

HALTING THE PROGRESSION OF ECOLOGICAL CRISES THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF ECO-JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Environmental justice remains a critical issue in Nigeria, where marginalized communities often bear the brunt of environmental degradation caused by industrialization, resource extraction, and weak regulatory enforcement. This study adopts a literature review approach to examine the intersection of environmental justice and sustainable development in Nigeria, drawing insights from academic journal articles, policy reports, and government publications. Grounded in Environmental Justice Theory and Sustainable Development Theory, the research explores the systemic inequalities in environmental governance and the challenges of balancing economic growth with ecological preservation. The findings highlight the need for stronger regulatory frameworks, community participation in environmental decision-making, and the adoption of sustainable policies that ensure equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. By advocating for a policy shift towards environmental sustainability and social equity, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on achieving a just and ecologically responsible future for Nigeria.

Keywords: Environmental justice, Eco-Justice, Ecological crises, sustainable development, environmental governance

Introduction

Ecological crises constitute significant environmental disturbances arising from both anthropogenic activities and natural processes, culminating in biodiversity loss, climate change, deforestation, desertification, pollution, and resource depletion (Onuoha, Chinedu, Ochekwu & Onuoha, 2022). These crises precipitate the degradation of ecosystems, thereby impacting human well-being, economic stability, and societal equilibrium. In response to these environmental challenges, the concept of eco-justice has emerged as a critical framework aimed at addressing the disproportionate distribution of environmental benefits and burdens (Bolich-Wade, 2022). Eco-justice integrates environmental sustainability with social justice, advocating for policies that safeguard ecological integrity while ensuring equitable access to environmental resources for present and future generations. Furthermore, it highlights the rights of marginalized communities, who often bear the brunt of environmental degradation, and calls for inclusive governance mechanisms to mitigate these disparities.

Across the globe, environmental degradation has reached alarming levels. Climate change, fueled by greenhouse gas emissions, according to Bolan, et al. (2024), has led to extreme weather patterns, rising sea levels, and declining agricultural productivity. Rising global temperatures contribute to prolonged droughts, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and increased incidences of wildfires, further exacerbating food insecurity and displacement of vulnerable populations. Deforestation, driven by urbanization, agricultural expansion, and industrialization, has resulted in widespread habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, and disruption of vital ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and water cycle regulation. The loss of forest cover accelerates desertification, leading to reduced land fertility and threatening traditional livelihoods that depend on natural resources. Pollution, whether air, water, or soil, continues to threaten both human and ecological health. Industrial emissions and vehicular pollution contribute to deteriorating air quality, increasing respiratory diseases and cardiovascular disorders among urban populations. Water pollution, caused by industrial waste discharge, oil spills, and improper

waste disposal, has contaminated freshwater sources, leading to the spread of waterborne diseases and loss of aquatic life (Münzel, Hahad, Daiber & Landrigan, 2023). Soil contamination through hazardous waste and excessive pesticide use diminishes agricultural productivity, endangering food security and economic stability. In Nigeria, these issues are exacerbated by rapid population growth, weak environmental policies, and unsustainable resource extraction. The country faces severe deforestation, driven by illegal logging and land conversion for agriculture, leading to the depletion of vital ecosystems such as the Niger Delta wetlands and the savanna regions (DGB Group, 2023). Oil exploration in the Niger Delta has resulted in widespread environmental degradation, with oil spills, gas flaring, and industrial waste polluting land and water sources, severely affecting local communities. Desertification in the northern region, worsened by climate change and unsustainable farming practices, has led to displacement and conflicts over diminishing arable land. Urban centers struggle with waste management issues, as inadequate infrastructure and poor regulatory enforcement result in excessive plastic pollution and the proliferation of unregulated dumpsites (Amusan, 2023). These environmental challenges pose significant threats to livelihoods and economic development. They contribute to rural-urban migration, increasing pressure on already overburdened urban resources and services.

Despite global and national efforts to address environmental concerns, Nigeria continues to experience severe ecological crises, including deforestation, oil pollution in the Niger Delta, desertification in the North, and urban waste management challenges (Ibimilua & Ayiti, 2024). These crises not only threaten biodiversity and public health but also exacerbate social inequalities. The research problem, therefore, revolves around the ineffective implementation of environmental policies and the lack of a justice-centered approach to ecological conservation. This study examines the extent of ecological crises in Nigeria and their socio-economic impacts while exploring the principles of eco-justice and their applicability in mitigating environmental degradation. It evaluates existing environmental policies and their alignment with eco-justice principles, proposing policy recommendations for sustainable environmental management. Arguing that integrating eco-justice into Nigeria's environmental policies and governance frameworks can significantly mitigate ecological crises, the study highlights how eco-justice can bridge the gap between environmental conservation and social equity. By ensuring equitable access to natural resources, holding polluters accountable, and empowering vulnerable communities, eco-justice emerges as a viable pathway toward environmental sustainability and social well-being in Nigeria.

Research Method

This study adopts a literature review approach to examine existing knowledge, policies, and practices related to the subject matter. The research relied on secondary sources, including academic journal articles, policy reports, government publications and reputable online resources. These materials provide in-depth insights, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence to support the study's findings and recommendations.

Literature Review

Concept of Ecological Crises

Over time, the understanding of ecological crises has undergone significant transformations, shaped by the evolving relationship between human society and the natural environment (Makhmudova, 2024). As industrialization and technological advancements have progressed, human activities have increasingly altered the Earth's ecosystems, often with harmful consequences. According to Lawinski (2023), the current ecological crisis is characterized by the widespread degradation of Earth's systems, leading to conditions that are less hospitable for most forms of life. The natural balance that once supported diverse ecosystems, including human civilization, has been disrupted. This deterioration is largely attributed to industrial activities,

which have contributed to environmental issues such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change. As a result, the stability of ecological systems that once sustained life is now severely compromised, posing significant challenges for the future of both human and non-human species.

Svitačová (2024) highlights that the worsening ecological crisis is the result of multiple factors, many of which are closely linked to the development of industrial society. This transformation brought about significant social and cultural pressures on the environment, leading to widespread ecological degradation. One of the key contributors to this crisis has been the irrational exploitation of natural resources, often driven by economic and industrial demands. Furthermore, the rise of consumerism has encouraged excessive production and consumption, resulting in vast amounts of waste that the planet is unable to absorb naturally. These environmental issues have led to serious consequences that modern society is now experiencing, and their impact is expected to persist well into the future. The restoration of damaged ecosystems and the replenishment of depleted natural resources require long-term efforts, making the reversal of this crisis a complex and time-intensive process. An ecological crisis occurs when environmental changes threaten the survival of species or populations, often due to human-induced factors such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change (Wikipedia, 2024). These disruptions destabilize ecosystems, making it difficult for life to thrive as it once did. The depletion of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, and alteration of climatic patterns contribute to the ongoing crisis, creating challenges for both the environment and human societies. Hume and Barry (2015) emphasize that an ecological crisis is not just an environmental issue but a global problem rooted in unsustainable practices. Instead of maintaining a balanced relationship with nature, industrialization and economic expansion have led to the overexploitation of resources, ultimately destabilizing ecological systems. This crisis extends beyond environmental concerns, influencing social, cultural, political, and economic structures. The consequences of unsustainable development include increased natural disasters, food and water shortages, and rising social inequalities, all of which threaten long-term human survival.

Eco-Justice

Chandramohan and Bhagwan (2023) emphasize the concept of eco-justice, which underscores the responsibility to care for and protect ecosystems. This involves reducing excessive consumption and minimizing the overuse of natural resources to ensure environmental sustainability. Overexploitation has led to severe ecological degradation, making it crucial to adopt more responsible and ethical approaches toward resource management. By promoting eco-justice, societies can work toward restoring balance within natural systems, preserving biodiversity, and mitigating the negative consequences of environmental harm. Jesuit Social Services (2018) further expand on this idea by introducing ecological justice, which integrates social and environmental dimensions. This perspective highlights how environmental issues are closely linked to social inequalities, as marginalized communities often bear the brunt of ecological degradation. The degradation of ecosystems not only harms biodiversity but also exacerbates economic disparities and social injustices. Therefore, ecological justice serves as a comprehensive framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges, recognizing that sustainable solutions must consider both human well-being and environmental integrity. In light of the ongoing ecological crisis, these perspectives emphasize the importance of fostering a more responsible relationship with the environment. Sustainable resource management, ethical consumption, and equitable policies are essential for mitigating environmental damage and ensuring a more just and livable world for present and future generations.

Jähnichen (2022) defines ecological justice as the recognition that Earth serves as a habitat not only for humans but also for a vast diversity of other life forms. This concept emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living organisms and the need for ethical stewardship of the

environment. Ecological justice advocates for a more inclusive approach to environmental protection, ensuring that human activities do not disproportionately harm ecosystems or disrupt the delicate balance that sustains biodiversity. Onyia and Gasiokwu (2024) describe environmental justice, also referred to as eco-justice, as a framework that guides the development, management, implementation, and enforcement of policies, laws, and regulations aimed at protecting the environment while supporting socio-economic development. This concept recognizes the need to balance economic progress with environmental sustainability, ensuring that industrialization, infrastructure projects, and other developmental initiatives do not lead to irreversible environmental damage. A fundamental principle of eco-justice is the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. It seeks to prevent vulnerable and marginalized communities from disproportionately suffering the consequences of pollution, deforestation, and resource depletion while ensuring equal access to clean air, water, and a healthy environment. By integrating environmental considerations into governance and policy-making, eco-justice promotes ethical and responsible stewardship of natural resources. Furthermore, effective eco-justice requires the enforcement of legal frameworks, active community engagement, and regulatory mechanisms to hold individuals, corporations, and governments accountable for environmental harm. Public participation is essential in decision-making processes to advocate for sustainable practices that protect both ecosystems and human well-being. By aligning economic development with ecological responsibility, eco-justice offers a pathway to a more sustainable and equitable future, ensuring that environmental preservation benefits all members of society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on Sustainable Development Theory. The theory emphasizes the need to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity. It argued that development should not come at the expense of future generations' ability to meet their own needs (Mensah, 2019). This theory is rooted in the principles outlined by the Brundtland Commission (1987), which defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Nigeria's rapid urbanization and industrial expansion often prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term ecological and social stability. This imbalance has led to severe consequences, including deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and climate vulnerability. By applying this theory, the research underscores the importance of sustainable policies that ensure development does not compromise future generations. Specifically, it critiques the country's dependence on fossil fuels and advocates for a transition to renewable energy, eco-friendly infrastructure, and policies that support climate adaptation. The study also examines how international sustainable development frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), can inform Nigeria's environmental and economic policies to foster a more resilient and inclusive future.

Key Ecological Crises Affecting Nigeria

Nigeria faces several serious ecological crises that threaten both people and the environment. These challenges include flooding, deforestation, air and water pollution, desertification, and biodiversity loss. Each of these issues has significant consequences for food security, livelihoods, health, and overall stability.

1. **Severe Flooding:** One of the most devastating ecological problems in Nigeria is flooding. In 2022, the country experienced its worst flooding in over a decade, affecting 34 states and displacing over 2 million people (Stromsta, 2024). The disaster was caused by climate change and the release of excess water from the Lagdo Dam. Bayelsa and Anambra states were among the worst-hit areas. Flooding has damaged farmland, worsened food insecurity, and increased

displacement, with many people forced into overcrowded camps. The crisis has had a particularly severe impact on children, with over 800,000 displaced and forced into emergency relocations, exposing them to malnutrition, disease, and gender-based violence. School closures and infrastructure damage have further disrupted education, pushing many children into labor instead of learning (Stromsta, 2024). If no action is taken, future floods could put 4.2 million people at risk.

2. Deforestation: Nigeria has lost a significant portion of its forests due to illegal logging, agriculture, and urban expansion. This has led to biodiversity loss and the destruction of natural habitats (Global Dialogue, 2021). The loss of trees also contributes to climate change by reducing the amount of carbon absorbed from the atmosphere. Without urgent reforestation efforts, desertification and soil erosion will continue to worsen, making agriculture even more difficult for rural communities. The Nigeria Socio-Ecological Alternatives Charter has called for stronger environmental protection policies and community involvement in preserving natural ecosystems (Global Dialogue, 2021).

3. Air and Water Pollution: Air pollution in Nigeria, particularly in urban areas, is at dangerous levels. Vehicle emissions, industrial activities, and the burning of waste contribute to respiratory diseases and other health problems (Global Dialogue, 2021). Water pollution is also a major issue, especially in the Niger Delta, where oil spills have contaminated rivers and lakes. Hydrocarbon pollution has reached catastrophic levels, affecting local communities' access to clean drinking water and damaging marine life (Global Dialogue, 2021). Many Nigerians struggle with water shortages, while debates continue over whether water resources should remain public or be privatized. The charter emphasizes the need to recognize water as a fundamental human right and to hold polluting industries accountable for environmental damage (Global Dialogue, 2021).

4. Desertification and Drought: Northern Nigeria is experiencing severe desertification due to climate change and deforestation. As the land turns into desert, water sources dry up, making it harder for farmers to grow crops (Global Dialogue, 2021). This has led to food shortages and forced migration, increasing tensions between farmers and herders competing for scarce resources. The displacement of pastoralists due to environmental changes has contributed to violent farmer-herder conflicts, especially in the Middle Belt region (Stromsta, 2024). Desertification is also worsening economic disparities, making life even more difficult for marginalized communities.

5. Loss of Biodiversity: Nigeria's rich biodiversity is under threat due to deforestation, industrial farming, and pollution. Many plant and animal species are disappearing, which affects ecosystems and the livelihoods of communities that depend on natural resources (Global Dialogue, 2021). The destruction of forests and wetlands has also increased the impact of flooding, as natural barriers that could absorb excess water are disappearing. The Nigeria Socio-Ecological Alternatives Charter advocates for ecosystem restoration, stricter conservation laws, and an end to unsustainable industrial farming practices (Global Dialogue, 2021).

The Need for Action

To address these ecological crises, Nigeria needs strong policies that promote environmental justice and sustainability. Improving flood control measures and urban planning is crucial to mitigating the impact of climate change-induced disasters and dam releases (Stromsta, 2024). Strengthening laws against deforestation and implementing large-scale reforestation projects can help restore lost ecosystems and reduce environmental degradation (Global Dialogue, 2021). Tackling air and water pollution requires stricter regulations on industries, particularly in regions

like the Niger Delta, where oil spills have severely contaminated water sources and damaged marine life (Global Dialogue, 2021). Desertification must be addressed through tree planting initiatives and sustainable agricultural practices to restore soil fertility and prevent further land degradation (Global Dialogue, 2021). Protecting biodiversity is equally vital, and this can be achieved through stronger conservation efforts and enforcing wildlife protection laws to preserve Nigeria's rich ecosystems (Global Dialogue, 2021). A sustainable approach that involves government action, corporate responsibility, and community participation is essential to ensuring environmental resilience and securing the future for coming generations.

Ecological crises in Nigeria and their Socio-Economic Impacts

Nigeria is facing severe ecological crises that have far-reaching socio-economic impacts. Climate change, deforestation, poor environmental management, and pollution are major challenges that threaten the country's economy and the well-being of its people. Agriculture, a crucial sector in Nigeria, is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and soil erosion. These issues reduce crop yields, increase food prices, and heighten food insecurity, forcing the country to rely more on food imports (Du Trésor, 2024). Despite several agricultural policies, food security remains a significant concern, requiring urgent reforms to modernize farming, improve infrastructure, and enhance value chains (Olurinola & Osabuohien, 2021). The dominance of subsistence farming means many small-scale farmers struggle with limited access to markets and technology, further worsening poverty levels. Climate change has also severely impacted Nigeria's economic growth. Rising temperatures and desertification in the north threaten water supply and agricultural productivity, while flooding in the south destroys homes, farmlands, and infrastructure. The devastating 2022 floods displaced over a million people and caused economic damages worth billions of dollars (Du Trésor, 2024). These environmental changes have led to internal migration, placing pressure on urban centers and contributing to unemployment and social tensions (Ogbuabor & Egwuchukwu, 2017). The energy sector has also suffered from climate-related disruptions, with flooding affecting oil and gas production and droughts reducing hydroelectric power output. As power shortages persist, businesses struggle, costing the economy billions of dollars annually (Du Trésor, 2024).

The reliance on hydrocarbons poses another challenge, as the global shift towards renewable energy threatens Nigeria's oil-dependent economy. While fossil fuel exports remain the primary source of revenue, environmental degradation in oil-producing areas, particularly in the Niger Delta, has caused severe socio-economic issues. Pollution from oil spills and gas flaring has destroyed farmland and water sources, displacing local communities and worsening poverty and unemployment (Agbonifo, 2022). The loss of livelihoods in these areas has fueled conflicts, crime, and anti-government movements, creating security challenges that further hinder development. Beyond economic concerns, climate change has direct implications for social and human rights. The poorest and most vulnerable populations suffer the most from environmental crises, as they lack the resources to adapt. Governance challenges, corruption, and inadequate climate policies have slowed Nigeria's response to these crises. Although international organizations have pledged financial support for climate adaptation, the country struggles with transparency and proper management of these funds (Oamen & Erhagbe, 2021). Weak institutional frameworks and poor environmental regulations have allowed unsustainable practices to continue unchecked.

There is a clear need for sustainable development strategies that integrate climate adaptation, economic diversification, and environmental conservation. Nigeria must strengthen policies to curb carbon emissions, promote reforestation, and invest in renewable energy (Ogbuabor & Egwuchukwu, 2017). A National Climate Change Commission would help coordinate efforts to mitigate environmental damage and ensure accountability in climate financing (Okon et al.,

2021). Agricultural reforms, including better training for farmers, improved irrigation systems, and investments in modern technology, can enhance food security and reduce vulnerability to climate shocks (Olurinola & Osabuohien, 2021). Stronger international cooperation is also necessary, with developed nations supporting Nigeria's transition to a more sustainable economy (Oamen & Erhagbe, 2021). The ecological crises in Nigeria are deeply interconnected with economic instability, social unrest, and governance challenges. Without urgent and comprehensive action, these issues will continue to threaten national development, exacerbate poverty, and create long-term consequences for future generations. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes policy reforms, environmental protection, economic diversification, and international collaboration.

The Principles of Eco-Justice and their Applicability in mitigating Environmental Degradation

The world is facing serious environmental problems, including pollution, deforestation, climate change, and loss of biodiversity. These issues threaten not only nature but also human health and survival. The concept of eco-justice provides a framework for addressing these problems by promoting fairness in the use of natural resources and ensuring that all people, especially vulnerable communities, have access to a clean and healthy environment. Eco-justice is based on the belief that humans are part of a larger ecological system and must take responsibility for protecting the environment. It emphasizes fairness in how environmental benefits and harms are distributed. According to Chandramohan and Bhagwan (2023), eco-justice calls for actions like reducing waste, conserving resources, and involving communities in environmental conservation projects, such as tree planting and recycling programs. These efforts can help slow down environmental degradation and promote sustainability.

In Nigeria, environmental justice is often seen as a legal and social movement aimed at protecting people's rights to a clean and safe environment. Onyia and Gasiokwu (2024) argue that the Nigerian legal system needs to be improved to give citizens better access to justice when they suffer from pollution or land degradation. The study suggests that the constitution should be amended to recognize the environment as a legal entity, meaning that laws should protect nature as much as they protect human rights. Collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and civil society can also help in strengthening environmental laws and policies. Despite the importance of eco-justice, many people in Nigeria and other parts of the world struggle to access environmental justice. Ibe and Akwa (2021) highlight key barriers such as lack of awareness, high legal costs, and the difficulty of proving environmental damage in court. Many victims of pollution and other environmental harms do not have the resources or legal knowledge to seek justice. The study recommends reducing legal costs and making it easier for affected communities to hold polluters accountable. Another approach to eco-justice is "Earth jurisprudence," which suggests that environmental laws should focus on protecting nature itself rather than only addressing human concerns. Gbadegesin (2022) argues that Nigeria's current legal system is too focused on economic growth and human needs, often at the expense of the environment. The study recommends shifting towards an earth-centered legal system, where laws prioritize the health of ecosystems. However, this change faces resistance from businesses and government institutions that prioritize profits over sustainability. One of the biggest challenges in addressing ecological crises is the poor enforcement of environmental laws. Odey (2023) points out that Nigeria has many environmental regulations, but they are not properly implemented. Corruption, weak institutions, and lack of public awareness prevent effective enforcement. To improve the situation, the study suggests creating special environmental courts, increasing penalties for polluters, and encouraging public participation in environmental decision-making.

Environmental Policies in Nigeria and their Alignment with Eco-Justice Principles

Nigeria has implemented several environmental policies to address climate change, deforestation, pollution, and other ecological concerns. These policies aim to balance economic growth with environmental protection. However, their alignment with eco-justice principles—ensuring fair treatment and involvement of all communities in environmental decision-making—varies.

1. National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) (2021–2030): The **National Climate Change Policy (NCCP)** provides a framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change. It aligns with eco-justice by emphasizing the need for sustainable development, but there are concerns about whether vulnerable communities, such as rural populations and low-income groups, have sufficient participation in policy implementation (Department of Climate Change, 2021).

2. Climate Change Act (2021): The **Climate Change Act** seeks to achieve low greenhouse gas emissions and promote green and sustainable growth. It mandates the development of a **carbon tax** and a **carbon market**, which could help fund environmental initiatives (Okereke & Onuigbo, 2021). However, eco-justice advocates argue that a carbon tax could disproportionately impact poorer populations unless properly managed.

3. Energy Transition Plan (ETP) (2022): Nigeria's **Energy Transition Plan (ETP)** aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060. It promotes renewable energy but also supports **natural gas expansion**, which contradicts global decarbonization goals (Nigeria Energy Transition Plan, 2022). From an eco-justice perspective, the reliance on gas could harm marginalized communities by prolonging pollution in oil-rich areas like the Niger Delta.

4. National Action Plan on Short-lived Climate Pollutants (2019): This policy targets **methane reduction** and seeks to minimize harmful emissions from oil production. It supports eco-justice by addressing air pollution, which disproportionately affects low-income communities near oil facilities (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). However, enforcement remains a challenge.

5. National Forest Policy (2020): The **National Forest Policy** aims to increase forest cover from **6% to 25% by 2030**, which is essential for carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2019). The policy aligns with eco-justice principles by promoting sustainable land use and reducing deforestation-driven displacement. However, enforcement is weak, and illegal logging persists.

6. REDD+ Strategy (2021): Nigeria's **Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+)** program aims to curb deforestation, particularly in **Cross River State** (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2021a). It aligns with eco-justice by involving local communities in conservation, but there have been concerns about whether indigenous groups have adequate land rights.

7. Great Green Wall (GGW) Initiative: Nigeria participates in the **Great Green Wall** project, a regional effort to combat desertification and create jobs in the Sahel region (Global Legislators Organisation, n.d.). The initiative promotes eco-justice by restoring degraded land and improving livelihoods. However, implementation has been slow, and some communities struggle to access benefits.

The Role of Religion in Nigeria

Religion plays a significant role in shaping societal values, influencing policy decisions, and mobilizing communities in Nigeria. Given the environmental challenges discussed in the article—climate change, pollution, deforestation, and weak policy enforcement—religious organizations and leaders have a critical role in advocating for environmental sustainability, promoting eco-justice, and fostering ethical responsibility towards nature. Many religious traditions emphasize the responsibility of humans to care for the Earth. In Christianity and Islam, which are the dominant religions in Nigeria, environmental responsibility is deeply rooted in scripture. The Bible teaches that humans are stewards of God's creation (Genesis 2:15), while the Qur'an emphasizes the balance of nature and warns against excessive exploitation (Qur'an 6:141). Religious leaders can leverage these teachings to raise awareness about sustainable development and encourage followers to take active roles in protecting the environment. Religious institutions can serve as powerful advocates for the enforcement of Nigeria's environmental policies. Given the weak implementation of environmental laws, religious organizations can pressure the government to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and hold corporations accountable for environmental harm. Through their extensive networks, religious bodies can also push for amendments to the Nigerian Constitution to recognize environmental rights as fundamental human rights, ensuring justice for communities affected by pollution and deforestation.

Faith-based organizations have a strong presence in rural and urban communities, making them effective agents for grassroots mobilization. They can lead community-based projects such as reforestation programs where churches and mosques organize tree-planting campaigns to support Nigeria's National Forest Policy and REDD+ initiatives, waste management initiatives encouraging waste reduction, recycling, and proper disposal of plastic waste in their communities, and water conservation and clean energy adoption through the promotion of solar energy and sustainable water management practices in places of worship and schools. Eco-justice emphasizes the fair distribution of environmental benefits and harms. Religious institutions, which often provide humanitarian aid, can advocate for climate justice by supporting marginalized communities disproportionately affected by climate change and pollution. Faith-based charities can provide relief to communities facing flooding, desertification, and food insecurity due to climate change. Many religious groups run businesses, schools, hospitals, and media outlets. By adopting eco-friendly policies, such as reducing carbon footprints, using renewable energy, and discouraging wasteful consumption, religious institutions can set examples for society. They can also encourage businesses to follow ethical environmental practices by promoting fair trade and sustainable agriculture. Christian and Islamic organizations can work together to promote environmental conservation. Interfaith dialogues can help unify efforts to combat climate change, deforestation, and pollution. This collaboration can also create a stronger collective voice when advocating for environmental policies at national and international levels. Religious gatherings, such as sermons, Quranic teachings, and Sunday school classes—can be used to educate followers about environmental issues. Clerics can integrate eco-justice principles into their teachings, emphasizing that caring for nature is a moral obligation. This approach can foster a culture of environmental responsibility across generations. While Nigeria has developed several environmental policies aimed at addressing climate change, deforestation, pollution, and sustainable energy, their alignment with eco-justice remains inconsistent. Various challenges hinder the full realization of eco-justice principles, particularly in ensuring equitable participation, environmental protection, and benefits for all communities. One of the significant barriers to aligning Nigeria's environmental policies with eco-justice principles is the lack of effective enforcement. While numerous policies and regulations exist to address environmental issues, their implementation is often inadequate due to institutional

weaknesses, corruption, and a lack of political will. Regulatory agencies, such as the Federal Ministry of Environment and the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), frequently struggle with limited funding, inadequate manpower, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, which prevent them from effectively monitoring compliance and penalizing violators. As a result, activities such as illegal logging, oil spills, industrial pollution, and waste mismanagement continue to threaten environmental sustainability and disproportionately impact vulnerable communities. Without a strong enforcement mechanism, these policies remain largely ineffective, and eco-justice objectives are not fully realized.

Nigeria's economy remains heavily dependent on fossil fuel production, particularly crude oil and natural gas, which generate a substantial portion of the country's revenue. Despite commitments to renewable energy and carbon reduction, the government continues to prioritize fossil fuel investments due to their economic benefits. For example, the expansion of natural gas infrastructure under Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan highlights the tension between economic growth and environmental sustainability. The ongoing extraction and exportation of fossil fuels not only contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions but also lead to severe environmental degradation, especially in the Niger Delta region, where oil spills and gas flaring have caused extensive damage to ecosystems and local livelihoods. The prioritization of economic interests over long-term sustainability contradicts the fundamental principles of eco-justice, which advocate for equitable environmental benefits and the protection of marginalized communities from ecological harm.

Eco-justice emphasizes the fair inclusion of all communities, particularly those most affected by environmental issues, in policy formulation and implementation. However, many of Nigeria's environmental policies are developed and executed in a top-down manner, with minimal input from local communities, indigenous groups, and civil society organizations. For instance, the implementation of conservation initiatives such as the REDD+ program has been criticized for excluding indigenous communities from decision-making processes, even though these communities are directly affected by deforestation and land use changes. Similarly, large-scale infrastructure projects, such as dams and urban developments, often proceed without adequate consultation with local populations, leading to displacement, loss of traditional livelihoods, and environmental injustices. Ensuring meaningful community engagement in environmental governance is crucial for achieving eco-justice, as it empowers affected populations to contribute to sustainable solutions and safeguards their rights to a healthy environment.

Nigeria relies significantly on international funding to implement its environmental policies, particularly in areas such as climate adaptation, renewable energy development, and conservation efforts. While external financial support from organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank has facilitated progress in some areas, the dependence on foreign assistance introduces uncertainties and challenges. Many climate finance agreements come with conditions that may not align with Nigeria's socio-economic realities, limiting the country's ability to develop independent, context-specific environmental strategies. Additionally, delays in accessing international funding, coupled with bureaucratic red tape, often slow down the implementation of crucial projects. Without a stable and self-sufficient financial framework, Nigeria's environmental policies may struggle to achieve their intended objectives, further hindering eco-justice outcomes.

Challenges in Aligning Nigeria's Environmental Policies with Eco-Justice Principles

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inconsistent. Various challenges hinder the full realization of eco-justice principles, particularly in ensuring equitable participation, environmental protection, and benefits for all communities. One of the significant barriers to aligning Nigeria's environmental policies with eco-justice principles is the lack of effective enforcement. While numerous policies and regulations exist to address environmental issues, their implementation is often inadequate due to institutional weaknesses, corruption, and a lack of political will. Regulatory agencies, such as the Federal Ministry of Environment and the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), frequently struggle with limited funding, inadequate manpower, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, which prevent them from effectively monitoring compliance and penalizing violators. As a result, activities such as illegal logging, oil spills, industrial pollution, and waste mismanagement continue to threaten environmental sustainability and disproportionately impact vulnerable communities. Without a strong enforcement mechanism, these policies remain largely ineffective, and eco-justice objectives are not fully realized.

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further hindering eco-justice outcomes.

Conclusion

Halting the progression of ecological crises in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach grounded in the principles of eco-justice. The key environmental challenges facing the country—flooding, deforestation, pollution, desertification, and biodiversity loss—have severe socio-economic implications, threatening food security, public health, economic stability, and social cohesion. These crises are largely driven by unsustainable industrial practices, weak environmental policies, and the unequal distribution of environmental harms and benefits. Eco-justice principles provide a framework for addressing these environmental crises through equity, responsibility, and sustainability. Equity ensures that all individuals, especially marginalized communities, have access to a clean and healthy environment. Responsibility emphasizes the need for industries, governments, and individuals to be accountable for environmental protection. Sustainability calls for long-term strategies that balance economic development with ecological preservation.

To mitigate environmental degradation, Nigeria must adopt and enforce robust environmental policies aligned with global frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement. Strengthening laws against deforestation, implementing large-scale reforestation projects, and investing in clean energy alternatives are essential steps toward reversing ecological damage. Additionally, stricter regulations on air and water pollution, particularly in the Niger Delta, will help protect both natural ecosystems and human populations. Case studies from various regions highlight successful eco-justice initiatives, such as community-led afforestation programs and sustainable agricultural practices, demonstrating that grassroots participation is crucial in environmental conservation. Incorporating indigenous knowledge and local community involvement in policy implementation can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes. Furthermore, integrating environmental justice into Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks will ensure stronger enforcement of ecological protection laws. Recognizing nature as a legal entity and expanding access to environmental justice for affected communities can empower citizens to hold corporations and policymakers accountable for environmental harm.

Nigeria stands at a critical juncture where decisive action is needed to halt the progression of ecological crises. Through a commitment to eco-justice principles, policy reforms, corporate accountability, and community participation, the country can build a resilient and sustainable future. Addressing these issues now will not only protect the environment but also secure the well-being of future generations, ensuring a balance between development and ecological preservation.

The Way Forward

To achieve eco-justice in Nigeria, a comprehensive and strategic approach is essential. Strengthening environmental policies and ensuring their strict enforcement will help curb environmental degradation. Government agencies, particularly the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), must be empowered to take decisive action against violators. In addition, local communities must be actively involved in decision-making processes regarding their environment, as grassroots advocacy and community-driven initiatives are key to sustainable environmental protection.

Promoting renewable energy and green technologies is crucial in reducing dependence on fossil fuels, mitigating pollution, and fostering a cleaner, healthier environment. Industries, particularly in the extractive sector, should be held accountable for their environmental impact, while

businesses must adopt corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies that prioritize sustainability. Furthermore, raising public awareness through education, media campaigns, and community outreach programs will empower citizens to take an active role in environmental conservation.

Judicial and legal reforms are necessary to ensure swift legal redress for communities affected by environmental injustices. A fair and transparent legal system will serve as a deterrent against environmental violations. Additionally, international collaboration is vital in accessing funding, expertise, and technologies that support eco-justice and climate resilience. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can build a just and sustainable environmental framework that safeguards natural resources and ensures a healthier future for all.

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