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**BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT; POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES**

Every natural creature (both animals and plants) that has existed or is exiting has its own assigned contribution and importance to the ecosystem and the continuity of life. Biodiversity according to Wikipedia is the variety and variability of life on Earth, it is the measure of variation at the genetic, species, and ecosystem. Thus, biodiversity conservation is concerned with saving life on Earth in all its forms and keeping natural ecosystems functioning and healthy. Since life began on earth, five major mass extinctions and several minor events have led to large to large and sudden drops in biodiversity. The Phanerozoic eon (the last 540 million years) marked a rapid growth in biodiversity via the Cambrian explosion – a period during which the majority of multicellular phyla first appeared.

Employing my immediate environment, Nigeria, as a benchmark, she occupies a vast and unique geographic position, clement weather together with affirming features for a rich bio-diversified nation. With all these freely given privileges, Nigeria should have an upper hand when it comes to biodiversity but reverse is the case as she is seen to be lagging behind when compared to some less privileged (i.e. geographic position, climate and natural resources) countries who are seem to be more advanced making use of the little they have to get much. Such countries have and are doing all that they can to preserve the lives of the creatures they are minimally blessed with. Obviously, this brings in random thoughts with loads of yet unanswered questions, Why? How? She is posed with challenges that stand in the way obstructing her from making the best out of the strong features that she possesses.

In 2002, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)conducted an Environmental Assessment (EA) in Nigeria. From their analysis, they identified two major problems with the resource allocation system that heavily impact on the capacity of the country to attain environmental management and protection. They include; Limited allocations to local governments and use of ecological funds. These two problems sum up to be mismanagement of financial resources. The government gives little or no attention to the ecological sector. From findings, ecological funds are said to be 2% of the annual federal budget which is belittling for such a salient sector. Yes! Technology is good but we should use it to develop our rather than cause harm to our ecosystem. It is true that Nigeria’s environment and biosystem is degrading as animals, plants and everything that has positive impact on the ecosystem seems to be fading away. It is not too late to revitalize and grow back our promising land. Action needs to be taken now! The government has to review the portion of the annual federal budget allocated to this sector and give it more attention. The government has the primary role in biodiversity but both non-governmental organizations and common citizens should stretch out supporting arms.

The environmental issues in Nigeria are extensive and rapidly increasing. Countermanding these trends is going to take more than just simple capacity building, it requires a consequential political and popular will. Updates and evaluation needs to made on existing Nigerian environmental regulations and policies as well as formation of new ones. These policies mandate the support of political will to see that they are enforced and implemented. Alas! This is not the current case in Nigeria. Awareness is key. Two frameworks that play very vital roles in the awareness scheme and regulation enforcement; the legal and political framework. Once these two bodies join hands, it would not only be of benefit to the biodiversity conservation but also help reduce pollution.

Data collection and research is another challenge standing in the way of biodiversity conservation and national development. Recalling the last time a standard population census was conducted in Nigeria is an apology. If we can barely have a dependable database for human beings for reference, how then are we to manage non-human creatures? To solve a problem, one must understand the problem first. We lack a systematic environmental data collection and management in Nigeria. Thorough review, research, data collection and evaluation should be made so as to lead us to make effective approaches to biodiversity concomitant problems, its conservation and relevant solutions to addressing them.

More than half of Nigerians live below the poverty boundary. One may ask, what is the relationship between poverty and biodiversity? Nearly 90% of these Nigerians that live in poverty rely on natural resources for their sustenance and livelihood as they work from hand to mouth. They work on farm lands or unused lands and slaughter variety of animals causing uncontrolled and continuous extraction of these natural resources leading to biodiversity loss and degradation. Now the tie between poverty and biodiversity conservation is obvious. Agriculture is good and very beneficial but one must be careful on the approach made to it. The activities of these peasant farmers such as exploration and exploitation of forest reserves and their resources, burning of trees and killing of wild life has a great toll on biodiversity. This is one of the reasons why certain plant and animal species have gone into extinct while some others are endangered. The truth is that we cannot totally blame them, they are in urgent need for some sort of income and are very ignorant of the long-term impact it has on biodiversity. To curb this, forest reserves should be given maximum attention and effective regulations put in place for its management. Also, we cannot remove food from the mouth of these hustling Nigerians by telling them not to farm rather, they should be educated on the right way to carry out their farming and hunting activities by introducing eco-friendly methods of farming such as double cropping, relay planting, poly culture, mixed cropping, sequential cropping, ratooning and succession planting. Hunters should be encouraged and trained to rare animals rather than just kill them so as to ensure their continuity.

What we see is denigrating for the potentials such a promising Nation, Nigeria holds. Although, rebuilding her to greater glory may seem impossible all it requires is massive joint effort from every Nigerian, no matter your status. It starts from you and me, if every Nigerian resident family has at least one tree in their residence it would go further than you think. Now imagine flowers surrounding these compounds; What a beautiful, colourful and green Nigeria. The ecosystem gives us life and it is our responsibility to protect it.