequate policies and laws, and a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms (Okereke & Yusuf, 2020). The country's environmental governance structure is further complicated by the presence of multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities, each with different interests and agendas (Ebele & Emodi, 2020). This has led to a lack of coordination and cooperation among stakeholders, resulting in ineffective environmental management and governance. Climate change and environmental degradation are significant challenges facing Nigeria's environmental governance. The country is already experiencing the impacts of climate change, including increased temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events (IPCC, 2021). According to Ahmed and Oluwatayo (2022), Nigeria's environmental governance framework is not equipped to address these challenges effectively, leading to significant environmental and economic impacts.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for improving environmental governance in Nigeria. According to Okpara and Stringer (2020), community-based initiatives and participatory approaches can be effective in promoting environmental sustainability and improving governance. Additionally, the use of technology, such as remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS), can enhance environmental monitoring and enforcement (Ebele & Emodi, 2020). Environmental governance in Nigeria is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach to address the country's environmental challenges. Strengthening institutions, improving policy and regulatory frameworks, and promoting community participation and technological innovation are essential for effective environmental governance in Nigeria.

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The analysis of existing policy frameworks and institutional capacity

The analysis of existing policy frameworks and institutional capacity is a crucial aspect of environmental governance in Nigeria. According to Lemos and Agrawal (2019), effective environmental governance requires a robust institutional framework, strong policies, and laws that promote sustainable development and environmental protection. In Nigeria, the existing policy frameworks and institutional capacity have been criticized for being inadequate and ineffective in addressing environmental challenges. The country's environmental policies and laws have been enacted over the years, but their implementation and enforcement have been weak (Okereke & Yusuf, 2020). For instance, the National Environmental Policy (NEP) of 1989 and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Decree of 1992 are some of the key policy frameworks guiding environmental governance in Nigeria. However, the implementation of these policies has been hindered by inadequate funding, lack of coordination among government agencies, and limited capacity (Ebele & Emodi, 2020). Institutional capacity is also a significant challenge in Nigeria's environmental governance. According to Ahmed and Oluwatayo (2022), the institutions responsible for environmental governance in Nigeria lack the necessary capacity, including human resources, technical expertise, and financial resources, to effectively manage environmental issues. This has resulted in inadequate monitoring and enforcement of environmental regulations, leading to environmental degradation and pollution.

The lack of effective policy implementation and institutional capacity has significant implications for environmental governance in Nigeria. According to Okpara and Stringer (2020), the country's environmental challenges, including climate change, deforestation, and pollution, require a robust institutional framework and effective policy implementation to mitigate their impacts. Strengthening institutions and improving policy implementation are essential for promoting sustainable development and environmental protection in Nigeria. The analysis of existing policy frameworks and institutional capacity in Nigeria highlights significant challenges that need to be addressed to promote effective environmental governance. Strengthening institutions, improving policy implementation, and enhancing capacity are crucial for addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria.

The Role of Civil Society and Stakeholder Participation

Civil society and stakeholder participation play a crucial role in environmental governance in Nigeria. According to Lemos and Agrawal (2019), effective environmental governance requires the active participation of various stakeholders, including civil society organizations, local communities, and other interest groups. Civil society organizations have been instrumental in promoting environmental awareness and advocacy in Nigeria, and have played a key role in holding government and corporate actors accountable for their environmental actions (Okereke & Yusuf, 2020). The participation of stakeholders, including local communities, is also essential for effective environmental governance. According to Okpara and Stringer (2020), community-based initiatives and participatory approaches can be effective in promoting environmental sustainability and improving governance. Stakeholder participation can also help to ensure that environmental policies and programs are responsive to the needs and concerns of local communities (Ebele & Emodi, 2020).

In Nigeria, civil society organizations have been actively involved in environmental advocacy and awareness-raising efforts. According to Ahmed and Oluwatayo (2022), civil society organizations have played a key role in promoting environmental awareness and education, and have helped to mobilize public support for environmental protection. Civil society organizations have also been involved in policy advocacy, and have worked to influence environmental policy and decision-making processes (Okereke & Yusuf, 2020). The role of civil society and stakeholder participation in environmental governance is not limited to advocacy and awareness-raising. According to Lemos and Agrawal (2019), civil society organizations and other stakeholders can also play a key role in monitoring and enforcing environmental regulations, and in promoting compliance with environmental laws and policies. By working together with government agencies and other stakeholders, civil society organizations can help to promote effective environmental governance and sustainable development in Nigeria.

In conclusion, the role of civil society and stakeholder participation is critical for effective environmental governance in Nigeria. Civil society organizations and other stakeholders can play a key role in promoting environmental awareness and advocacy, influencing policy and decision-making processes, and monitoring and enforcing environmental regulations.

The Impact of International Agreements on National Policy

According to Biermann et al. (2020), international environmental agreements have a significant impact on national policy, shaping the way countries approach environmental governance and sustainable development. International agreements, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, set global standards and guidelines for environmental protection, which countries are expected to follow and implement at the national level (Okereke & Yusuf, 2020). As noted by Ivanova and Escobar-Pemberthy (2020), international agreements can influence national policy by providing a framework for countries to develop and implement environmental policies and programs. For instance, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been widely adopted by countries, including Nigeria, as a framework for promoting sustainable development and environmental protection (United Nations, 2020). According to Okpara and Stringer (2020), international agreements can also provide technical and financial assistance to countries to support the implementation of environmental policies and programs. For

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example, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) provides funding and technical support to countries to address environmental issues, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution (GEF, 2022).

As observed by Ebele and Emodi (2020), the impact of international agreements on national policy can be significant, leading to changes in laws, policies, and institutions. International agreements can also promote cooperation and collaboration among countries, enabling them to address global environmental challenges more effectively (Biermann et al., 2020). In Nigeria, international agreements have had a significant impact on national policy, shaping the country's approach to environmental governance and sustainable development. According to Ahmed and Oluwatayo (2022), Nigeria's participation in international environmental agreements has led to the development of new policies and programs aimed at promoting environmental protection and sustainable development. Thus, international agreements play a crucial role in shaping national policy, promoting environmental protection, and sustainable development. By providing a framework for countries to develop and implement environmental policies and programs, international agreements can help countries address environmental challenges and promote sustainable development

VI. Theoretical Framework

Institutional Theory

The institutional theory was propounded by Douglass North (1990) and other institutional economists and political scientists. The theory posits that institutions shape the behavior and interactions of individuals and organizations within a society. Institutions include formal rules, laws, and regulations, as well as informal norms and practices. The basic principles of the institutional theory emphasize the importance of institutions in shaping economic, social, and political outcomes. Institutions provide incentives and constraints for individuals and organizations, and their quality can affect the effectiveness of governance.

The institutional theory is highly relevant to environmental governance in Nigeria. Weak institutions, corruption, and lack of effective enforcement mechanisms have hindered environmental governance, leading to environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. By applying the institutional theory, policymakers can identify the institutional weaknesses that contribute to environmental degradation and develop strategies to strengthen institutions and improve environmental governance. Strengthening formal laws and regulations, improving enforcement mechanisms, and promoting transparency and accountability can help to improve environmental governance in Nigeria.

V. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing secondary data collection methods to investigate the challenges and opportunities of environmental governance in Nigeria. The study used secondary data collection methods, which involved a comprehensive review of existing literature on environmental governance in Nigeria. This included academic journals, books, reports, and policy documents from government agencies, international organizations, and civil society organizations. The literature review was conducted using a systematic search strategy, which involved searching online databases, academic journals, and websites of relevant organizations. The study employed a critical analysis approach to analyze the existing literature and policy frameworks. This involved a thorough examination of the data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships that could help to answer the research questions. The analysis was conducted using a qualitative content analysis approach, which involved coding and categorizing the data into themes and sub-themes. The study relied on a critical analysis of existing literature and policy frameworks to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

VI. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed in line with the research questions, which sought to determine the problems of environmental governance in Nigeria and the opportunities associated with environmental governance in Nigeria.

Problems of Environmental Governance in Nigeria

The study found that environmental governance in Nigeria is characterized by weak institutions, inadequate policies and laws, and a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. This finding is consistent with previous studies, such as Okereke and Yusuf (2020), which noted that environmental governance in Nigeria is hindered by institutional weaknesses and inadequate policy frameworks. However, the present study provides a more nuanced understanding of the problems of environmental governance in Nigeria, highlighting the role of corruption, lack of funding, and inadequate public participation in exacerbating these problems.

Compared to previous studies, such as Ahmed and Oluwatayo (2022), which focused on water governance in Nigeria, the present study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the problems of environmental governance in Nigeria, covering a broader range of environmental issues. The gap covered by the present study is the lack of a comprehensive analysis of the problems of environmental governance in Nigeria, which previous studies have not adequately addressed.

Opportunities Associated with Environmental Governance in Nigeria

The study found that there are several opportunities associated with environmental governance in Nigeria, including the potential for community-based initiatives and participatory approaches to promote environmental sustainability. This finding is consistent

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with previous studies, such as Okpara and Stringer (2020), which noted that community-based initiatives can be effective in promoting environmental sustainability in Nigeria. However, the present study highlights the importance of stakeholder participation and collaboration in promoting environmental governance in Nigeria. Compared to previous studies, such as Ebele and Emodi (2020), which focused on climate change and water resources in Nigeria, the present study provides a more nuanced understanding of the opportunities associated with environmental governance in Nigeria, highlighting the role of stakeholder participation and collaboration in promoting environmental sustainability. The gap covered by the present study is the lack of a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities associated with environmental governance in Nigeria, which previous studies have not adequately addressed.

VII. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities of environmental governance in Nigeria. The findings of the study show the need for institutional strengthening, policy reform, and stakeholder participation to promote environmental sustainability in Nigeria. The study also underscores the importance of community-based initiatives and participatory approaches in promoting environmental governance. Therefore, effective environmental governance is critical for promoting sustainable development and human well-being in Nigeria. The findings provide a roadmap for policymakers and stakeholders to improve environmental governance in Nigeria, including strengthening institutions, improving policy frameworks, and enhancing enforcement mechanisms. By taking these steps, Nigeria can mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation and promote sustainable development and human well-being.

Implications of the Study

The implications of this study are far-reaching and underscore the urgent need to address the problems associated with environmental governance in Nigeria. If the problems of weak institutions, inadequate policies and laws, and lack of effective enforcement mechanisms are not addressed, the consequences will be severe. The environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity resulting from poor environmental governance will have significant impacts on human health, livelihoods, and well-being. Climate change impacts, including increased temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events, will also be exacerbated, leading to loss of property, infrastructure, and human lives. Furthermore, the negative impacts on human health will be significant, including increased incidence of respiratory diseases, cancer, and other health problems. The economic costs of poor environmental governance will also be substantial, including loss of productivity, increased healthcare costs, and damage to infrastructure. This will undermine the country's economic development and poverty reduction efforts. Moreover, the lack of effective environmental governance will lead to social and political instability, including increased social unrest, conflict, and instability, which will undermine the country's stability and security. In light of these implications, it is essential that policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public take urgent action to address the problems associated with environmental governance in Nigeria. This includes strengthening institutions, improving policy frameworks, and enhancing enforcement mechanisms. In addition, promoting stakeholder participation, community-based initiatives, and public awareness will be critical in promoting environmental sustainability and effective governance.

Limitations

While the use of secondary data collection methods has several advantages, it also has some limitations. One of the main limitations is that the data may not be tailored to the specific research questions or objectives. Additionally, the quality and reliability of secondary data can vary, depending on the source and methodology used to collect the data. However, these limitations were mitigated by using a systematic search strategy and critically evaluating the quality and reliability of the data.

VIII. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

The Federal Government of Nigeria should strengthen institutions responsible for environmental governance, including the Federal Ministry of Environment, by increasing funding and resources, and providing training and capacity-building programs for staff.

The National Assembly should review and improve policy frameworks and laws related to environmental governance in Nigeria, including the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Decree, to ensure they are effective and enforceable.

The Federal Ministry of Environment and relevant agencies should enhance enforcement mechanisms by increasing funding and resources for environmental enforcement, and providing training and equipment for enforcement personnel.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations should promote community-based initiatives and participatory approaches to environmental governance, including community-led conservation and sustainable development projects.

The Federal Ministry of Environment and relevant agencies should foster stakeholder participation and collaboration in environmental governance by involving local communities, civil society organizations, and the private sector in decision-making processes.

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The Ministry of Education and relevant agencies should incorporate environmental education into school curricula, and promote public awareness campaigns on environmental issues and governance to promote public understanding and support for environmental sustainability.