

## Rethinking development



The Government's development initiatives have not managed to reduce poverty in the country and have also failed to diversify a petroleum-based economy, with a non-sustainable extraction-led growth model still being applied. This has led to severe environmental degradation, with alarming desertification and erosion trends. The Government has to rethink its strategies and adopt environmentally friendly long-term planning policies based on renewable energy sources and adequate environmental management. The poor should be empowered and given a stake in managing the environment and natural resources.

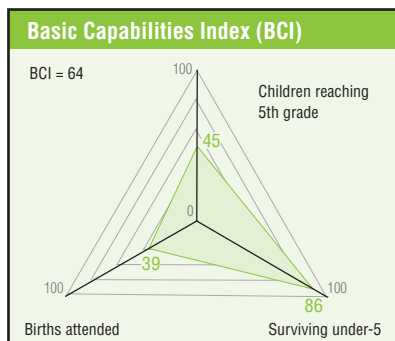
### Social Watch Nigeria Ray Onyegu

Although Nigeria is rich in natural resources such as bauxite, gold, tin, coal, petroleum and forests, it is still poorly developed. The 2010 Human Development Index ranks the country in the low human development group, with an index value estimated at 0.423, placing it at 142 out of 169 countries.<sup>1</sup> Non-sustainable attempts to restructure the economy during the last decade have further worsened the situation.

From 2003 to 2007 the Government attempted to implement a programme called the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), designed to raise the country's standard of living through a variety of reforms that included liberalization of the economy and privatization of State assets.<sup>2</sup> The Government expected that NEEDS would create 7 million new jobs, diversify the economy, boost non-energy exports and improve agricultural productivity. However in 2010, three years after its implementation, about 92% of the population were still living on less than USD 2 a day, while about 71% survived on less than USD 1 a day.<sup>3</sup>

Reasons for Nigeria's developmental stagnation include inappropriate macroeconomic policies, weak economic growth, the negative effects of globalization, lack of good governance, corruption, the debt burden, low productivity and low wages in the informal sector, deficiencies in the labour market resulting in limited job growth and unemployment, a high population growth rate, poor human resources development, an increase in crime and violence and environmental degradation arising from both climate change and human activities.

This situation is further aggravated by the extraction-led development model being implemented by the Government. Thus despite recent indicators

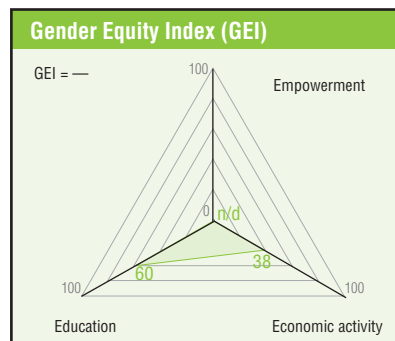


showing some economic progress (GDP growth rose from 5.6% in 2010 to an estimated 6.8% for 2011),<sup>4</sup> the country remains highly dependent on the hydrocarbon industry,<sup>5</sup> clearly a non-renewable resource and therefore unsuitable as a basis for sustainable development. Poverty – the country's biggest challenge – is linked to the country's environmental issues, most of which are derived from extractive practices: desertification, flooding, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity.

### Desertification

Almost 350,000 hectares of arable land are being lost annually to the advancing desert.<sup>6</sup> Natural causes include the poor physical condition of the soil, vegetation and topography as well as increasingly dry land and the inherent extreme climatic variability as evidenced in periodic droughts. Moreover there is human overexploitation, overgrazing, deforestation and poor irrigation due to diverse factors such as demographic growth, migration and the extremely hard socioeconomic conditions in which the people live.<sup>7</sup>

The demand for wood for housing, fuel, the fishing industry and other uses and the removal of trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants and grass cover continue to accelerate the degradation of the soil to



desert-like conditions. Pastoralists also cut foliage to feed their animals and use branches to build enclosures. Bush burning by villagers during land clearing for agriculture, hunters setting fire to the vegetation in search for animals, cattle herders setting fire to dry grass to stimulate the growth of dormant grass buds and cultivation of marginal areas in periods of higher than normal rainfall are also causes of Nigeria's increasing desertification.

The intensified use of fragile and marginal ecosystems has led to progressive degradation of marginal agricultural land even in years of normal rainfall.<sup>8</sup> Insufficient water supply in most parts of Nigeria resulting from drought has led to increased contamination of the remaining sources of water and enhances the transmission of water-borne diseases such as typhoid, hepatitis A and cholera. It is feared that the damage caused by drought and population pressure may have already resulted in the genetic loss of a vast array of plant species.<sup>9</sup>

### Flooding

At the same time as it suffers widespread drought, Nigeria's topography makes it especially vulnerable to flooding. This phenomenon takes three main forms: coastal, river and urban. The first occurs in the low-lying belt of mangrove and fresh water swamps along the coast, including overflow of the Lagos Bar

1 UNDP, *Human Development Report 2010: The Real Wealth of Nations*, (New York: 2010), <hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2010/>.

2 Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, *Country Profile: Nigeria*, (2008), p.11, <lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nigeria.pdf>.

3 AllAfrica.com, *UNESCO on Poverty in Nigeria*, (27 January 2010), <allAfrica.com/stories/201001280540.html>.

4 IndexMundi, "Nigeria GDP – real growth rate," <www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/gdp\_real\_growth\_rate.html>.

5 EconomyWatch, "Nigeria economy," <www.economywatch.com/world\_economy/nigeria/>.

6 N. Medugu, "Nigeria: combating desertification and drought," *AllAfrica.com*, 2 June 2009, <allAfrica.com/stories/200906030289.html>.

7 Ibid.

8 Desertification, "Desertification in Nigeria," 9 March 2007, <desertification.wordpress.com/2007/03/30/desertification-in-nigeria-african-agriculture>.

9 Government of Nigeria, *Country Profile: Implementation of Agenda 21*, submitted to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, (New York: April 1997), <www.un.org/esa/earthsummit/nigeriac.htm>.

Beach of the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>10</sup> River flooding occurs periodically in the flood plains of the larger rivers and in the Niger Delta, and also sudden short-lived flash floods are caused by the overflowing of small rivers in the rainy season. Urban flooding occurs in towns located on flat or low-lying terrain, especially where little or no provision has been made for surface drainage or where existing drains have been blocked with municipal waste. Heavy unpredicted rains and other forms of extreme weather are among the risks of climate change due to global warming, thus increasing the country's vulnerability to natural disasters.

Severe flooding caused the displacement of nearly 2 million people in the northern region of the country in 2010.<sup>11</sup> Many other West African countries – including Benin, Ghana and Niger – were also severely affected by the disaster, which followed a large-scale drought and famine in the Sahel region (the transition zone between the Sahara Desert and central Africa) and the Senegal River basin.

The northern states of Challawa and Tiga were among the hardest hit by the floods, which also displaced some 2 million people in Jijawa state. The Governor of Jijawa blamed the flooding on the irresponsible opening of the Challawa and Tiga dam gates with no warning to local villagers. Although the Government admitted that one of the dams had spilled over, it claimed this could not have been enough to cause the flooding and pointed to heavy rains as the cause of the disaster.<sup>12</sup> Entire crops were lost in the floods, which occurred just before the harvest when it was too late for the farmers to replant their fields, increasing the risk of food crisis and famine.

### Environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity

Inappropriate agricultural practices along with the destruction of watersheds and the opening up of river banks and other critical areas have led to silting of river beds and loss of water courses. Uncontrolled use of agro-chemicals and the concomitant problems of chemical persistence in the soil in humid areas and soil-crust formation in arid climates have contributed to the destruction of vast agricul-

tural land. In addition petroleum prospecting – with its attendant oil pollution problems including spills, oil well blow-outs, oil blast discharges and improper disposal of drilling mud – has created problems such as: damage to marine wildlife, modification of the ecosystem through species extinction and a delay in the establishment of new flora and fauna, a decrease in fishery resources and the loss of the aesthetic value of natural beaches due to unsightly oil slicks.<sup>13</sup>

Nigeria's wildlife is also rapidly declining due to habitat loss and increased pressure from hunters, poachers and bush burning. The cheetah, pygmy hippopotamus, giraffe and black rhinoceros are no longer found in the country. Rampant bush burning is threatening the growth of trees and wildlife and reducing ecological diversity. Gravel mining for construction is aggravating the problem of erosion and surface run-off, while indiscriminate discharge of particulates from construction sites is leading to pollution and siltation. Areas earmarked as green belts and recreational areas are now being systematically converted into building sites.<sup>14</sup>

### Industrial pollution and waste<sup>15</sup>

Nigeria has about 5,000 registered industrial facilities and some 10,000 small-scale industries operating illegally within residential premises. In places such as Kano, Kaduna and Lagos, coloured, hot and heavy metal-laden effluents – especially from the textile, tannery and paints industries – are discharged directly into open drains and water channels, constituting direct dangers to water users and flora and fauna downstream. Also disturbing is the practice whereby some industrial facilities bury their expired chemicals and hazardous chemical wastes in their backyards, threatening the ground water quality.

Stack fumes from industries emit gases and particulates with grave respiratory and cardiac ailment consequences. They often occlude sunlight for hours in several parts of Lagos, Kano, Enugu and Port-Harcourt. Air inversion with its accompanying foggy dispersion and visibility reduction to less than 20 meters has become an almost permanent feature of the Oko Baba mid-section of the Third Mainland

Bridge in Lagos, where saw millers burn sawdust and other wood shavings.

A similar phenomenon is experienced at the tollgate end of the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway at Oregon, where smoke from a nearby dumpsite pollutes the air and has a nauseating odour. Municipal solid waste heaps dot several parts of the major cities blocking roads, alleys and pavements. These unsightly dumps are characterised by:

- Various non-biodegradable household petrochemical products such as polythene bags, plastic containers, Styrofoam packages and tyres;
- Crankcase oils from mechanical workshops, industries, power stations and commercial houses discharged carelessly into drains and surface waters thereby contaminating surface and underground waters;
- The placement of public buildings and residential quarters on flood-prone areas as well as unsettled and improperly reclaimed dumps. Such ecologically sensitive areas are often converted into plots for the erection of residential quarters and public buildings such as markets.

### Conclusion

Sound environmental management is critical to sustainable development and, as a consequence, to poverty reduction. Nigeria's present economic growth will be short-lived because of the economy's dependence on hydrocarbon industries and also because of inadequate natural environment and resource conservation. Most of the past damage to the environment and natural resources was caused through deforestation, overgrazing and over-fishing. The rural poor are often forced to live on fragile land and near fragile water supplies that require sensitive resource management in the face of increasing degradation, while the urban poor are exposed to diseases and illnesses resulting from overcrowding, inadequate basic services and polluted living conditions. In order to properly address the issue of poverty the Government needs to empower the poor and give them a stake in managing the environment and natural resources. ■

10 A. Raufu, "Africa underwater: Nigeria's coastline is besieged by global warming," *The Environment Magazine*, (March–April 2002), <findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\_m1594/is\_2\_13/ai\_83667620/>.

11 BBC News Africa, *Northern Nigeria flooding displaces two million*, (24 September 2010), <www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11409167>.

12 TerraDaily, *Agency denies opened dams caused Nigeria floods*, (26 September 2010), <www.terradaily.com/reports/Agency\_denies\_opened\_dams\_caused\_Nigeria\_floods\_999.html>.

13 P. O. Bankole and A. Surajudeen, *Major environmental issues and the need for environmental statistics and indicators in Nigeria*, paper presented on behalf of the Nigerian Delegation at the ECOWAS Workshop on Environment Statistics, (Abuja: 19–23 May 2008).

14 Government of Nigeria, op. cit.

15 Ibid.