

## **Evolving a Common Environmental Policy Framework in the South South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is simply a proposition for an ideal environmental policy tenable for a geographical entity that has a common environmental problem, cultural affinity and a unique socio-cultural and political background. The article x-rays some existing legal and institutional arrangements for environmental policy implementation in the area. It also proposes an environmental policy pathway which could be adopted to suit the different entities that make up the South South geopolitical zone. The paper finally provides a framework for a common environmental policy awareness and control in the area.

**Key words:** Environment, Policy, Framework, Institution, Cycle.

### **Introduction**

Environmental policy essentially refers to official rules and regulations concerning the environment that are adopted, implemented, and enforced by some governmental agency, as well as the general public opinion about environmental issues. In a democratic setting, environmental policies are usually established through negotiations and compromise. Sometimes, this wrangling can take decades. Theoretically, it allow all voices to be heard, and the resulting policy serves the interest of the majority.

A background to any environmental policy tenable in any society points to the fact that modern man is seen to be a paradox of extremes. He does not confine himself to situations that can continuously warrant his surgeon on the earth's surface. Because of his actions, he is finding himself in the web of environmental crisis. All over the faces of the earth man is seen to possess untold knowledge and wealth, but these have brought no universal end to the indignity of poverty and ignorance. He has conquered space, but on earth he is unable to overcome conflicts and inequities. Man's mastery of science and technology gives him unprecedented power, but his living environment is "threatened" as at no time since his planetary home first gave him warmth and shelter (Strong. 1972).

It should be noted that man's capacity to destroy is of course most dramatically manifested in his possession of the techniques of mass destruction-biological and nuclear warfare. But the relatively recent emergence of the environmental issues has revealed the more subtle but no less dangerous risk he faces from the uncontrolled use or misuse of natural resources and the technologies of production. It is an issue that transcends political boundaries such as states and Local Government Areas. It is suffice to state here that since environmental crisis have trans-boundary effects the success of any environmental policy must wear an integrative outlook-taking into cognizance the various states that make up the geographical zone such as the South South zone comprising Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Edo States.

In the South South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, damaging conditions such as increasing salinity of fertile land, depletions of forest reserves, pollution of land, air and water supplies, flood, erosion, drought, biodiversity loss and ozone layer depletion are prevalent. Both human and economic developments of the South South zone depend on how the forces that generate these problems can be controlled.

### **Existing Legal and Institutional Arrangement**

A useful starting point in discussing institutional arrangements for the implementation of environmental policies and programmes in the South South is to first of all examine very briefly the existing arrangements for dealing with environmental problems. At the various state levels in the zone, different organizations ranging from the ministry of Environment, health, works, to boards or committees are responsible for the environmental clean-ups. Each of these organizations has different goals in its environmental missions, and it seems to me that at least one way of dealing with disparate goals as evident in the activities of the institutions is to create or establish an institutional arrangement that would co-ordinate and inter-phase among the different institutions and organizations and serve as a zonal reference point for policy programmes on the environment. The environment must be seen as a whole. Therefore, the activities of the various institutions concerned with the environment must be co-ordinated towards some common purpose and zonal goals. The idea is that while individual institutions and organizations pursue their different activities or sub-goals within the framework of the zonal environmental objectives these activities are

integrated by a common criterion of the zonal goals, which in this case is the improvement of the quality of the environment. The establishment of a co-ordinating institutional arrangement both at the state and South South zonal level would make it easier for the public to know where to go with their complaints. The co-ordinating institutions at the state and zonal levels would also effectively encourage interest groups to support government's policy and programmes. To achieve this desirable objective of a co-ordinating institutional arrangement for an effective environmental policy in both the states and the zonal level, the desirability of a clear definition of the functions of such an institution and the provision of sufficient budgetary allocation for their implementation can not be overemphasised.

The goals of such a co-ordinating environmental policy in the South South zone may include:

- (a) Secure for all people in the South South a quality environment adequate for their health and well-being.
- (b) Conserve and use the environment and natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.
- (c) Restore, maintain and enhance the ecosystems and ecological processes essential for the function of the biosphere and for the preservation of biological diversity and to adopt the principle of optimum sustainable yield in the use of natural resources and ecosystem.
- (d) Raise public awareness and promote understanding of essential linkages between environment and development and to encourage individual and community participation in environmental improvement efforts.
- (e) Cooperate in good faith with other geopolitical, international organizations and agencies to achieve optimal use of trans-boundary natural resources and effective prevention abatement of trans-boundary environmental pollution.

#### **Possible Environmental Policy Cycle in the South South Zone**

In the south south geopolitical zone, environmental policies should be able to find their way into the public debate. Here problems are identified and acted upon in a policy cycle that acts to continually define and refine the public agenda. The public should be adequately intimated of any issue concerning their existence in that particular environment. They should be stakeholders in game of the discussion of any policy regarding them.

The first stage in this process of having a common environmental policy in the south south is problem identification. Sometimes, the respective government of the south south identifies environmental issues for groups or their citizens that have no voice or don't recognize problems themselves. In other cases, the public identifies a problem such as loss of biodiversity, flood, erosion and pollution, and demands redress by the government. In either case, proponents describe the issue – either privately or publicly and characterise the risks and benefits of their preferred course of action.

Seizing the initiative in issue identification often allows a group to define terms, set the agenda, organize stakeholders, choose tactics, aggregate related issues, and legitimate (or delegitimized) issues and actors. It can be a great advantage to set the format or choose the location of a debate. Next, stakeholders should develop proposals for preferred policy options, often in the form of legislative proposals or administrative rules. Proponents build support for their position through media campaigns, public education, and personal lobbying of decisions makers. By following the legislative or administrative processes through its many steps, interest groups ensure that their proposal finally get enacted into law or established as a rule or regulation.

The next step is implementation, ideally, government agencies will faithfully carry out policy directives as they organize bureaucracies, provide services, and enforce rules and regulations, but often, it takes continued monitoring to make sure the system works as it should. Evaluating the result of policy decisions is as important as establishing them in the first place. Measuring impacts on target and non-target population shows us whether the intended goals, principles, and course of action are being attained. Finally, suggested changes or adjustments are considered that will make the policy fairer or more effective.

There are different routes by which this environmental policy cycle should be carried out. Special economic interest groups, such as industry associations, labour unions, or wealthy and powerful individuals, don't need (or often want) much public attention or support for their policy initiatives. They generally carry out the steps of issue identification, agenda setting and proposal development privately because they can influence legislative or administrative processes directly through their contacts with decision makers. Public interest groups, on the other hand, often lack direct access to corridors of power and need to rally broad general support to legitimate their proposals. An important method for getting their interests on the table is to attract media attention. Organizing a dramatic protest or media event can generate a lot of free publicity. Announcing some dire threat or sensational claim is a good way to gain attention. The problem is that it takes ever-increasing levels of hysteria and hyperbole to get yourself heard in the flood of shocking news with which we are bombarded every day. Ironically, many groups that bemoan the overload of rhetorical over statement that engulfs us contribute to it to be heard above the din.

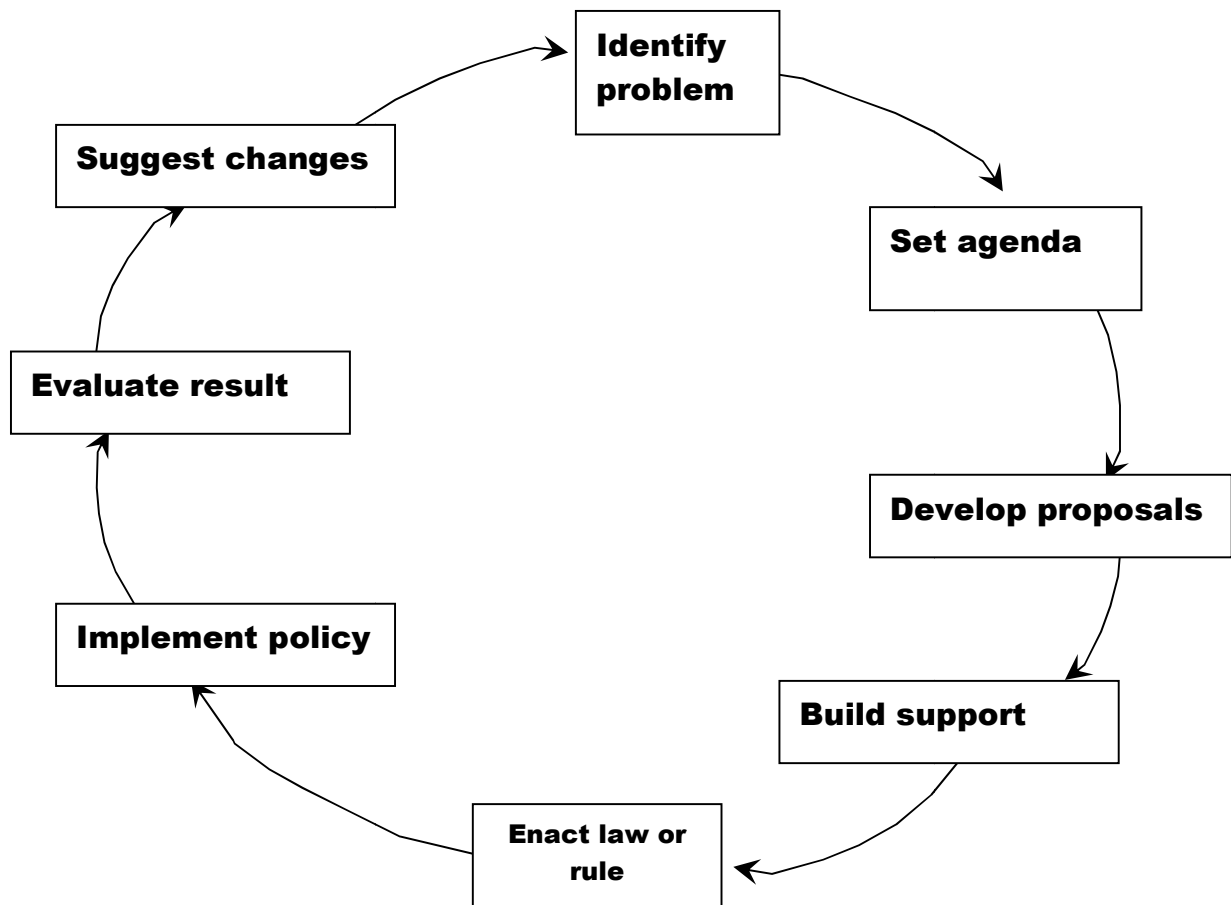


Figure 1: Recommended Environmental Policy Pathways (after Cunningham et al., 2004).

It should also be noted that the best environmental policies that may be attainable in the South South geopolitical zone should not fall short of economic, ecological and socio-cultural considerations (see figure 2).

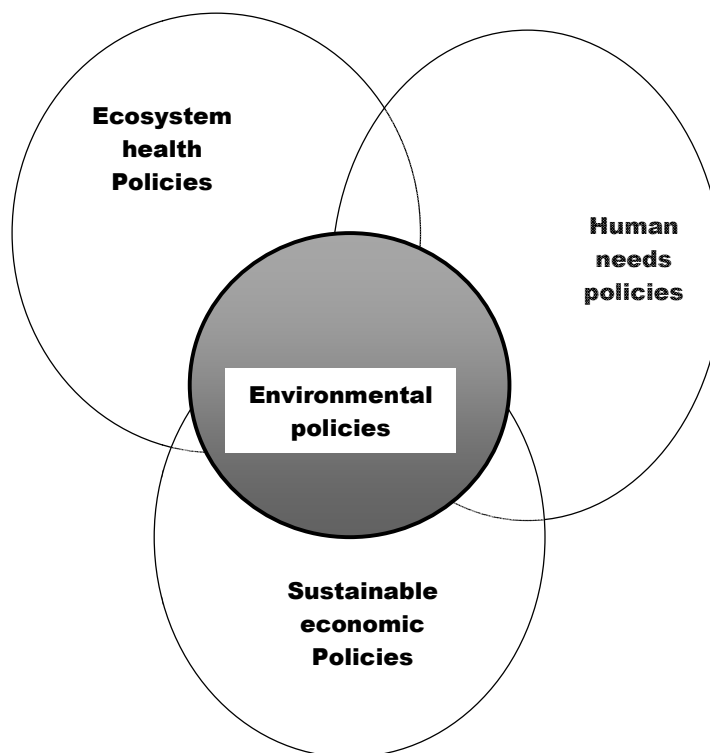


Figure 2: Environmental Policy Considerations.

#### **Framework for a Common Environmental Policy Awareness and Control**

The utility or value of an informed and conscious public in effective environmental policy is glaring and undisputable. There is the need to develop in the South South zone an information system and programme of research and dissemination of facts about our environment to the public.

The key demand here is for on going South South zonal researches on public understanding of environmental line of action to assist develop better attitudes and values to the environment. This has to be done by financing appropriate medium and lay language for describing various aspects and the nature of environmental problems because of technical complexities. At this level, a framework is now put in place for a zonal information system and programme of public enlightenment and information dissemination for environmental problem control. Here, four steps may be recommended.

The first step is to develop research and information on various aspects of environmental problems in the south South geopolitical zone; the contributions of industry, individual attitudes and other activities and this could be done by specialised research institutions, investigative media reporters, monitoring units and environmental pressure groups. This may be followed by the public information dissemination system so as to erode the problems of environmental ignorance. Institutions such as schools, churches, mosques, other religious bodies and the media could be used as agents of information dissemination. As Moemaka (1973, p.95) quite rightly argued in talking about the role of the media; “the mass media should strive to erode those attitudes harmful to sound environmental management and conservation and try to elicit attitudes that will enable the ecosystems to function beneficially”.

The third stage that may be required here is the evolution of environmental policy measures. Policies and programmes adopted should reflect public opinion and research findings on acceptable limits of environmental hazards and these should in turn be reflected in appropriate edicts and bye-laws which also are disseminated to the public through the medium earlier stated. Finally, the job of implementation should be viewed as a challenge to all citizens of the South South while the technicalities of enforcement are handled by a relevant autonomous commission for environmental protection and preservation whose activities are publicised, and monitored through research and legislative checks. By all these means, the disposition and commitment of people towards

environmental matters would be heightened. In fact, the establishment of monitoring and control units in major industries and the taxation of the profit of multinational companies for environmental quality improvement is a *sin qua-non* of an effective environmental policy in the South South zone of Nigeria.

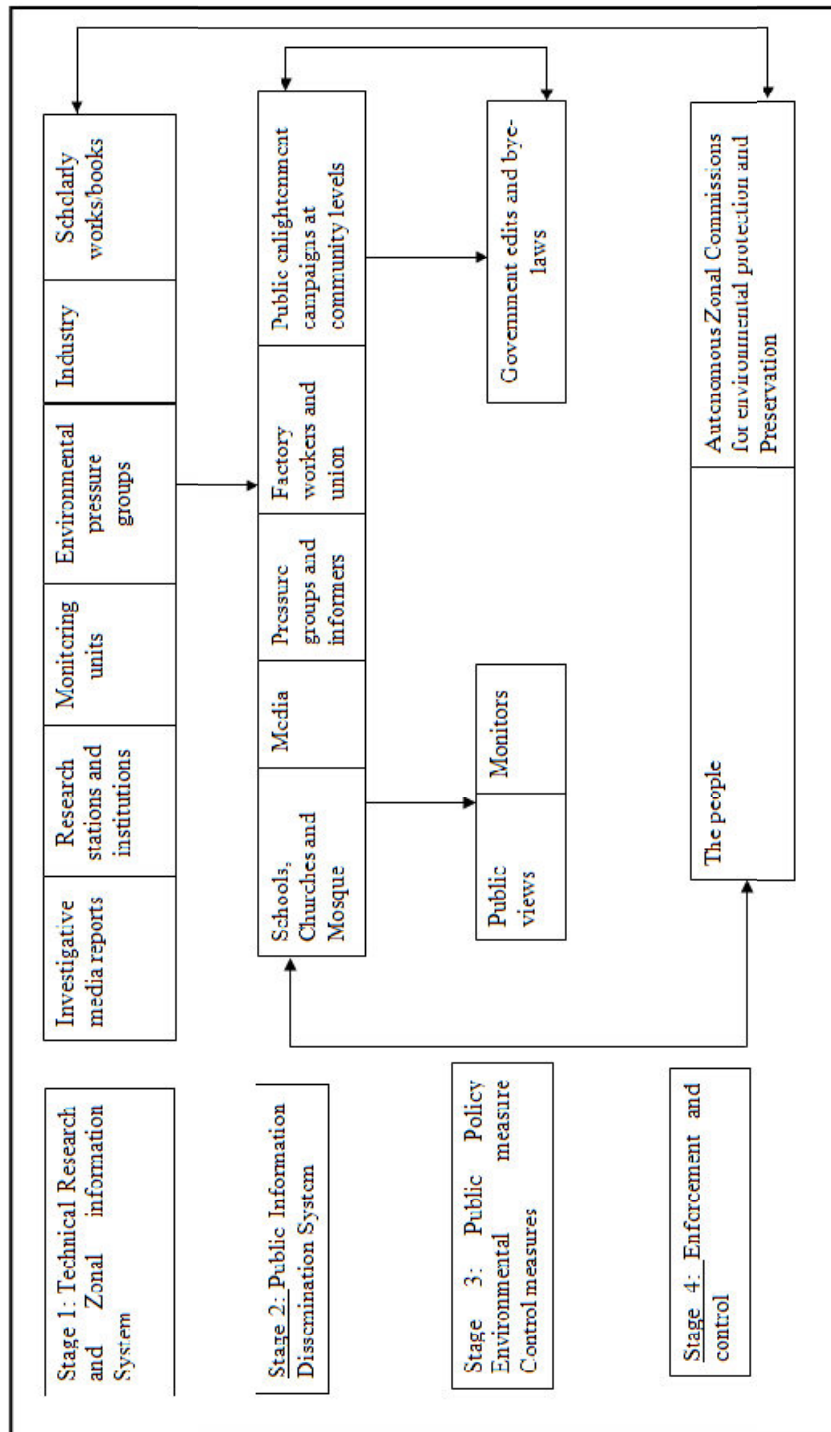


Figure 3: A framework for a Common Public Environmental Policy Awareness and Control (after Chokor, 1988).

### **Conclusion**

A cursory glance at a map, a university curriculum, or a government organization chart will confirm that man has a remarkable capacity for establishing arbitrary boundaries. Moreover, he has usually claimed a degree of sovereignty within those boundaries which he would energetically defend and, if possible, extend. We would continue to believe that we could reasonably afford our independent behaviour except for the recent “discovery” that the human environment is not only a complex but also a finite system. Environmental problems, or, more particularly, the harmful effects of man’s activities on his environment, challenge our exclusiveness and affect our existing territorial, disciplinary, and institutional boundaries simple because they transcend them. Of the many factors to be taken into account in dealing with environmental problems two have particular importance: the identification of the geographical level (such as the South South geopolitical) at which action can effectively be taken and the choice of the appropriate legal and institutional instruments to be employed.

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