



Review Article

The Effects of Man's Activities on the Environment and Humanity: The way forward

Ojong Lawrence Odey



<https://doi.org/10.62865/bjbio.v13i1.32>

Abstract: This paper shows how man's activity negatively impacts the environment and humanity. This work emphasizes that human beings should reduce activities in the environment to avoid boomeranging effects. Thus, man must realize that the environment provides man with naturalness, aesthetic enjoyment, and spiritual significance value. As such, man should cultivate an attitude of love for nature (environment), reverence for nature (environment), and limit the use of nature (environment) for future generation. The methods employed in this work include critical analysis, logical evaluation, and argumentation as well as prescription.

Keywords: Environment, humanity, depletion, degradation.

Introduction: Human activities have caused environmental destruction and degradation in so many ways¹. For instance, deforestation, bush burning and application of fertilizers, pollution, overpopulation, global warming, climate change, acid rain, ozone layer depletion, and water pollution all affect the environment, humans, and non-human animals negatively¹. Regrettably, hundreds of extinctions (extinction of non-human animals and trees) have occurred within the last centuries as a result of man's developmental pursuit for food, shelter, and sustained survival. Despite development providing a

better life for humans but it also reduces its capacity to provide a natural environment for the future generation like a double-edged sword².

However, in recent times, the environment has been the center of attention amongst scientists, environmentalists, philosophers, and other scholars³. For instance: does the natural world, plants, animals, bioregions have their own worth? Do humans have moral obligations or do we also have moral obligations to animals, to plants, and even to whole ecosystems? To what extent do ecological problems arise from

Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

Email: lawrenceojong23@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7543-9822>

Corresponding Author: Ojong, Lawrence Odey, Email: lawrenceojong23@gmail.com



anthropocentrism? How long does humanity-nature dualism require? How worth is humans dominating nonhumans⁴? Could it be as a result of the biblical mandate to subdue the earth^{5,6}? Noteworthy is the fact that biblical theology of creation and its development in traditional Christianity provides the foundation for modern science and technology advancement?

The focus on the earth doctrine of the human being created in the image and likeness of God and command to multiply progeny, fill the earth and subdue it⁴ has been interpreted as a license for human to exploit nature⁷. Peschke lamented that because of human careless and wasteful exploitation of the environment and the natural resources therein has led to the human natural habitat being threatened⁸. This work shall therefore examine the effect of man's activity on the environment and humanity to proffer a solution to these challenges.

Effects of Man's Activities on the Environment: Man's activity through agriculture, mining, manufacturing, communication, tourism, religion, transportation etc has impacted negatively on the environment in one way or the other¹. Man has cultivated, excavated, and manipulated the environment for his survival, comfort, and future existence. This was motivated by the need for human survival that led to technological advancement, which aided humans to domesticate the environment. It is this manipulative scientific technology that made humans lord and master of the universe, which they now abuse and plunder⁹. Here are some of the ways man has impacted the environment.

1. Deforestation: Civilization encourages industrialization and since the industrial revolution, a large number of trees are usually cut down each year for developmental purposes. Trees are very important because they contribute to the production of oxygen; therefore, cutting trees or clearing forests is to a great degree not a good thing for non-human animals and humans alike because we are dependent on the oxygen converted from trees. Unfortunately, man's activities through the development and want for more food for survival, shelter for continued existence, and materials to work, build and maintain what has already been developed mostly come from the forest. Moreover, deforestation is a major threat to non-human animal's survival because the forests are homes for most non-human animals. More so, conservation of some non-human animal species becomes difficult because of cutting trees and destroying forests. Furthermore, the greenhouse gases within the atmosphere deforestation increase as a result of deforestation; and as a result, global warming occurs¹.

2. Pollution: Pollution is another resultant effect of human activities which affect the environment negatively. Throwing of trash on the road, millions of pollutants pumped into the air and water many cause not to have access to clean water and fresh air¹. Man's continuous pollution of the environment will require millions of years to replenish the soil¹. Air is arguably the most polluted each year alone through industrialization and manufacturing activities. Developing countries on the other hand continue to pollute the environment as they try to meet the standard of development they have set¹.

3. Overpopulation: In order to keep the human race alive, there is a need for reproduction. Humans have overpopulated the earth and this overpopulation is becoming a problem because it leads to environmental impact and challenges. Can our planet sustain or carry the high increase in population? Although medicine has improved the standard of health, industrial methods of farming have improved the food (from large scale to quality), etc. This has kept humans alive much longer and increased the total population. Consequently, environmental degradation is also a resultant consequence of overpopulation because humans will need food and shelter and this can only happen when the environment is exploited¹. Thus, Humans require enough space whether it is for farming, the building of houses, or industries. An increase in population results in more clearing of forest or cutting of trees and burning of the forest. Secondly, humans depend so much on coal and fossil fuels for energy. The larger the population, the more fossil fuels, and coal will be used¹. When this is the case, there is a large amount of carbon dioxide sent into the air, thereby threatening man's health, extinction of non-human animals, and the life and quality of trees¹.

4. Global Warming: Global warming is no doubt one of the greatest negative impacts the environment has ever experienced. Every year, humans through development and industrialization consistently increase emanation through CO₂ levels globally. Also, other ways of causing global warming include deforestation and the burning of fossil fuel¹.

5. Climate Change: Climate change has a great impact on humanity and the environment. As global temperatures increase. Earth's weather patterns are being drastically changed. Consequently, and as a truism, some areas are experiencing longer growing seasons while others are becoming barren waste lands¹. Also, water depletion in some vast areas leads to deserts in floral regions¹.

6. Water Pollution: Water and water life are one of the most important natural resources at our disposal. Water pollution is also a threat not only to humans but to all aquatic life and has led to the reduction of variety and/or variability of life in the ecosystem¹. Every year a large amount of waste is dumped into the ocean¹. Moreover, through rains, floods, wind, etc., excessive amounts of fertilizers find its way into the ocean, rivers, and streams. This Fertilizer is dangerous for aquatic life because it contains nitrogen, an essential element for the growth of plants¹. Wastes or garbage that are dumped into the ocean mainly contains plastics and plastics do not dissolve easily in water. The garbage accumulates and moves in rotary motion across the ocean¹. Aquatic animals, for instance, will think they are eating food when really it is only a floating plastic bag or other poisonous plastic; that will eventually cause suffocation¹.

7. Acid Rain: Man's activities such as the burning of coal, sulphur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides are released into the atmosphere which accumulates in the clouds making the clouds to become saturated and rain acid on the environment¹. The consequence of this is that it causes havoc on the ground beneath such as: (a) it accumulates in water bodies

which is harmful for lakes and small bodies of water. (b) Essential nutrient from the soil is depleted as a result of the water soaks up by acid. (c) Trees that absorb the acid accumulate toxins that damage leaves and slowly kill large areas of forest (d) Aquatic animals' species are completely eliminated as a result of acid rain¹.

8. Ozone Layer Depletion: The ozone layer is known for its ability to absorb harmful ultra variant rays (UVR) that are detrimental to the health of all of life; human life, animal life, and plant life¹. Without the ozone layer, walking outside would be horrible and unbearable. Ozone is made up of three bonded oxygen's that float up to the stratosphere where they absorb a substantial amount of ultra-variant radiation (UVR), protecting all life down below¹. If this ozone layer is depleted as a result of human impact, these impacts are usually devastating for plants that are extremely sensitive to ultra-variant light (UVR) including wheat and barley, two indispensable crops to humans.

Effects of Man's Activities on Humanity: Human activities such as manufacturing, agriculture, transportation, mining, religion, tourism, communication, etc. affect not only the environment but humanity. Animals, plants, and trees cannot be regarded as lower creatures on the evolutionary scheme because of their inability to talk or do many other things as humans do⁹. The following are some ways by which human activities affect humanity.

1. Food Security: Man depends solely on food for survival. This is because food helps man to develop biologically. Man gets food from the environment. He cultivates this environment through

deforestation, bush burning, and plants food crops of all kinds. Continuous cultivation of the earth has affected the climate such that there have been food shortages all over the world (with the increased population)¹. If the changes in climate increase food crops such as rice, maize, wheat, etc, in some regions, will be hit by the temperature in other regions. Climate change for instance affects economic growth. This makes it difficult to tackle poverty especially in developing country¹. The prices of food will increase as hunger will increase as a result of climate change¹.

2. Human Health: It is always said that health is wealth. Man through medical science has strived to improve his living condition by discovering medicine and building hospitals. No doubt, man's activities still poses threat to humanity and some of these activities affect his health¹. Increased devastation of the environment will lead to increase health challenges, particularly in poorer countries¹. Consequently, there shall be increased water risk, food risk and insect-borne diseases, the likelihood of under-nutrition due to reduced food production, heat as a result of deforestation etc¹.

3. Security: Insecurity is a threat to human existence. Human has developed in all ramifications. One of such this developed are weapons¹. Man wants to experiment these weapon he has created. Through exchange of this weapon, there is a greater risk of violence and conflicts between individuals and countries or within a country (civil war). War or violence leads to poverty, health hazard, destruction of lives and property¹.

4. Water: Water is another essential aspect of man. And within Islamic culture, water is highly regarded¹⁰ because of its purifying importance. Human drinks water, cooks with water, baths with water, uses water for production, agriculture, and otherwise. Human activities such as burning for farm purposes, deforestation make stream/river water vanish or gradually disappear¹. Improper management of waste that are been sent to the ocean affects the drinking water of humans and it also affects aquatic animals negatively¹. Application of fertilizer excessively on the soil affects the water when rain falls and washes this fertilizer into the rivers, seas or ocean¹. This does not only kill aquatic animals but makes the water undrinkable for humans and non-human animals. Through man's continued maltreatment of nature, dry areas will see a reduction in water. Consequently,

1. Dry areas will see a reduction in water quality causing droughts
2. Increase water scarcity by the percentage of people
3. Increased flooding by major rivers, through extreme rainfall, snow and ice will affect water quality.
4. Coastal area will see increased submergence and erosion
5. As a result of carbon dioxide emissions, increased acidity in the streams, rivers, and ocean will pose a serious risk to fisheries or aquatic animals.

5. Wildlife: Animal species are very important to the environment as a lot are feared extinct as a result of human activity such as hunting, deforestation, bush burning etc¹. Man depends on animals for meat. As such, animals face a lot of threats as a result of man's activities. Other

activities that threaten animal species are (1) climate change (2) habitat loss (3) pollution (4) drought (5) rising temperatures etc. Islamic teachings for instance emphasize respect for animals, as such Islamic teaching places restrictions on how animals are treated¹. According to Islam, animals must not be forced to bear or carry loads heavier than they can, and they must be given food and water when they stop or come to where there is water¹. Also, animals must not be branded or burnt or stricken at their face since they glorify God¹⁰. This implies that Islam as a religion recognizes and appreciates the importance of non-human animals in the environment¹.

6. Air: Air is another important natural resource that humans depend on for survival. Plants and animals also depend on air for survival. Air pollution is the result of man's activities. Activities such as fossil fuel combustion from vehicles, industrial factories, and power plants all pump a large amount of air pollutants such as carbon monoxide, ozone, and nitrous oxides, into the atmosphere. Air pollutants can lead to a serious health crisis for both human and non-human animals¹.

The Way Forward: It is imperative that we must live on with support to the earth. If the environment deteriorates, man deteriorates too. "The desire of man to continue to subsist on the earth planet in the face of a diminishing earth and the very fact that man has no other planet as a habitable and hospitable perhaps led man to start thinking; at first specifically and in time deeply about the need to protect the earth"¹⁰. The environment has given so much to the man. A man should in turn

give to the environment. This can be done through the following ways:

1. Love of the Environment (Nature):

The virtue of love should not only tilt towards God and man but also to the environment (nature). This is because nature is the handiwork of God's wisdom and it is not only beautiful but good. Love for nature entails appreciating the goodness and beauty of the aesthetic value nature has. Secondly, respecting the purpose by which it was created by God is also crucial. Evidently,

"...a unique way the love of nature has been lived by Francis of Assisi. All creatures were to him brothers and sisters; sun and moon, earth and water, herbs and animals; and he praised God for them all... But also for ...Hildegord of Bingen, nature evokes joy, wonder, praise, awe and especially love. These attitudes accord with the genuine Christian spirituality"⁸.

This is an evidence of love for nature shown by Francis Asisi.

2. Reverences for Environment (Nature):

Reverence for nature is another important attitude in preserving our environment. Reverence for nature should have its foundation in the intrinsic value (goodness) it has not in the extrinsic values which is the result of civilization, industrial, mechanistic and materialistic value man place on nature. Consequently, for man to realize this intrinsic value, "this requires a spiritual formation, which goes beyond a concept or science that limits... and regards the material world only as an object to be dominated and used"⁸. That is to say, the material world is not to be used regardless of the spiritual significance.

3. Moderation and Self-limitation of the Use of the Environment:

The moderation and self-limitation of nature require self-control and the obligation of man towards nature. Nature no doubt has intrinsic value and as such humans have obligations of responsibility to taking care of nature because of the boomeranging effects it has both on man and the environment. A man should develop an attitude of self-control in the way he treats nature. "Nature is God's creation and therefore belongs to him. Only he is its absolute proprietor. Humans are only the stewards of creation. This implies that in their dealing with nature they are limited by a superior authority and its superior rights"⁸.

Conclusion: Human impacts the natural habitat in so many ways as seen above. Environmental degradation is the result of human activities. These activities deteriorate, degraded, and depleted the environment through developmental strides to better man's standard of living for his survival. The resultant is the boomeranging effects it has on the environment and humanity. Activities such as agricultural, religious, communication, manufacturing, tourism, mining, transportation, etc. have destroyed the ecosystem. This has led to environmental problems like air and water pollution, species extinction, bush burning, deforestation, climate change, global warming, ozone layer depletion, overpopulation, and flooding. Etc.

This work, therefore, holds that no doubt man depends on the environment for survival; the man should cultivate the attitude towards maintaining the environment. This is because "The natural environment offers many values of

emotional and spiritual, creative and esthetic nature, which enrich people greatly. Evidently, nature is also in many ways the indispensable basic for the person's material existence in this world⁸. Man must stop the war against the environment because the environment brings man closer to its naturalness. Secondly, the environment offers man some aesthetic enjoyment and finally, the environment offers man some spiritual significance and values.

Reference:

1. Donovan A. 11 Ways Humans Impact the Environment. 2020. <https://interestingengineering.com/11-ways-humans-impact-the-environment> (Accessed 11th December 2021).
2. Asira EA, Bisong PB. Being-In-Control and Sustainable Development. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 2015; 5(4): 1-10.
3. Bisong PB, Essien, JP. A Philosophical Analysis of the Impact of Christianity on the Environment. *The Academic Conference of African Scholar Publication & Research International*. 2015; 3(3): 15-19.
4. Zimmerman ME. General Introduction. In Michael EZ, Baird JC, George S, Karen JW, John C. ed. *Textbook of Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*. New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 2001:1-6.
5. Fuller RC. *Good News Bible: With Deuterocanonical Books/Apocrypha*. Today's English Version. Swapna Printing Works Pvt. Ltd, India; 1979.
6. Mbonu C. Ethics of Environmental Restoration: Biblical and African Perspectives. *Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values*. 2011; 1: 59-72.
7. Bisong PB, Asira EA, Okolie CN, Essien JP. An Ethics of Sustainable Environment in the Light of Asouzu's Ibuanyandanda Philosophy. *UHSS* 2015; 3(11): 44-58.
8. Peschike KH. *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II*. Theological Publication in India, Bangalore; 2009.
9. Ekwealo CJ. Environmental Ethics and Values in the 21st Century: An African Philosophical Analysis. *Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values*. 2011; 1: 59-72.
10. Owosho S. Islamic Perspective of Eco-Balance Human-Nature Relation: A Philosophical Examination. *Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values*. 2011 1: 85-96.
11. Omoogun AC. *Ethics & Environment: Issues and Perspectives*. Baye Communication, Calabar; 2009.

Author Contribution: The author conceived the idea and wrote the manuscript and checked the manuscript meticulously.

Conflict of Interest: I declare that there is no conflict of interest

Funding: No funding.