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Rural Poverty and Environmental Degradation in Annang Nation of Akwa Ibom State

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Rural Poverty and Environmental Degradation in Annang Nation of Akwa Ibom State

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I. Introduction

Poverty in whatever dimension is a disease and the poor are not only disadvantaged in the community but traditionally bears the brunt of community problems, environmental degradation inclusive, The rural ecosystem is rich in biodiversity. The higher the number of species, the greater the stability of an ecosystem. All species are important for environmental stability. The rural setting is predominantly characterized by desperate human attempts to harness different natural and environmental resources in farming, mineral extraction and forest resources exploitation. We can no longer boast of virgin-forests and ancestral land because of increasing vigorous exploitation of these resources to satisfy human needs. Because of selfish interest underlying this exploitation, there is a glaring lack of proper coordination in harnessing resources resulting in man-induced environmental degradation. There is a high correlation between poverty and environmental exploitation and degradation.

a) *Explanation of Terms*

In this study, poverty, degradation and Annang nation as used in this context have the following meanings:

Poverty: Is a condition of serious deprivation or lack of resources necessary for a living within a minimum standard conducive to human dignity. Poverty dominance in the rural area is greatly caused by lack of gainful employment to generate income since everybody is engaged in subsistent agriculture. Even able-bodied people looking for work cannot find any except working the land. Poverty impacts on the environment in diverse areas of Akwa Ibom State, Annang nation inclusive.

Degradation: This is the reduction in the quality of environment (air, land, water) to the level that it can no longer positively or profitably sustains healthy human existence or reasonable human activities. When the human environment (air, land, or water) is affected by degradation agents, the life of the inhabitants is affected. Serious degradation can cause famine, plague epidemics, migration and death. When left unattended to by the government in place, resistance (peaceful or armed) could manifest.

Annang Nation: In this paper refers to all Annang speaking areas of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The area covers eight (8) Local Government Areas of the State namely Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun. There is about four million Annang language speaking people in Akwa Ibom State and over one million speaking people living outside the states. (2018 estimate, Wikipedia).

b) *Literature Review*

People in a bid to survive hard times exert effort (legitimate or illegitimate) in exploiting and utilizing available resources to meet their short or long term economic interest. Illiteracy or lack of awareness among men, women, children and the low-income group on proper utilization of the environment produces different artisans who depend on the natural environment for their livelihood. While Peters (1987) sees the male rural poor as different from the females in their handling of the environment. Okon (1994) contrasts that the male and female rural poor are not different in their behaviour towards the environment. Grille (2013) insists that women are always seen as promoters and victims of environmental degradation. Both male and female engage in garri processing and palm oil production and these two jointly generate waste materials that contribute to environmental degradation. Unwise use of the land during agricultural practices and deforestation promote degradation of a vast area of farmland over time. Ebin (1995) found out that the married ones

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engage actively in quarrying activities, bush burning to hunt out games, cutting of trees for fuelwood and continuous cropping of the same farmland for years. Rural large families without formal education nor exposure are ignorant of the adverse effect of their actions on the environment. The destruction of biomass, bush fallowing, shifting cultivation, fuelwood consumption and trade on timber seriously deplete the environment causing serious deforestation and accompanying environmental problems including erosion in some areas (Ukegbu, 1994).

In the rural setting, the poor constitute more than seventy per cent of the population and in many developing nations of the world birth rate still, remain alarmingly high because few couples believe in limiting family size. They believe that children are valuable God-given assets in societies where social welfare measures are few and provision for old age almost impossible because of poverty. According to Sumonis (2002), polygamous families engage in intensive farming to provide food for their families and for titled chiefs, the more wives and children they acquire the easier for them to engage in extensive yam farming. The growing population demands more farmlands hence the demand for forest land, cropland, household gardens and freshwater. The overutilization of these resources results in environmental degradation and extensive generation of the garbage that pollutes the communities. When arable land is unduly stressed through continuous cultivation it leads to poor yield; use of artificial fertilizers, insecticides and other chemicals, which destroy the soil structure, the ecosystem and soil microbes rendering such farmlands difficult to rejuvenate.

While adherents of traditional religion preserve everything natural through sacrifices to their different gods (gods of the land, sea, forest, sun, moon, etc.,) and as such the environment, Christians because of their belief and interpretation of Genesis 1:28 feel they should dominate, exploit and plunder and destroy the work of creation to a point of extinction. (Ntia, 1995). Sacred groves, forest groves that protect water heads, community forest lands that preserved the myths of such communities when cleared for whatever reasons open up such areas for erosional influences. Ecosystems destroyed would also affect the biodiversity they custody as well as the soil structure.

It is accepted that both the youths and adults degrade the environment. Restless youths have been associated with bush burning for gaming, generating a vast store of carbon (iv) oxide into the atmosphere, (Kumbo, 2002). Carbon (iv) oxide formed is among gasses that make for the atmospheric imbalance that gradually and slowly warm the earth. Sumonis (2002) believes the youths engage in throwaway mentality, a mentally that makes people unappreciative and thoughtless as they casually waste resources. This carefree attitude promotes the discarding of clothing's/ furniture and other personal items that lead to the degradation of the environment and waste of resources. As both youth and adult engage in indiscriminate farming and degradation of the ecosystem (Abang, 1995) wonders why a man who should be friendly with the environment to sustain him am' future generation has turned up, either because of ignorance or selfishness, to kill the same environment.

In Oruk Anam and Ukanafun local government areas of Annang Nation, oil drilling and gas flaring in the rich Niger Delta, have caused serious degradation. Pollution (air, water and soil) through oil spillage, gas flaring, water source, poisoning has greatly affected the people. Pollution in the above areas results in degradation. Pollution covers the ecosphere (lithosphere, hydrosphere and the atmosphere). (Oil spillage destroys marine vegetation and lives, pollutes wafer sources, reduces farm yields and poisons tubers (yam and cassava) Agbo (2003) reports that gas flaring destroys vegetal growth and roofs of the building. Roofs are changed every three years. The heat from the gas flaring at 1300 - 1400°c, destroys vegetal growth. The effluent and chemical contents in the gas flared return to earth as acid rain that corrodes roofs of the building.

II. Methodology

The population of the study was inhabitants of the Annang nation of Akwa Ibom State (comprising Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun local government areas). Sampling was done in stages. Five (5) local government areas were sampled out of eight (8) through random sampling without replacement. The second sampling was to select ten villages in each of the selected local government areas. The same method of sampling without replacement was used to select the names of the villages in each of the five local government areas. The third step was to get thirty respondents from each of the villages. Accidental sampling was used for respondents literate enough to understand the items of the questionnaire and react to them. Village gatherings at churches and or village squares were used to get enough respondents. A total of one thousand, five hundred respondents were used comprising seven hundred and fifty of each sex (750 males, 750 females),

A 2.5 items questionnaire, Survey Questionnaire on Rural Poverty and Environmental Degradation (3UQRUPED) was used to extract information from respondents on their feelings on degradation based on gender, marital status, family size, religious affiliation, and age.

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III. Data Analysis and Results

The data collected for the study were subjected to statistical analysis using the t-test, as presented in tables 1 -5:-

Table 1: t-test analysis of the contribution of male and female rural poor to environmental degradation.

Source of Variation	N	Six	X	SD	Df	t.cai	t.crit	Decision
Female	750	50,825	67,86	5.43	1498	5.97	1.96	s
Male	750	50.063	66.86	2.88				

As shown in table 1, the calculated t-test value of 5.97 is greater than the critical t-test value of 1.96, at 0.05 level of significance and df of 1498, the result is statistically significant. This implies there is a significant difference between male and female rural poor contribution to environmental degradation.

Table II: t-test analysis of the contribution of married and single rural poor to environmental degradation.

Source of Variation	N	Sx	X	SD	Df	t.cai	t.crit	Decision
Married	900	61,308	68.12	5.43	1498	0.36	1.96	ns
Single	60	40770	62,95	7.97				

From the analysis in table II, the calculated t-test value is 0.36 while the critical t-test is 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and df of 1498.

There was no significant difference between married and single rural poor contribution to environmental degradation.

Table III: t-test analysis of the contribution of large and small rural poor families to environmental degradation

Source of Variation	N	Sx	X	SD	Df	t.cal	t.critical	Decision
Large Family	857	58233	67.95	4.74	1498	129.32	1.96	ns
Small Family	643	31.211	48.54	20.17				

Table III presents a calculated t-test value of 129.33 and a critical t-test value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and a df of 1498. This result shows that there was a significant difference in the contribution of large and small families to environmental degradation.

The working null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between large and small families in contribution to environmental degradation was therefore rejected.

Table IV: t-test analysis of the contribution of rural poor Christian and non-Christians towards environmental degradation.

Source of Variation	N	Sx	X	SD	Df	t.cai	t.crit	Decision
Christians	967	65,804	65.76	4.76	1498	0.83	1.96	ns
None-Christians	533	35.902	67.36	3.93				

From table iv, we have a calculated t-test value of 0.83 and critical t-test value of 1.96 at 0.05 degree of significance and 1498 df. This means there was no significant difference in the contributions of Christians and non-Christian to environmental degradation. The null hypothesis was therefore retained.

Table V: t-test analysis of the contribution of rural poor youth and adult to environmental degradation

Source of Variation	N	Sx	X	SD	Df	t.cai	t.crit	Decision
Youth	1160	79,228	68.3	4.58	1498	33.8	1.96	s
Adult	340	22,338	65.7	4.07				

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The result from table v above shows a calculated t-test value of 33.8 and critical t-test value of 1.96 at 0.05 degree of significance and df of 1498. This is statistically significant. There was a significant difference between rural poor youth and adult in their contributions to environmental degradation.

IV. Analysis of Findings

The result of the analysis in table 1 showed that there was a significant difference between sexes towards environmental degradation. This seems a contrary finding to popular opinion that women are very close to the environment since they cannot do without resources from it, especially in the rural setting. Nenty (2009) had found out that women in the rural communities in Ikono LGA were not only impoverished but fertile with attendant high population. The high population and poverty made them impact negatively on the environment to survive though through enlightenment, they can save the environment. Nduke (1997), Okon (1994) and Noibi (1991) in their studies presented contrary findings that both female and mule rural dwellers do not differ in their behaviour towards the environment. Both male and female use land equally in agricultural practices use chemical fertilizers and herbicides and in the processing of farm yields, to produce garbage and waste into the environment.

The result in table II showed no significant difference between single and married rural poor towards environmental degradation, Nworgu (1998) and Ebin (1995) found out that married rural poor constitute the greatest population threat to the environment. They engage in quarrying activities, bush burning and continuous felling of trees for fuelwood and shelter construction just as the singles do. The singles require little resources for their upkeep, so through engagements in "menial jobs sponsored by the rich, are instruments of environmental degradation.

Large rural poor families significantly contribute more to environmental degradation especially polygamous ones that engage in intensive farming. Nuclear rural poor families do not engage much in farming and generation of garbage as do large families. They are not known to impact much negatively on the ecosystem, biodiversity and the destruction of soli structure as do large, rural poor families that engage in crude intensive farming to produce enough food to sustain large family size. Summarily, there was a significant difference in the contribution of rural poor large and small families to environmental degradation.

Table IV had a no significant difference between rural poor Christians and non-Christians in their contributions to environmental degradation. The non-Christians are regarded as traditional custodians of culture to preserve totems, sacred animals, shrines, forests and groves were ancestral spirits abide. As traditionalists, they believe that animal life form or soul has a connotation with human existence and that some objects have some powerful spirits and deities one should not recklessly tamper with (Odum, 1975). With this mindset, they religiously protect the environment. However, a development that brings the opening of schools, roads, industries, churches, and the demystification of shrines and forests cut down by Christians encourage non-Christians who should be friends of the environment to join their Christian brothers to degrade the environment. Development and its twin brother, technology, have degraded the environment. When forests protecting water head are cleared, springs dry up and technology provides water through boreholes.

Table V has a statistically significant result meaning that there was a significant difference in the contribution of rural poor youth and adult to environmental degradation. Both youth and adult are dangerous to the environment but we note that adult forms the majority of the married and large families that engage in quarrying of stones and gravel, extensive and intensive deforestation for the cultivation of farmland. Ukit (2001) had confirmed the cutting of trees for building of mud and thatched houses. Hunger and the search for food by adults through farming are critical issues that cannot be ignored. This makes the adult more vulnerable than youth who contribute to degradation to come a distant second.

V. Conclusion

Though we accept that there is a symbiotic relationship between rural poverty and environmental degradation, this study found that the contribution of the rural poor people differ significantly by gender, family size, and age but not significantly by marital status and religious affiliation. In the rural setting, the exploitation of resources from the ecosystem cannot be ruled out. What is needed is the sustainable exploitation of these resources so that the ecosystem would be preserved for future generations. Degradation kills the environment and this must be checked through education.

VI. Recommendations

1. Public enlightenment and education should be given to rural poor people to avoid some of the activities that promote degradation.
2. The rural people should be given lessons on modern agricultural practices that help sustain the ecosystem.
3. Public campaigns should be periodically mounted in the rural areas to make the people familiar with sustainable exploitation of the environment and its resources.
4. There should be increased and sustained economic empowerment packages for poor rural fanners to

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encourage them to plant more to feed their families arid to sell for wealth.

5. Agricultural Extension agents should be adequately trained in environmental preservation technique to train rural poor farmers who engage in the actual farming.
6. Communities should be, allowed to instil stricter penalties on defaulters of bush burning and deforesting water grove Ural shelter water table and springs heads.

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