



ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RIVERS STATE



PRESENTED BY THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
GOALS CDS GROUP, NYSC PHALGA ZONE

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PREAMBLE

We members of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Community Development Service (CDS) Group, NYSC PHALGA Zone in recognition and response to the social, economic and environmental challenges pressing Rivers State commit ourselves to the socio-economic, political and environmental development of Rivers State.

The Sustainable Development Goals is a set of 17 ambitious goals, 169 targets and 304 indicators. The Global Goals, as they are also called, cover a broad range of sustainable development issues that include; ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education and combating climate change. Member states of the United Nations are expected to use this agenda to frame their policies over the next fifteen years (2015-2030) to ensure that our world becomes a better place.

We therefore commit ourselves as Sustainable Development Goals Advocates/Development Knowledge Facilitators to work to the best of our abilities to promote the agenda, including its 17 goals and 169 targets through advocacy and active partnerships with governments, major groups, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, workers and trade unions, local authorities, local communities, volunteer groups and foundations, philanthropic organizations, educational and academic entities, parliamentarians, and all other relevant stakeholders.

In order to have sincere partnerships, we believe all parts of society must be integrated as partners in sustainable development.

We recognize that in order for this ambitious 2030 agenda to be realized, we youth must be equally committed. Accordingly, we express our resolve to take committed and concrete actions in order to achieve Sustainable Development.

FOREWORD

Sustainable Development Goals, a post 2015 development agenda remains a more significant road map to sustainable development taking into cognizance the issues that confront the vulnerable, elite, literate, non- literate members of the society.

The reality of these developmental challenges confronting people and planet is clearly seen in the seventeen goals of the SDGs raised from the ‘MY WORLD SURVEY’ questionnaire; a research carried out to get the view point of the populace on the kind of world they need and want post 2015. It made the SDGs more inclusive than the MDGs, with greater focus on people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnership.

This development agenda calls for more attention, involvement and innovative approaches by all and for all - irrespective of age, social status, religion, ethnicity or race - as Nigeria and the world at large looks forward to the attainment of the SDGs by 2030 and beyond.

It is against this backdrop that Nigeria joins the rest of the world to embrace the seventeen goals of Sustainable Development together with its targets and indicators as a blue print for sustainable development.

This document, “**Achieving Sustainable Development in Rivers State**” focuses on disseminating vital information and strategies to step down the SDGs, with more emphasis on slums and rural areas. It also encourages community participation and ownership of projects for easy understanding and implementation.

This position paper which focuses on achieving the SDGs’ especially in Rivers State has been developed as a vital resource that offers essential information on practical approaches to end all forms of poverty – ‘material well- being, ideas, courage’ by the year 2030 without jeopardizing the health of the planet and without compromising the provisions of future generations.

I highly recommend this ingenious and indigenous document to all stakeholders; government and its agencies, development partners, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, students, housewives and the general populace. I hope that the information in this document will be put to practical use for maximum impact.

AUDU OGBU, ENE

Development Knowledge Facilitator

GOAL 4 – QUALITY EDUCATION

The focus of this piece is goal 4 of the SDGs which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal plays one of the most important roles in achieving sustainable development in any society. The UN puts it this way; "obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development".

Issues on education in Rivers state are very similar to those in the bigger context of Nigeria- funding difficulties, infrastructural deficits, inadequate access, quality assurance, malfeasances, and inadequate commitment to research and so on.

Science laboratories in educational institutions in Rivers State that once oiled the wheels of inventions and innovations have become empty permanent abode for rodents. School libraries that once fuelled the vehicle of knowledge and whet the intellectual appetite of individuals have become ordinary reading rooms and dumpsites for out-of-date books and journals. The serene ambience expected of learning environments has in most educational institutions have given way to the hazy tunes of generating sets that have to be resorted to as a result of erratic power supply. Most primary, secondary and tertiary students in Rivers state receive lectures in dilapidated buildings and those who stay in school hostels live in parlous and doleful conditions which make learning a task of Sisyphus.

As regards staff/teacher welfare, it is no different from what applies across the country. On many occasions, salaries and emoluments are not paid as and when due. More often than not, once salaries are paid, no further financial emoluments are made to the institutions. Staff welfare, capacity building and research funding are not being seriously considered. Failure to invest in continuous learning for academic and non-academic staff in educational institutions dampens their spirit and diminish academic and research productivity.

Nothing typifies the violence and hooliganism that occasionally happens in educational institutions in Nigeria as a whole and Rivers state in particular like the unfortunate incident that has come to be known as “Aluu four (4)”. Such violence including others like cultism, rape, arson, shooting and examination malpractice permeate and thrive on a large scale in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Rivers state. The sight of policemen raiding schools to arrest students suspected to be cult members is not unusual.

According to Horace Mann, “Education is our only political safety. Outside of this ark, all is deluge.” Educational institutions are where the destinies of future leaders of the state and the country are molded. There is no gainsaying the fact that the quality of our education today is a sure predictor of our future. Achieving SDGs goal 4 is not just an end in itself but serves also as a means to several other ends as education has been found to be an indirect means of achieving certain desirable development aspirations. The essence of education in national development is evident in the exponential development of countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Dubai and China. These countries were able to develop rapidly because they realized the importance of education and went ahead to build formidable knowledge based economies which have catapulted them from being third world countries not long ago to being some of the fastest growing economies in the world today.

Looking at it from any perspective, we will realize that since the beginning of the recorded history of human beings, nothing worthwhile has ever been achieved without the input of education. Through the help of qualitative education, ailments tagged incurable have been wiped out of earth’s surface; feats thought unattainable have been achieved and heights unimaginable have been surpassed. In fact, the result of many Sustainable Development Goals survey reveals that a larger percentage of individuals across the globe regardless of race, religion or gender see Goal 4 -Quality Education- as most important.

Therefore, to achieve the targets of goal 4 of the SDGs, which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, the government of Nigeria and of Rivers state in particular should implement the following action plans:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher Welfare

If our government is committed to doctoring this ailing state of ours and exponentially fast tracking her holistic development, the government must take good care of teachers who are the fountainhead and flowing spring of knowledge. Non-payment of teacher salaries and emoluments as and when due will dampen the spirit of teachers and this will surely have adverse effects on the quality of education in the state. Incentives like car loans and housing loans should also be introduced to ensure that teachers enjoy basic luxuries of life and live at par with their counterparts in other fields of endeavour.

Furthermore, it is often said that the quality of teachers determines the quality of students. Provisions and allowances should therefore be made towards continuous training for teachers to learn the latest trends in their fields so that they can be able to prepare students to be able to compete globally.

Research

Research is the lifeblood of development. Research is the way by which new discoveries are made. It is through research that we discover innovative approaches to the solutions of humanity's most pressing challenges. The value of research in tackling the myriad of problems of this area cannot be overemphasized. It is pitiable that several factors have diminished teaching and learning and has made research output poor. Educational institutions in the state, especially technical colleges, polytechnics and universities have to be given adequate resources and well monitored to make sure that qualitative research is revived in our institutions.

STEM

STEM is the acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. STEM embodies the core subjects that which when mastered, can be exploited for the development of a place. The adoption of STEM and proper application has the capacity to take a place from nothingness to prominence.

If the government of Rivers state creates an enabling environment for STEM by providing educational resources, infrastructure and teaching aids for staff and student from primary to tertiary level, there's no doubt that the effects will change the destiny of Rivers state for good-improved welfare, stable economy, security and improvement in amenities.

Value Re-orientation and Social Responsibility

Schools, apart from being places for learning and generation of ideas are also supposed to instill fundamental values and the tenets of social responsibility into students. Currently, River state grapples with crimes such as cultism, oil bunkering, armed robbery, pipe line vandalization, rape, and kidnapping. These deviant behaviours are not unconnected with lack of quality education and the high level of unemployment. To get to the root of these issues, government should introduce courses like moral education to all schools across Rivers state. This will instill good character in students and continuously remind them of the need to imbibe core values of honesty, hard work, diligence and patriotism. Government can even partner with the National Orientation

Agency (NOA) office in Rivers state to conduct workshops and trainings for staff and students from time to time.

In addition, studies in trade and entrepreneurship should be made compulsory for all students regardless of class or department; this will ensure that students are well equipped to float businesses upon graduation instead of waiting endlessly for scarce white collar jobs; this will in the long run reduce crime in the state as vibrant youths will have profitable ventures to channel their excess energy.

Information and Communication Technology

Investing in modern technological tools for education especially in emerging domains such as mobile learning and open education resources is crucial. Tools of ICT can be exploited to make education fun and more accessible.

ICT as a course should also be made compulsory for teachers and students for it is the present and future of innovation and creativity globally.

GOAL 3 – GOOD HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Recognizing the interdependence of health and development, the Sustainable Development Goals provide an ambitious, comprehensive plan of action for people, planet and prosperity and for ending the injustices that underpin poor health and development outcomes. To achieve this lofty global ambition, goal 3 of Sustainable Development seeks to ensure health and well-being for all at all ages by the year 2030. It also aspires to achieve universal health coverage and provide access to safe and effective medicines and vaccines for all. By committing themselves to the Sustainable Development Goals, world leaders unanimously reiterate the fact that physical, mental and social well-being are essential for global development.

The concept of health is so familiar that many of us have never thought much about what it really is. To start with, the World Health Organization in the preamble to its constitution defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not mere absence of disease or infirmity”.

Health is fundamental to human development. All people regardless of social status, race or religious affiliation consistently rank good health as a top priority. Healthy people are crucial to sustaining societies. It is when people lead healthy lives that they can create an environment in which they can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in line with their needs and interests.

Likewise, well-being is basically the crux of human existence and its achievement has been one of the major concerns of human beings since the beginning of the recorded history of humans. It is the active process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going through the interaction between their circumstances and activities. It means that we as humans possess the faculty to respond appropriately to diverse situations, to create and to engage constructively with other people and the world around us.

From all the foregoing, one cannot be far from the truth by saying that the essence and ambition of the third goal of Sustainable Development is to ensure that all people at all ages have the ability to live their dreams regardless of their station or situation in life.

Despite the progress recorded by Millennium Development Goals which are the precursors of Sustainable Development Goals in increasing life expectancy and reducing malaria, polio, HIV/AIDS epidemic in Rivers state, a lot still has to be done to fully eradicate a wide range of

communicable and non-communicable diseases. Issues like ignorance, self-medication, high cost of accessing health facilities, manpower deficit, overstretched facilities, paucity of funds for medical research, brain drain, and poverty among others still remain hydra-headed challenges bedeviling the health sector of the state.

Moreover, Rivers continues to be the state with the highest percentage of HIV/AIDS in the country. Also, in local communities like Etche, Andoni, and Asarama, medical health services are almost non-existent. Even in the state capital where we have operational health facilities, equipment, medical practitioners and drugs are mostly in short supply. In some state hospitals where health facilities are manageable, people complain bitterly that the cost of accessing quality care is outrageous.

To address this diverse spectrum of persistent and emerging health-related challenges, the following are our recommendations;

RECOMMENDATIONS

Revamping of State Health Insurance Scheme

It is on record that under the administration of former Governor Rotimi Amaechi, there were talks of kick starting a state health insurance scheme but it is evident from our findings that the scheme is not effective. Therefore, to cater for the medical needs of the vulnerable citizens of the state, the present administration should work to revamp and expand the scheme. It is also essential to let people know through massive campaigns the essence and good of health insurance.

We strongly believe that the existence a vibrant insurance scheme for health will put quality health at the disposal of the less privileged and this will in no small way help the development of the state as people are the real wealth of nations.

Provision of Quality and Standard Health Facilities

We cannot have a sound secondary health care system without the basic foundation which is primary health. Massive establishment of new primary health facilities and the jealous maintenance of existing ones should also be keenly considered. The government should embark on the massive renovation of the numerous abandoned primary health care facilities in the nooks and crannies of the state. These primary health care facilities should also be fitted with state of

the earth medical equipment, well stocked pharmacies, well serviced laboratory and diagnostic services and well qualified medical staff. The same goes for secondary health care facilities also. State owned hospitals in Rivers state like Kelsey Harrison Memorial Hospital and Braithwaite Memorial Hospital should also be renovated and fitted with modern health equipment to alleviate the sufferings of all.

This revolutionary step will drastically reduce incidences of death from avoidable causes as people will no longer have the need to travel long distances from rural to urban centers to access medical care. Besides, individuals who travel abroad to seek medical attention will no longer have to risk their lives or spend huge amount of money that can improve the economy of the state in other places.

Medical Intelligence and Surveillance

Medical intelligence and surveillance represent a very useful component in the control of disease outbreak. In recent times, there has been an increase in the use of automated medical intelligence and surveillance systems in addition to the traditional manual pattern of document retrieval in advanced medical settings such as those in countries like the USA. Medical intelligence and surveillance provides the opportunity to adequately monitor and combat issues of health concern. MIS systems are used for medical data collection, aggregation, storing, analysis and sharing. In the year 2003 for instance, MIS systems were crucial to the control of SARS.

Adopting MIS systems in Rivers state health sector will help forestall, monitor and contain occurrences and incidences of disease epidemic.

Availability of Well Qualified and Motivated Medical Workforce

The state has to massively recruit more medical practitioners as the present doctor/patient ratio is pitiable. In the same vein Rivers state health workers also need to be well motivated by providing them with commensurate incentives and generous fund for ongoing medical research at home and abroad. The foregoing will swiftly address the menace of brain drain and also empower our medical staff to be at par with their colleagues across the world and to catapult the state's medical sector to an enviable height.

Issues of adequate management coupled with strong leadership principles also require fierce urgency. Government should wade in to ensure that leadership and civil tussles among and

within different strata of health professionals in the state are reduced to the barest minimum and to prevent occurrences of incessant strike actions.

GOAL TWO – ZERO HUNGER

Food is a basic necessity of life; this is due to the fact that it is a basic means of sustenance. Also, adequate food intake, in terms of quality and quantity, is key to a healthy and productive life. Food security as defined by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), exists when all people at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy life. Household food security accordingly is the application of this concept to the family level with individuals within these households as the focus of concern. Food security is regarded as the physical and economic access to food by all household members without the risk of losing the access.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) concept of food security is made up of four key elements; food availability, food access, food utilization and “the risks that can disrupt any of the first three”.

Food insecurity by contrast, exists when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food as defined above. Food insecurity or lack of access to nutritionally adequate diet in a country or household can take various forms, for instance; chronic food insecurity exists when food supplies are persistently inefficient to supply adequate nutrition for all individuals. Transitory food insecurity occurs when there is a temporary decline in access to adequate food because of instability in food production, food price increases or income shortfalls.

Food security at household level is a subset of the national level and it requires that all individuals and household have access to sufficient food either by producing it themselves or by generating sufficient income to demand for it.

In Rivers State, food insecurity is a reality. The price, availability, accessibility and the capacity of people to purchase food is limited. Food insecurity in the state has been attributed to political instability, poverty, use of manual farm tools, rapid population growth, violence, lack of food storage or processing facilities, illiteracy, poor road network, and climate change.

Furthermore, some farmers in Khana local government have attributed food insecurity in the state to the lack of access to land. They claim that most rural dwellers are farmers but have no direct access to land because of the Land Use Act. They argue that the government finds it easy to acquire land for white elephant projects with little or no consideration for agriculture.

In addition, another challenge they face according to them is the lack of easy access to improved seedlings, credit and loan facilities and improved equal distribution of fertilizers.

If the challenges highlighted above as currently facing the agricultural sector in Rivers State are combated headlong, there is no gainsaying the fact that the state will in no time take a position of leadership in agriculture and food security in West Africa.

Some of our recommendations are as follows:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improved Infrastructure

A keen look at the available agricultural infrastructure in Rivers state shows that the state has the potential to become a leading producer of agricultural products in Nigeria if not in Africa as a whole. The state boasts of agro infrastructure like the Rison Palm, Buguma Fish Farm, Ogoni Banana/Plantain Project and a large fertilizer plant among many more. The challenge however is that these projects are non-functional and those that are functional operate below capacity.

We hereby recommend that the good government of Rivers state should resuscitate these defunct industries and also build new storage and processing facilities for farmers to minimize food wastage thereby ensuring food security. Apart from ensuring food security, resuscitation of agro industries in the state will provide jobs for a lot of people and improve their capacity to purchase food at reasonable prices.

Improved Security

Increased trade and improved market access through improved infrastructure alone does not guarantee food security. The prevalence of armed conflict in the state continues to have detrimental effects on the entire agricultural value chain. People (especially rural dwellers in communities like Ahoada, Okrika, Emoha, Ataba) continue to flee their communities in fear. On several occasions, they have had their farmlands destroyed and livestock killed in the events of violence. In addition, there has been a sharp reduction in the availability of labour due to fear of attacks which results to improperly timed weeding and late harvest.

Therefore, to ensure food security, government must guarantee security of lives. Proper measures must be put in motion to curb armed conflicts in the state.

Combat Global Warming

Harping on the need to promote climate-friendly agricultural practices has become essential in today's world. Farmers should be educated on the latest trends in sustainable agriculture to save our planet and conserve resources for future generations. Land-use policies that help mitigate global warming and other effects of climate change should be spelt out and enforced on farmers.

Credit and Loan Facilities

Government should not pay mere lip service to promises made as regards credit and loan facilities for farmers. The 2 billion naira loan scheme for farmers, the Central Bank of Nigeria's 220 billion naira financial pool and extension of the services of Rivers State Microfinance Agency (RIMA) should be pursued vigorously for accelerated results in the eradication of hunger.

Strict financial controls must also be followed to see to it that these funds are not misapplied or misappropriated. For example, farmers should be encouraged to form cooperative societies according to their locations. Strong horizontal and vertical channels of communication between farmers associations and government officials locally and at state levels should also be instituted.

Investment in Agricultural Technology

Agriculture as it is practiced today is far more advanced. Innovations in crop and animal production have reached new heights. Nowadays, trends like aeroponics, biotechnology, mechanized farming, and organic farming have come to change the agro industry. These new improved practices continue to make it clear by the day that agriculture can be one of the most profitable and least stressful engagements if practiced properly.

The government of Rivers state should tap into this new trend by improving the level of agricultural extension in the state through the state ministry of agriculture, local authorities, and other related parastatals. Farmers should be empowered with proper knowledge and resources to adopt these improvements in their farms.

GOAL ONE – NO POVERTY

Poverty is the most prevalent social phenomena in human history that generates a lot of controversy. In fact it is as old as the whole world. The common questions that readily come to mind when talking about poverty are; what really is poverty? What are its parameters? How does it manifest among individuals and nations? Can it be eradicated or reduced?

Poverty has no precise definition but for the sake of this piece, the definition of African Leadership Forum (Farm House Dialogue) will suffice. The definition views poverty in three broad ways; poverty of material well-being, poverty of ideas and poverty of courage. What we can deduce from this definition is that poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood. It also reflects a lack of opportunities and capabilities in many interlinked areas, including insecure access to food, lack of access to education, employment, healthcare, drinking water and sanitation, lack of political participation, insecure personal safety conditions, and lack of productive opportunities deriving from eroding natural resource bases.

Despite being the 3rd biggest economy in Africa, Nigeria ranks around 160th out of 177 countries on the scale of the Human Development Index (HDI). Poverty in Nigeria has been described as essentially a rural issue although it thrives in urban centers too.

To bring the issue of poverty closer home as it concerns Rivers state, it is unimaginable that poverty still features prominently in the state. It is often said that poverty is more of a rural issue than an urban concern but a visit to places like Diobu or Slaughter both in the heart of Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers state will reveal that poverty in Rivers state is an urban and rural issue. The causes of poverty have actually been traced to corruption, bad governance, unemployment, low productivity, debt, lack of effective capacity and skills training, escalating population growth, etc.

It has however been reported in the MDGs Assessment Indicator that 70% success was recorded in the alleviation of poverty in the state through the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency (RSSDA) and Rivers Microfinance Agency (RIMA); despite this fact, poverty still features prominently in Rivers state. It will not be an overstatement to state categorically that Rivers state has one of the country's highest internally generated revenue and economic growth rates given the vast availability of natural and human resources. For a state with massive wealth

and a huge population to support commerce, industry and trade, the level of poverty remains unacceptable.

We are not aware of the fact that eradicating poverty is a problematic and frustrating enterprise and that's why the following recommendations are proffered by us to help the government in a bid to curb poverty in all its forms and manifestations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Creation of State Poverty Alleviation Agency

We suggest that the state government of Rivers state establish an agency that will be in charge of formulating policies and implementing poverty alleviation and eradication programmes for the sake of continuity, uniformity and accountability. The agency should be formed in a way that will guarantee that successive governments do not discard their predecessor's programmes but should rather consolidate them.

The structure of the agency should be drawn in such a way that it will house all poverty alleviation programmes with separate coordinating units for each of the programmes. Such agency should have provisions in the state annual budget and should form strategic alliances and partnerships with national and international governmental and non-governmental agencies that share similar objectives.

War against Corruption

In order to overcome the problem of poverty in the country, the war against corruption should be intensified. One way to achieve this is through by ensuring accountability and transparency in government at all times. Strict financial controls that will emphasize frugal spending and make the defalcation of public funds difficult and almost impossible should be put in place.

In addition, the wrath of law should always be met out to any person or group of persons found guilty of corrupt practices. Above all, the policies of government should reflect the needs, yearnings and aspirations of the people at all times.

Effective Credit Schemes

The activities of Rivers state government towards the eradication of poverty through Rivers Microfinance Agency (RIMA) is laudable. The truth however remains that RIMA can do much more. Government awareness of the programmes and opportunities that RIMA has to offer should be enhanced. It has been observed that credit and loan facilities which are most effective poverty reduction schemes are not popular among the illiterates. The awareness of these opportunities is high among the educated elite than the illiterates whom are more liable to poverty.

Experts usually consider access to banking and micro-credit services crucial to help local farmers invest in agriculture, be it for crops, machines, transport vehicles and so forth. Government should therefore make it a point of call to spread news about RIMA to the interiors of Rivers state. Our government should also inject more funds and build more branches of RIMA especially in the rural areas.

Socio-Political Local Authority Initiatives

Local initiatives that contribute to extending freedom and opportunities for poor/rural communities, marginalized groups and slum dwellers should be initiated. These opportunities without any iota of doubt will empower them to achieve political, economic and social inclusion thereby improving the quality of their lives.

Such initiatives include but are not limited to; partnering with community groups and associations on community based social initiatives; providing access to land, good roads and modern infrastructure; initiating special programmes that cater for vulnerable groups; collaborating with international organizations on provision of basic social amenities.

All these will go a long way to open up life changing opportunities for marginalized vulnerable groups and rural dwellers. It will also give them the chance to participate and dutifully exercise their civic rights in the face of growing disparities and economic downturns.

Investing in rural people by establishing social protection systems, building rural-urban linkages and defining policies focused on boosting the incomes of the critical agents of change - smallholder producers, foresters, fisher folk, indigenous people, rural women and youth - have the potential to produce dramatic and lasting effects on the economy.

Promotion of Capacity and Skills Development

Policies that would favour job creation like the establishment of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) should be the focus of government. This is because SMEs have been found to be not just job creators but creators of wealth in the society. Given the high unemployment rate in the state (especially among youths), this means that entrepreneurship is key to reducing poverty and crime in the state.

GOAL 6 – CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Next to air, water is no doubt the most essential element for human survival as the body cannot function well longer than a few days without water. Not only is water essential to every single cell and organ in the body; it makes up 2/3 (two-third) of the human body weight.

In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation. Everyone everywhere has the right to sufficient, continuous, safe, physically accessible and accessible water for personal and domestic use.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation lies at the heart of human well-being and is rightly labeled as a moral and ethical imperative. Equally important are the health benefits derived from adequate and clean water supply. These are not trivial considering that the WHO attributes most of the global burden of disease to water borne pathogens.

The people of Port Harcourt and other major towns are served with water from Port Harcourt Water Corporation (PHWC). However, supply is irregular and many urban dwellers have to buy water even after paying the mandatory annual water rates. According to Ambah Projects International Ltd. (2007), people in most parts of Rivers State source water mainly from unprotected wells, private boreholes, (directly in their households or through vendors) and sachet water (popularly known as pure water).

Safe and readily available water is important for public health whether it is used for drinking, domestic activities, recreational purposes or food production. Apart from the health benefits, access to clean water can contribute greatly to poverty reduction. When water comes from improved and more accessible sources, people spend less time and effort in physically collecting it which means that they can be productive in other ways. Better water sources also translate to less spending on health as people are less likely to fall sick.

Sanitation generally is the provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human waste. Most households in Rivers State are served by toilets with on-site septic tanks or household pit latrines, while most public centres such as markets and motor parks lack basic sanitary facilities. As a result, a large percentage of people defecate in open spaces such as rivers and dumpsites; acts that are dangerous to public health.

Improved sanitation is known to have significant benefit on health both in households and across communities. Contaminated water and poor sanitation are linked to transmission of diseases.

Inadequately managed water and sanitation systems expose individuals to preventable health risks. In fact, countries where open defecation thrives are known to have the highest levels of malnutrition, poverty and big disparities of wealth. Benefits of improved sanitation extend well beyond the prevention of diseases. Improved sanitation will reduce the severity of malnutrition, can promote dignity and boost safety especially among women and girls and can even promote school attendance; girls' school attendance is boosted by the provision of good sanitation facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve the targets of goal six (6) of the SDGs in Rivers State, the government must strive hard to ensure that people have access to clean affordable water and top-notch sanitation facilities. Our own recommendations are as follows:

Infrastructure

The rehabilitation and reconstruction of water production systems must be vigorously pursued. The government should also ensure that water transmission and distribution networks are expanded to ensure that majority, if not all the people of Rivers State have access to clean water.

Public places such as motor parks and markets should be provided with basic sanitary facilities. Also, it has been realized that access to sanitary facilities in schools has great impact on pupils' attendance and performance. Public primary and secondary schools should therefore be provided with adequate sanitary facilities.

Health and Hygiene Corps

To ensure that people adhere strictly to health and sanitation rules, the government can set up a health and hygiene corps that will be charged primarily with the responsibility of inspecting public spaces, schools and even private residences to ensure that people maintain proper sanitation habits.

GOAL 12 – SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Goal 12 of the Sustainable Development Goals seeks to ensure “Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns’. Broadly, the goal is about promoting resource and energy efficiency, sustainable infrastructure and providing access to basic services, green and decent jobs and a better quality of life for all. Its implementation helps to achieve overall development plans, reduce future economic, environmental and social costs, strengthen economic competitiveness and reduce poverty.

One of the most important thrusts of this goal is to ensure that countries of the world become circular economies; economies that are restorative and regenerative by design and which aim to keep products and materials at their highest utility and value at all times. It aims at “doing more with less”, increasing net welfare gains from economic activities by reducing resource use, degradation and pollution along the whole life cycle, while increasing quality of life.

It involves different stakeholders; business owners, consumers, policy makers, researchers, scientists, retailers, media and development agencies among others. It also requires a systemic approach and cooperation among other actors operating in the supply chain from manufacturer/producer to final consumer.

Furthermore, it includes targets like efficient use of natural resources, reducing food waste at all levels, managing chemical waste and encouraging companies and individuals to adopt sustainable practices to integrate sustainability reporting into their reporting cycle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Media Campaign

While passing across information about the Global Goals, there is need to explain in plain terms to people why humanity needs sustainable consumption and production patterns. Pamphlets can be shared to people so that they will be aware of the implications of global warming. Without proper education, people will not adopt responsible production and consumption patterns. There is also a need to encourage a campaign on the three Rs of Climate Action which are 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.' If materials are reused, waste generation will become minimal and manageable.

Legislative Action

There is a dire need for state laws that will domesticate the SDGs and ensure that each person sees the goals as something to be achieved. Rivers State being an oil rich state has to ensure that multinational Oil and Gas companies that operate in the state comply with international best practices to ensure that they contribute to the state and the country's sustainable development plan. The government should mandate and monitor businesses to ensure that they find ways to reduce their environmental impact by using resources more efficiently and by reducing carbon emissions.

Waste Management

One of the recent innovations in the world now is waste to wealth. Waste materials generated daily have to be used efficiently to yield maximum benefit. The state can partner with relevant agencies and companies to ensure that waste is properly managed and converted to good use. The UN Habitat program to convert garbage to composite waste should be explored by the state. There is need for serious research work to explore ways of making the best possible use of waste.

The government can also partner with relevant people from the private sector and organize free training for people on recycling household items. The training has to begin from government workers so that the importance of reusing papers and other items in government establishments can be emphasized.

An aggressive campaign to ensure that books are reused is also needed. Year in, year out, parents and guardians buy books for students but after the session, most of the books become waste. There is a need to emphasize the importance of reusing books and papers. Fortunately, the capital city of Rivers State, Port Harcourt was recently a World Book Capital. The participants at the UNESCO event can be saddled with the responsibility of driving the campaign. Schools also have to encourage students to manage papers properly.

Food and Water Management

Food and water management is pivotal to the achievement of this goal. Government should partner with other stakeholders to ensure that the state produces enough food to consume and sell to others. Investment in the existing state farms has to be increased and managed appropriately. Beyond producing food, the state also has to harness resources to ensure that food items are processed locally. Considering the current financial crisis in the country, the state can work with

private companies on partnerships to build food preservation and processing factories. This arrangement, while ensuring that food waste is minimized will also provide jobs for the teeming youths of Rivers State.

Also, food items have to be well preserved to ensure safety and reduce health risks. Many food items require electricity which is still epileptic in some parts of the state. There is need for food storage facilities to be constructed in all the local government headquarters. These stores will be useful to farmers, retailers and consumers alike and should be made available for use at a subsidized rate. If possible, the storage facilities can be more than one per local council.

Research and Development

There is also a need to work with researchers and people in the academia to track recent development and innovation on responsible consumption patterns. Research is at the heart of innovation, new ways of making optimum use of resources need to be explored. There is need for constant research and application of international practices in the management of resources. For example, to ensure maximum success in the agricultural sector, the state can establish a farm hub where farmers can be supported in their businesses. Farm products will be bought from them by the state to control price and minimize loss on the part of farmers. They can also be supported with emerging technologies that will simplify their works.

Without the help of government, this goal cannot be achieved. Of all the goals, this is probably the goal that requires the input of government the most. However, it is the responsibility of everyone to ensure that natural resources are properly managed and waste is drastically reduced.

GOAL EIGHT – GOOD JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

According to the World Bank, it is commonly accepted that economic growth is good for all countries as it tends to reduce poverty and income inequalities. However, data available on Nigeria relates that economic growth since independence has not been commensurate with the requirements of rapid poverty eradication and generation of employment to absorb the teeming number of unemployed Nigerians.

Nigeria has largely been unsuccessful in the achievement of sustained economic growth and economic management since it became a major exporter of crude oil in the world. The consequences have been an uneven development pattern in trend characterized by overdependence on oil and the lack of significantly high or stable growth rate for any extended stretch of time. Decline in the average standard of living of Nigerians has been phenomenal. The level of per capita income is very low and annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not in tandem with population growth. A larger proportion of the population is more impoverished and more malnourished today than what was obtainable about four decades ago.

Nigeria's development path has been unstable and sustained socio-economic progress has been elusive despite the huge influx of foreign exchange from crude oil and gas exports. Prominent among the causes of Nigeria's unstable economic growth include but are not limited to; poor industrial growth, weak institutional framework for development, poor investment trend, overdependence on oil, corruption, and political instability among others.

In the same vein, Nigeria's demographic trend is characterized by rapid population growth rates pegged at an average of about 3% annually which makes it one of the fastest growing in the world. Nigeria's population structure is highly skewed towards young people resulting in a high rate of dependency.

The economic situation in Rivers State is not in any way different from what is obtainable the whole nation. High rate of unemployment, especially among youths has led to numerous hydra-headed problems. Insecurity, youth restiveness, poverty, reduced life expectancy, poor health, amongst many others.

To combat these nagging problems and achieve a state of fiscal independence like Lagos state, our recommendations are as follows:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Infrastructural Development

The redirecting of public investment expenditure to ensure adequate and reliable provision of social infrastructure (education, health, power and water) and economic infrastructure (rail, road, water transport and irrigation) will create the enabling environment required for robust private sector led economic growth and in turn raise job opportunities. Employment situation will improve with a redirected sense priority for public expenditure and public investment into the economy.

The role of adequate infrastructure provision and better education in creating and sustaining more and better job prospects in the industrial sector as well as guarantee more meaningful self-employment in the informal sector cannot be overemphasized.

Capacity Development

An expanding labour market encourages workers to upgrade their skills in order to qualify for available higher wage jobs. Improvement in the education and skills of the labour force makes the nation increasingly attractive for business in the future.

Massive Industrialization

An increased activity in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors has perceptible impact on unemployment and also sustains employment in the service sector.

Public Private Partnership

Government has the duty to protect and provide opportunities for citizens but the truth is that government cannot fulfill all its duties and obligations alone. Government must therefore work hand-in-hand with the private sector to provide employment opportunities and drive development in the state.

The Build, Operate and Transfer/Public Private Partnership (BOT/PPP) arrangement can be explored in the state. The government can together with wealthy individuals and or corporations pull resources together to establish and resuscitate industries and provide infrastructure. If pro-investment policies and programmes like BOT/PPP are well planned and executed, they have the potential to create many jobs and help resolve the unemployment challenge in the state.

Empowerment through Small and Medium Scale Enterprises

It has become evident that there are limited opportunities in the formal sector to provide employment for the teeming population of the unemployed. It is generally recognized that in developing economies, small and medium enterprises make significant contributions towards employment generation. SMEs play a complementary role in the development process and play a vital role in meeting the basic needs of people and raising their standards of living.

In this light, government should therefore encourage the establishment of small scale enterprises by investing heavily in vocational training and entrepreneurship studies especially for the youths who constitute the largest percentage of our population.

Moreover, the standards of technical schools and vocational training institutes in the state could be improved so that they can churn out competent employment creators and not job seekers.

Undergraduates and graduates alike should be trained and retrained; employment creation should become the focus of higher institutions in their drive for human capital development. They should be trained to utilize the skills, potentials and knowledge garnered and developed through years of schooling for productive and employment generating ends.

The promotion of entrepreneurial activities is a sure way towards transforming and diversifying an economy to a market oriented one. Small businesses have the capacity to accelerate economic growth and provide jobs. The role of the government in this wise is to provide an enabling environment for the proliferation of such sectors through increased investments in power generation, road and transport infrastructure, credit and loan facilities, capacity development, etc.

GOAL 14 – LIFE BELOW WATER

The ocean is the lifeblood of mother earth, covering more than 70 percent of the planet's surface, driving weather, regulating temperature, and supporting all living organisms. Throughout history, the ocean has been a vital source of subsistence, transport, commerce, growth, recreation, and inspiration. The Ocean is a significant source of social and economic wealth. There is more life living under water than on the earth: the population living in the ocean makes up 57% of natural world habitat.

We depend on oceans for key natural resources including food, medicines, biofuels and other products. They help with the breakdown and removal of waste and pollution, and their coastal ecosystems act as buffers to reduce damage from storms. Maintaining healthy oceans supports climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Oceans are also a great place for tourism and recreation. Even more, Marine Protected Areas contribute to poverty reduction by increasing fish catches and income, and improving health. They also help improve gender equality, as women do much of the work at small-scale fisheries.

Oceans form an integrated and essential component of our planet's ecosystem and are critical to sustainable development. However, we're seriously endangering our oceans. 80% of pollution in the marine environment comes from the land.

Rivers State being an industrial coastal state feels the impact of marine pollution than many other states in Nigeria. In Rivers, threats to the oceans abound and include agricultural run-off, discharge of toxic substances and plastic, leakage of underground petrol tanks, commercial exploitation, urban construction and costal tourism. Over the years, legal and illegal oil exploration, production and refinement in the state, especially in Tai Local Government Area, have resulted in various ecological problems. Residents of Tai Local Government area face dangerous health risks when they bathe, drink water, or eat fish from contaminated water bodies.

Discharges from industries (especially oil and gas industries) have increased the sulfate and nitrate content in water bodies and have altered properties such as color and odor. Furthermore, deposit of solid industrial waste into water bodies is a menace in Rivers State. The improper disposal of solid industrial waste creates major marine problems in so many parts of the state. The unwholesome activities of numerous industries in the state cause irreparable losses to

aquatic bodies and affect the socio-economic life of local communities that are based primarily on fishing.

It is worthy of note to mention the fact that effects of marine pollution in Rivers State can have devastating effects on the global marine environment as there are water bodies in Rivers State that connect the state with other countries of the world. Therefore, if we degrade these areas, we are indirectly creating negative externalities for other parts of the world.

For the people of Rivers State, water is closely linked to their livelihood and has direct impact on their health and sustainable growth. To ensure the achievement of all the targets of goal 14 of Sustainable Development, the following recommendations should be considered:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enlightenment and Advocacy

Aggressive advocacy through print and online media should be vigorously pursued. Government must also make it a point of call to work hand in hand with local authorities to organize frequent town hall meetings to sensitize people on the need to respect and take care of water bodies in and around their environment. At occasions like this, information pamphlets that contain vital information can be distributed to the people.

Furthermore, bill boards that give warnings on the debilitating effects of marine degradation can be placed at strategic locations around the state. To ensure swift reporting of sea pollution, there should be special emergency numbers that people can call to swiftly report incidents of marine pollution for immediate action.

Strict Enforcement of Relevant Laws Concerning the Abuse of Seas

The government of Rivers State should not wait for the Federal Government before enacting laws concerning abuse of water bodies. The state legislative arm of government should review and update relevant laws concerning marine degradation for the benefit of people and their environment. All arms of government must come to task to ensure that adequate precautions are taken and to see to it that industries and multinational corporations imbibe global industry best practices to prevent and mitigate incidents of marine pollution.

By taking adequate precaution to prevent and or mitigate marine degradation, we are indirectly ensuring that we do not come to the stage of expensive response and recovery.

Capacity Development

People, especially those who live very close to oil installations and industrial areas should be educated on basic environmental management techniques like; oil spills prevention, oil spills detection, oil spills clean-up and environmental restoration. This will afford people the opportunity and give them the confidence to take proactive steps to mitigate the effects of marine pollution in their environment.

Poverty Alleviation

It should be noted that to achieve the targets of goal 14, the government of Rivers State must address the nagging issue of poverty in local communities. It is obvious that most of the people who are behind illegal mining, oil refining and production do so out of poverty. It has therefore become exigent to draw a practical socio-economic development framework If the menace of marine pollution will succeed in the long run.

GOAL 15 – LIFE ON LAND

Human life depends on the earth as much as the ocean for our sustenance and livelihoods. Plant life provides 80% of our human diet and we rely on agriculture as an important economic resource and means of development. Forests account for 30% of the species and important sources for clean air and water; as well as being crucial for combating climate change. Today, we are seeing unprecedented levels of land degradation and the loss of arable land. Drought and desertification is also on the rise each year amounting to the loss of 12 million hectares of land.

In Rivers State, increase in human population, habitat transformation, deforestation, infrastructural development and increasing poverty are some of the challenges confronting biodiversity conservation. Human population expansion and rapid infrastructural development such as the construction of roads, educational establishments, residential estates, etc. in Rivers State has led to the steady decline of agricultural activities more especially in areas where wildlife once thrived. As a result, there seems to be no green vegetation left in Rivers State and this has caused and is still causing conflicts in many areas in the state amongst human beings (land owners and tenants) and also between human beings and the wildlife community; when wild animals lose their natural habitat and have reduced access to natural food, they often depend on agricultural products, livestock and sometimes injure or kill human beings.

Increase in the number of people living below poverty line has contributed in no small measure to the loss of green vegetation. Many people in the interior parts of Rivers State depend largely on green vegetation for sustenance. Survival is one of the major reasons that rural people rely on green vegetation for medicine and herbs, fuel, building materials, raw materials for tools and house ware, source of protein, etc. Activities such as hunting, poaching and logging have contributed to the loss of biodiversity.

Another unsustainable practice that contributes immensely to the loss of our ecosystem is illegal grazing. Illegal grazing along farmlands and bushes especially in areas like Etche, Abara and Ozuzu for instance can have devastating effects on both crops and flora species in that area. Grazing livestock, apart from contending with crops for survival also deposit harmful pathogens into plantations. Cattle rearers have also been reported to cut tree branches to feed their livestock. They are also known to hunt games for their own food. It is important to state that consistent grazing of livestock in plantations and farmlands can also cause compaction which leads to erosion.

It is noted that the loss and degradation of ecosystem in Rivers State is enormous. Therefore, for Rivers State to achieve the aim of goal 15 of the SDGs which is to conserve and restore the use of terrestrial ecosystems such as forests, wetlands, dry lands and mountains, the following recommendations should be considered;

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is noted that biodiversity loss in Rivers State is enormous. For effective conservation, it is necessary that the following considerations be adopted:

Legal Action

Government should enact strict laws and penalties that will discourage indiscriminate felling of trees, poaching, illegal grazing and other actions that can threaten life on land. These laws should not only be made effective at the state level alone; local authorities including local government authorities and traditional rulers should also work with the government to ensure proper adherence to the laws.

Establishment of Grazing Fields

Provision should be made for grazing land at specific locations to avoid and discourage illegal grazing which has become wide spread not only in the interiors of Rivers State; large herds of cows grazing illegally have become common place in the state capital (Port Harcourt) also.

Poverty Alleviation

It is important to alleviate the level of poverty in the state if the war against biodiversity loss will yield tangible results. Indiscriminate felling of trees for cooking, hunting of games for food, poaching have all been largely linked to poverty. The government should work assiduously to drastically reduce the level of poverty in Rivers State. A massive reduction in poverty level will make people rely less on nature for their sustenance.

GOAL 13 – CLIMATE ACTION

The issue of climate change has become a prominent issue on the policy agenda of numerous countries and is also an issue of serious concern to the United Nations Organization hence, its inclusion as a vital action point in the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report recognized that development activities in many nations (especially developing nations) are causing serious environmental degradation while at the same time leaving the people poor and very vulnerable. The massive wave of industrialization and urbanization has made people overstress the environment. The environment has always been overburdened with the debilitating consequences of human excesses in their struggle for survival. In Nigeria for instance, unstable and unsustainable exploitation of the environment for strictly economic reasons is fast resulting into disastrous outcomes for the environment. As a result of large scale gas flaring, greenhouse gas emissions and incessant oil spills, Nigeria and Nigerians now have to live with disastrous consequences like green house effect, desertification (especially in northern Nigeria), acid rain, air and water pollution and chronic health problems.

In the Niger Delta area and in Rivers state to be specific, where these oil spill and gas flaring dominate on a large scale, industries inject pollutants that deplete the ozone layer into the air and this is gradually reducing the quality of human life and the quantity of the natural resources deposited in the land. This unsustainable exploitation of mother earth have serious adverse effects like global warming, air and water pollution and also causes impairment of mental function, aggravation of cardiovascular diseases and also affects foetal development.

Scientists warn that if the present rate of global warming continues, it could lead to a rise in the level of oceans and this will be enough to flood land in coastal cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Calabar.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the environment “is a life support system that ensures the continuous existence of human beings and also provides them with the resources required for socio-economic progress.” In the face of all the aforementioned and more, it has become increasingly important for us as inhabitants of planet earth to protect the planet and manage it sustainably in order to ensure our continued existence. It is true that the earth is made up of complex and beautiful systems but these systems are not just the big systems of how the climate is managed; they are the small systems of our actions on a daily basis. Issues

of climate change that we see as global problems are in essence, local problems and unless we start paying attention to these details and work within their limitation, we are doomed to face grievous consequences; if we fail to sustain the environment, the environment too will not sustain us. The damage done recently in Haiti by Hurricane Matthew reminds us all of the devastating power of nature. Taking adequate precautionary measures on climate change to forestall such danger in Rivers State has never been more urgent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Environmental Awareness through Massive Media Campaign

Illiteracy and people's lack of knowledge as regards the consequences of their actions on the environment influences people's behavior and attitude towards the environment. There is a need to raise public awareness on the effects of their actions on the environment and the importance of their participation in the physical planning and development of their environment. This can be achieved through media campaigns using television, radio, print media (especially pamphlets and flyers) and town hall meetings.

Environmental Empowerment

There is an urgent need for residents of Rivers state to be educated and empowered to detect and report oil spills, resource degradation and to participate in clean up restoration. Through this medium, environmental hazards will be nipped in the bud before causing devastating implications to the people and the environment.

Enactment of Strict Environmental Sanctions

Most corporations do not consider how their operations affect the environment; the executive, legislative and judicial arms of Rivers state should therefore work in tandem to enact and enforce strict sanctions on oil companies and other large and small scale industries in the state to make sure they conform to international best practices in the prevention and management of water and air pollution, gas emissions and oil spills. Government should make it mandatory for these organizations to incorporate sustainability into their operational processes. This can be achieved by ensuring that companies operating within the borders of Rivers State phase out harmful chemicals, make use of alternative and renewable energy, reduce and reuse waste and continuously fashion out ways of reducing negative impact on the environment.

Tree Planting

According to scientists, the current level of CO₂ is thought to be the highest in so many years and one approach that has been professed to be effective in containing atmospheric carbon emitted as a result of greenhouse emission is the planting of trees. A tree absorbs carbon during photosynthesis and stores it in the wood for the life of the tree.

We must however note that not all trees are effective in curbing carbon emission; in fact some trees like willow trees emit harmful organic compounds. When choosing trees to plant, we should consider fast growing trees as they store the most carbon during their first decades. We should plant trees that have wide leaves and wide crowns; low maintenance and disease resistant trees. Some of these high performance species are yellow poplar (tulip tree), silver maple, oak, horse chestnut, red mulberry, London plane, American sweetgum, dogwood, blue spruce and spines.

GOAL 7 – AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Energy plays the most vital role in the economic growth, progress, and development, as well as poverty eradication and security of any nation. Uninterrupted power supply is a vital issue for all countries today. Future economic growth crucially depends on the long-term availability of energy from sources that are affordable, accessible, and environmentally friendly. The standard of living of a given country can be directly related to the per capita energy consumption. The recent world's energy crisis is due to two reasons: the rapid population growth and the increase in the living standard of whole societies. The per capita energy consumption is a measure of the per capita income as well as a measure of the prosperity of a nation.

Energy supports the provision of basic needs such as cooked food, a comfortable living temperature, lighting, the use of appliances, piped water or sewage, essential health care (refrigerated vaccines, emergency, and intensive care), educational aids, communication (radio, television, electronic mail, the World Wide Web), and transport.

Energy also fuels productive activities including agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, industry, and mining. Conversely, a lack of access to energy contributes to poverty and deprivation and can contribute to the economic decline. Energy and poverty reduction are not only closely connected with each other, but also with the socioeconomic development, which involves productivity, income growth, education, and health.

Electricity supply in Rivers State is at its lowest ebb. Despite the billions spent by the government to help the Power Holding Company (now Port-Harcourt City Electricity Distribution Company), no significant improvement had been recorded in power supply to the city. The energy crisis, which has engulfed Rivers State for almost a decade, has been enormous and has largely contributed to the rise of poverty level by paralyzing industrial and commercial activities during this period. Apart from the huge income loss, it has also resulted in health and environmental hazards due to the exposure to carbon emissions caused by constant use of ‘backyard generators’, kerosene lanterns and oil wicks in different households and business enterprises. This has not only affected running cost in business but has also resulted into high cost of goods and services in the city.

In some parts of the state, power supply can go off for as long as one to three months for what the electricity officials usually refer to as “major fault”, forcing residents to depend solely on private generators. In fact, ownership of electricity generator is no more a luxury but a necessity in the state.

Since Rivers state is blessed with abundant free renewable energy resources such as hydroelectric, solar, wind, tidal, and biomass, there is a need to harness these resources and chart a new energy future for the state. The movement of wind and water, the heat and light of the sun, the carbohydrate in plants and the warmth in the earth are all viable and affordable energy sources that can supply our energy needs in sustainable ways. The government has a responsibility to make renewable energy available and affordable to all to ensure sustainable development in all sectors of the state.

Fossil fuels like charcoal, firewood, kerosene, petrol and natural gas do substantially more harm than good to our health and environment whilst also contributing to civil unrest, environmental devastation and crime in oil producing regions like Rivers state.

The switch to renewable and clean energy sources will undoubtedly impact all sectors of Rivers state positively. For example, uninterrupted power supply translates to longer study hours for pupils, more income for business owners (as they won't have to spend a larger chunk of their profit on fuel), reduction of crime, and job creation for teeming unemployed youths amongst so many more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Investment in Clean Renewable Energy Research and Infrastructure

The first step that the government has to take is to invest heavily in clean energy research, technology and infrastructure to make the transition to clean renewable energy swift and easy. The state can do this by consulting energy experts who will conduct feasibility studies on how to efficiently and sustainably harness our natural resources to tap clean energy without compromising the needs of future generations.

We should also train the intelligent and enterprising youths of the state to go into green energy fields. This means learning to install, service and fabricate renewable energy infrastructure to ensure that green energy becomes commercially viable in the state thereby creating jobs for the teeming unemployed youths of the state.

Clean Energy Subsidy

Subsidizing basic renewable energy resources such as solar panels will encourage and afford low income earners, small business owners and rural dwellers the opportunity to install and enjoy uninterrupted power supply which will translate to prosperity for all.

Green Energy Evolution Campaign

Massive campaigns to educate people on the need to embrace renewable energy should be embarked upon. The good people of Rivers state must know that it is better to turn off the lights if they don't need them, to save electricity by plugging appliances into a power strip and turning them off completely when they are not in use and to replace old appliances with energy efficient models and light bulbs. If they are well informed on the hazard that fossil fuels cause for us and our environment and the vast opportunity that clean energy provides, we are certain that they will in no time subscribe to and embrace renewable clean energy.

Government Action

Government of Rivers state has to blaze the trail in the use of clean energy. If the government should pay mere lip service to the promotion of clean energy, people will likely not be moved to use clean energy. By installing solar panels in government establishments and using clean energy resources to run social amenities like street lights and public pumps citizens will be encouraged to follow suit.

GOAL NINE – INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Nigeria will not be able to sustain her current levels of population and economic growth without enhancing her infrastructure. PriceWaterhouseCoopers' (PwC) 2014 report titled "*Trends, Challenges and Future Outlook: Capital Projects & Infrastructure in East, South & West Africa*" indicates an opportunity-filled future for infrastructure development in Nigeria with infrastructure spending estimated to grow from \$23 billion in 2013 to \$77 billion in 2025.

Investing in infrastructure will drive economic growth, provide jobs, and deliver vital services to the country and majority of its citizens. Good infrastructure readily translates to opportunities for sponsors or investors that are keen on investing in Nigeria. Opportunities exist across all core and social infrastructure sectors in Nigeria ranging from energy, transport, and urban development / real estate, to healthcare, water, agriculture, waste management, and Information Communication Technology (ICT).

Important infrastructure sectors such as power, transportation (roads, rail, seaports and airports) have significant gaps and challenges. There are also significant gaps in both rural and urban ecosystems across Nigeria ranging from availability of basic infrastructure such as housing, healthcare, water, and waste management, to other enabler infrastructure like ICT, hospitality, and industrial / commercial real estate.

What is obtainable in the whole of Nigeria is not far from what obtains in Rivers State. To start with, traffic congestion is a problem residents have to live with daily in the city of Port Harcourt. Despite the huge resources spent on road construction and expansion by the government, traffic jam is one nightmare that has refused to disappear from the streets of the city. Most of the major roads including some of the recently constructed ones are infested with deep potholes due to the failure of contractors to use quality construction materials. Driving through Trans-Amadi/Peter Odili Road, Olu Obasanjo Way, Mile 1 Road, Trans-Woji Road, especially during peak hours or in and after rain is a nightmare.

The population of Rivers State is still rising daily despite the fact that the land space accommodating the city has been over-stretched. Adequate planning on the part of the government for its present and future population is therefore essential if we are to prevent further chaos in the city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Low Cost Housing Scheme

The available economic opportunities in the state have made it a haven for people from different parts of the country. The daily increase in the city's population has resulted into high rent in both residential and commercial accommodation. For the fact that little has been done in the provision of low cost housing for low income earners, marginal lands have become a haven for them; here, cost of accommodation is on the low side. These settlements which are largely inhabited by low income earners with very poor environmental, social and economic conditions have become a breeding ground for criminals and cult activities.

Demolition of marginal settlements in the state as a way of checking criminality without redeveloping such settlements is not only an indirect way of bringing forth more severe housing problems in the city but also generating more social and economic problems. What the government needs to do is to provide some basic urban infrastructure and introduce some element of development control into the settlements. The provision of safe water, health services, educational facilities, recreational centres etc. will bring some measure of life into the settlements. Public housing provision for low and medium income earners should not be neglected by the government. Availability of housing loan to workers in the public service on the part of the state government will help alleviate housing problem of in the state. As a long term measure towards decongesting the city, the government can also consider the development of other urban centres in the state to serve as secondary cities.

Public/Private Partnership

For industry innovation to be effective, Government does not need to privatize public utilities but rather should partner with significant stakeholders and investors to help renovate and maintain the essential amenities for business continuity.

Development of Oil & Gas Infrastructure

Gas infrastructures in this region should be foremost simply because putting in place the right facilities to convert kinetic/thermal gas energy to electrical energy (Gas Turbines) will greatly reduce constant power-outage, which has been plaguing the country for decades. In the long run, a lot of communities and businesses will begin to flourish and develop which in turn shall encourage local investors and woo foreign investors.

Stronger Technical Partnerships and Knowledge Transfer

Infrastructure projects typically require a mix of diverse skills and competencies for successful delivery. The level of competence required for successful and timely execution of these projects is usually built over several years of successful project design, development, and delivery. Unfortunately, Nigeria is challenged on this front as there is a dearth of skilled manpower and only a limited number of infrastructure projects have been successfully delivered in the country over the last five decades.

Rivers State therefore should forge stronger relationships between local sponsors and foreign technical partners that have robust experience. This is necessary for credible infrastructure development, and the subsequent management and maintenance of the infrastructure assets after delivery. Sponsors must ensure that the interests of their technical partners are aligned with theirs, and the arrangement must deliberately create opportunities for local capacity building by pairing local talent with international expertise right from the start of the project for necessary skills and knowledge transfer.

Better Project Planning

In developing projects and ensuring that the right results are achieved, it is necessary that the project sponsor be more deliberate about the business case development and project appraisal process. Government should put in place proper measures to always ensure that necessary feasibility, traffic, environmental, legal/regulatory and other relevant studies are carried out to support the business case for investment. While ensuring that the objectives of infrastructure projects are clearly articulated and communicated among the key stakeholders, attention should be given to risk identification, allocation, and management especially when dealing with Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

GOAL 17 – PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOALS

The most important goal of the Sustainable Development Goals is goal 17 which seeks to revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. The basis of the Global Goals is partnerships; without partnerships, the goals cannot work.

A successful Sustainable Development Agenda requires that all hands be on deck. The mantra of the goals says “everyone, everywhere.” As true as this saying is, without concerted efforts from all stakeholders, the goals will not be achieved. The partnership needed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals involves governments, the private sector, civil society, the academia and the society at large. These inclusive partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place people and planet at the center are needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Private Sector and Individual Involvement

Immediate action is needed to mobilize, redirect and unlock the transformative power of the private sector and the general populace to deliver on the goals. Rivers State has always been at the forefront of implementation of the global Goals since they were launched but the goals have still not been adopted at the grassroots level. Most people are not aware of the goals; making them aware is the first step, helping to include the goals in their activities is the next and then they have to be engaged and made to see why the goals are important.

With shared vision of the Rivers State SDGs Office which says #MakingTheSDGsWork, there is need for another domestic vision to #EveryoneEverywhere. The bane of the MDGs was that people thought it was another government policy and because government policies had not been sustained over the years, people have lost hope in successive government policies. There is an urgent need to involve the people and ensure that they are aware that the goals are meant for everyone. For the SDGs to be achieved there is need for proper orientation of citizens because the SDGs are centered on people. There is need for a top to bottom strategy to publicize the SDGs in Rivers State. The few Development Knowledge Facilitators have to be put to use. A new volunteer corps should be initiated to train people and multiply the knowledge.

Media Campaign

All media has to be engaged in the advocacy project. It is a fact that Social Media is the most popular media in this global age so social media engagement has to happen so that people can know about the goals with ease at their leisure time. On radio and television, programs on implementation and monitoring should be introduced so that citizens can engage the goals and monitor the progress. With aggressive publicity, the goals will become a household project and families will implement the goals daily at home and in their respective workplaces.

Support through Legislation

For the partnerships to work and for the goals to be achieved, there is need for legislations that support the implementation of the goals. Slight changes can be made to state laws to ensure that they directly touch the goals. Government influence can be leveraged to take the information to ministries, departments and agencies so that they will in turn transfer the goals to their respective offices and include it in their activities.

For instance, for the achievement of Goal 16 which seeks to ensure Peace, Justice and strong Institutions, the Ministry of Justice can work with the Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) to keep legal practitioners informed and the strategy team will explore ways they can partner with public and private security agencies to ensure that the goals are achieved.

Rivers State is a state that plays host to a good number of multinational companies that take Corporate Social Responsibility seriously. Government can influence these companies to ensure that their CSR projects are tailored towards achieving the SDGs. Moreover, the Ministry of Education with the help of the legislative arm of government can ensure that the SDGs are integrated in the school curriculum for primary and secondary school pupils as part of Civic Education. For schools like Rivers State University of Science and Technology, the university authorities can be made to engage students in intellectually stimulating events to push the implementation of the Global Goals in conjunction with the Students Union. For all the Technical Colleges, various departments can further be informed on ways they can work towards being SDGs centered. The mechanical and Motor Vehicle Mechanics departments should be made aware of Climate Action and the need to save our planet.

The local branches of Nigerian Union of Teachers can be adopted as an implementing partner to train their pupils on the SDGs.

Finally, the state lawmakers, after being involved in the implementation of the goals have to make laws that center on achieving the SDGs. There is need for increased budgetary allocations for programs that encourage the implementation of the Global Goals.

Civil Society Involvement

There is a need to carry civil society groups along if we want to ensure that the SDGs are achieved. Faith based organizations like the Muslim Rights Council (MURIC), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and others need to be carried along. It is known that faith based organizations engage in a lot of community work; they only need to be aware that the SDGs are meant for everyone and should be the guiding light in their activities.

Youth groups and community associations should also be engaged in the implementation of the goals. Youths play important roles in our society and they constitute the largest age group. Old Students Associations of schools can be encouraged to participate actively in the implementation of the SDGs in their support to their alma mater. Also, there are Drug Free Clubs in secondary schools and colleges, the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) should be contacted so that these clubs can also adopt the SDGs and integrate the goals into their activities.

Another practical step that can lead to the implementation of the goals is SDGs events for specific target groups; guilds of working people need to be involved. Associations of artisans like welders, tailors, drivers and market women should be adopted as implementing partners. SMEs and professionals can be brought together to meet and discuss practical ways to implement the goals, funding opportunities available and partnership opportunities among them. There are many people who will meet the puzzle they've always sought at events like this. The Finance Ministry should also collaborate with the State SDGs team to ensure that participants at SDGs event who intend doing projects on the goals are exposed to funding opportunities and given technical support as needed. The strategy team only has to help them include the SDGs in their activities. The strategy team can advise each agency appropriately after some research must have been done.

Creation of a Database

One of the failures of the MDGs in developing countries was a lack of data. The Millennium Development Goals were not tracked appropriately and to ensure that the SDGs do not fail, the goals have to be tracked. A working database of citizens must be created to track and measure the progress, challenges and opportunities as regards the SDGs.