

## THE COMMUNITY'S GOOD, AND EXPLOITATION OF HUMAN AND NATURAL RESOURCES IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

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The title of this paper is drawn from Section 17 (2d) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended in 2023. Both human and natural resources are essential for the development of any nation. It is human resources that carry out development projects for the good of the people. It is also human beings who exploit natural resources for the development of any nation. A look through the history of Nigeria shows that human resources have not been well managed for the communitarian good. This is why there is so much underemployment, unemployment, and other factors that threaten the full exploitation of Nigeria's human potential. The rate at which brain drain is taking place, the Japa syndrome indicates poor exploitation of human resources. There is also the additional problem that the benefits that come from natural resource exploitation in the country rarely get to the masses of the Nigerian people. The benefits often are siphoned away through corruption, bad leadership, etc. The paper argues that there is a vital need to attend to what section 17(2d) of the constitution states. The paper examines what is the common good of the community and extends the good of the community to include the entire ecological good and not just human good. Arguing from an African-based understanding of community and Ecocentric ethics, the community includes both present and future generations and ecosystems. Critical analytic and hermeneutic methods are adopted to unravel and examine the issues in the paper. The paper concludes that a positive and healthy exploitation of both human and natural resources is necessary for promoting the good of the community and authentic development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Community, Communitarian, Good, Human resources, Natural resources, Exploitation, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

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This paper revolves around the idea that human and natural resources (HNR) in Nigeria have been poorly exploited. Most often instead of HNR to be exploited for the common good they are

exploited and manipulated for personal and sectional interests. Human resources should be harnessed for the good and well-being of not just a few individuals but for the benefit of the entire Nigerian community. The same should apply to the exploitation of natural resources. While natural resources should be exploited and managed following the principles of equity and justice, all persons and sections in the nation should benefit from it.

### Conceptual Analyses

MacQueen et al (2001) define community as a set of persons sharing social ties and common perspectives who engages in common actions in a geographic area. A community can be trans-geographical and also have persons of differing identities and perspectives. A community does not necessarily have to be monolithic. In today's plural and multi-cultural world, it is difficult to see a homogenous community. What matters is that despite differences and persuasions the people in a community share some common interests that they willingly work to accomplish possibly in a democratic fashion. Obunadike (2011) defines a community as a "...collection of mutually dependent families living and working together in a given geographic area and usually in a face-to-face association" (p. 293). There are different kinds of communities such as religious communities, political communities, economic communities, social communities, cultural communities, national communities, regional communities, international communities, cosmopolitan communities, etc. According to Bradbury (2009) community is "a group of people who are socially related by virtue of identity with a particular location" (p. 100). Bradbury (2009) notes that the term though is contested as different schools see a community in different ways: traditional conservatives see it as linked with kinship, blood, and historic ties; socialists see the traditional school as hegemonic in tying both the haves and have-nots together; reformist socialists opt for a community in which there is wealth distribution; liberals focus rather on individuals freedoms than community, and rather see community as freely decided associations of individuals. For this paper, it is the entire Nigerian national community that is the concern here, and not the ethnic or sectional community.

It is important to state a word on communitarianism, for this paper the common good is communitarian. Reeve (2009) sees the term communitarian as: "Advocacy of a social order in which individuals are bound together by common values that foster close communal bonds"(p. 100). In this work, community good refers to whatever fosters the welfare, well-being, wellness, and beauty of the entire Nigerian people, both those living in the physical entity called Nigeria and in the Diaspora.

The concept of human resources is also important to be explained here. Nwaka (2011) cites Okafor to state human resources is the entirety of skills, knowledge, energies, and experience of all the people in a community. Human resources refers to human beings with all their innate potentials, gifts, talents, abilities, educational acquisitions, etc. Human resources are different

from natural resources which are resources that you find in nature. Natural resources are not human-made though they can be managed and adapted by human beings. Mayhew (2009) defines natural resources as: “Any property of the physical environment, such as minerals, or natural vegetation, which is exploited by humans” and they may be non-renewable or renewable (p. 342). Stranks (2008) sees natural resources as: “...naturally occurring substances classified as valuable in their natural and untreated form such as fish, forestry, fossil fuels and oils” (p.262). Micheals (2004) defines natural resources as, “...any component of the natural environment such as air, water, soil, forest wildlife, and minerals. Specifically, the material of nature available for use as inputs to economic activity...” (p. 137). Peretomode and Peretomode (2001) write that: “Human resources refer to all categories of employees, skilled and unskilled workers, supervisors and managers in an organisation” (p. 2). It should be realized that not only organizations that have human resources, but a country or nation is also filled with human resources, and organizations and companies do not exist in a vacuum, they exist in the space of a country or nation. When organizations and companies are dynamic and profitable they contribute to the well-being and health of a country. Dysfunctional human resources negatively affect a country and its economy.

### **The Situation of Exploitation of Human and Natural Resources in Nigeria**

First, in this section, the state of human resources exploitation shall be discussed. One major problem facing human resources exploitation is the “Japa” syndrome. Because of massive unemployment, especially youth unemployment many Nigerian youths are leaving the shores of the country for foreign lands. The most painful issue regarding this is that already trained human resources (manpower) like doctors, nurses, lecturers, health care workers, etc are leaving the country. This is a big brain drain and a great loss to the country. Some of them leave the country to never return. Some persons may indeed argue that the people leaving will send remittances back home. But this is not the ideal situation. The development of the homeland is delayed and negatively affected by this brain drain. Nigeria needs a strong and healthy population to develop rapidly and advance scientifically and technologically. As many Nigerian doctors and nurses are leaving the country, there are many Nigerians who cannot have access to medical doctors.

The number of doctors to Nigerians per head is grossly poor. Adeyemo (2016) states that there is human capital flight from Sub-Saharan Africa as skilled labourers are migrating to the Middle East and other foreign countries and this is affecting the individual, group, and institutional capacities of these countries. As Nigerians especially skilled ones migrate out of their nation, to a certain degree Nigeria’s greatness is delayed and impeded. There is no serious issue with genuine and needed migration, but not the one that is caused by negative push factors such as unemployment, economic development, and lack of opportunities. No one knows the exact number of Nigerians who have died in the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Chrysestom (2018) cites Harris John and Michael P Todaro to state that irregular migration leads

to the loss of highly skilled manpower, low return from public investment in education, reduced productivity, and income disparity.

Busari (2003) writes that while much has been invested into the development of human resources in Nigeria, its utilization and management have been impeded by ethno-political instability, federal character, poor educational funding, corruption, nepotism, mass unemployment, widespread poverty, poor social capital formation, inconsistent public policies, poor infrastructure, etc. There is a massive turnout of university graduates from other tertiary institutions in Nigeria every year. There is hardly any university that does not have courses on entrepreneurship as required by the National Universities Commission (NUC). But there is still much mismatched between graduates and their skills. Many come out of university without the adequate skills needed in the industry. This also is a factor that has led to poor utilization of human resources in the nation. Busari (2003) writes that despite the constraints facing human resource development in Nigeria, the following can be done: strengthening primary and secondary education, expanding post-secondary technical training and education, upgrading basic education for the workforce, expanding in-company training, continuing education, upgrading skills, and public policy reforms.

Natural resources in Nigeria have been exploited and utilized from time immemorial. But the concern here will essentially be with the contemporary state of their exploitation. There are various natural resources in the country such as crude oil, natural gas, gold, iron ore, forestry, wildlife, fish, etc. While Nigeria is blessed with many natural resources the unfortunate reality is that since the discovery of oil, a great deal of attention has been turned to the exploitation of oil to the detriment of the development of solid minerals and other natural resources. The Nigerian Embassy in the Hague (2024) states that:

Nigeria is among countries in Africa with a wide variety of different natural resources. The country is richly endowed with natural resources ranging from industrial metals to various precious stones such as Barites, Gypsum, Kaolin and Marble. Most of these minerals are yet to be exploited. Statistically, the level of exploitation of these minerals is very low in relation to the extent of deposit found in the country. One of the objectives of the new National Policy on solid minerals is to ensure the orderly development of the mineral resources of the country.

A look at the website of the embassy just mentioned shows the minerals from various states. Outside oil, the exploitation of other natural resources is bedevilled by many problems. There is the problem of terrorism, terrorism, herders-farmers conflicts, and militancy which has made the geographic terrain where natural resources are located insecure. While there is insecurity there are bandits and others who steal and exploit the natural resources illegitimacy to the detriment of the good of the Nigerian people. The economy of Nigeria is a distressed one. What Babawale

(2007) wrote about many years ago is not different from present-day Nigeria, where there is massive unemployment, declining living standards, removal of fuel subsidy, poor workers' salary, transportation crisis, etc; and all these affect the Nigerian workers and continuous downturn in the economy. All through the nation, Nigerian workers are groaning in pain.

The exploitation of natural resources is also bedevilled by massive embezzlement and corruption in the land. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (1998) lamented how the corruption and poor leadership in the land have affected the people when they prayed:

Father in heaven, you always provide for all your creatures, so that all may live as you have willed. You have blessed our country Nigeria with rich human and natural resources to be used in honour and glory and for the well-being of every Nigerian. We are deeply sorry for the wrong use of these your gifts and blessings through acts of injustice, bribery and corruption, as a result of which many of our people are hungry, sick, ignorant and defenceless. Father, you alone can heal us and our nation of this sickness

This is where also the issue of accountability comes into play. Budgets are made every year in Nigeria at the Federal and State levels. Not much is accounted for by those who govern. Roads and many other infrastructures that have been awarded are yet to be done and the same project that was awarded and paid for in a previous administration is still being awarded again and again. Nigeria is a land of abandoned projects. Projects that should benefit the generality of the people are left undone. Some politicians simply get the road leading to their houses or village done and forget the other roads. It is as if only their houses or villages that matter. Resources that should be harnessed for the common good are harnessed for the good of the politicians and his/her cronies.

The exploitation of oil in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta has been a curse and a tale of woes. Oil exploration and exploitation has brought untold hardships to the people of the Niger Delta. Utuama (2009), Otite (2009) Obagbinoko (2009), Danjibo and Nwiline (2009) have all narrated the miseries, deprivations, pains, and underdevelopment in the Niger Delta despite the wealth of oil and gas resources. Concerning the exploitation of oil, Gutti, Aji and Magaji (2012) write that: "...petroleum exploration has adverse effects on the environment of the host communities like oil spills, extensive deforestation, loss of farms, loss of soil fertility, erosion, gas flaring, intensive exploitation, contamination of streams and rivers, effluent discharge and disposal, conflict between oil companies and host communities." Imuetinyan and Eghweree (2019) state that natural resource exploitation has caused environmental damage arising from wilful damage to the environment and no attention to sustainable development concerns. The state of natural resource exploitation has also been affected by environmental problems. Environmental problems make it difficult to healthily exploit natural resources, and they also make it hazardous for human beings to exercise their rights and develop their human potential. The environment is necessary for human beings to live and enjoy the good life. Gutti, Aji and

Magaji (2012) state that: “Deforestation is a serious problem in Nigeria with forest loss occurring at rate of 3.3% per year since 1990, the country has loss over 36% of its forest cover.”

The country of Nigeria is confronted by constant strikes and protests. It is either doctors who are on strike or lecturers, nurses, etc. all over the land many workers are poorly paid. This is one of the reasons why some have migrated out of the country. The minimum wage in Nigeria is one of the lowest in the world. Not too long ago in August 2024, there was end bad government protest. The rising price of goods and services in the country is terrible. Many workers are experiencing poor working conditions. This affects people’s health and well-being. In difficult and painful conditions that many Nigerian workers are facing it becomes difficult for them to give their best. The importance of the human resources of the Nigerian people to build their nation should not be in doubt. The people are the human resource and they are crucial to the development of the nation. Peretomode and Peretomode (2001) cite Mathis and Jackson to state that: “The successful management of human resources is one of the keys to the efficient operation of an organization...Managers in both the private and public sectors (banks, universities, small retail stores, hospitals, manufacturing firms, and governmental agencies) must all tap the talents of their human resources if they are to be successful, if the organizations are to accomplish their objectives” (p. 2). Poor management and corrupt managers and others in public office have led to gross failures in Nigerian public institutions and corporations. This is what affected the Nigeria Electricity Power Authority, the Nigerian Airways, etc. Public corporations like the Nigerian Ports Authority, the Nigerian Postal Service, Refinery, etc are not functioning to capacity. There are Nigerian government offices that you go to such as local governments, agricultural institutions, etc where many workers rarely come to the office but they collect monthly salaries. Then there are offices filled with ghost workers.

The majority of Nigerians do not benefit in a reasonable and just manner from the natural resources found in the land of Nigeria. Take the case of crude oil. Most of the profits accrue to the oil multinational companies who pay taxes to the government. And because of the heavy taxes they pay to the government, government agencies rarely care about environmental degradation in the Niger Delta and beyond. For many years gas flaring should have stopped in Nigeria, but it is still taking place. Then there is massive corruption in the oil industry. There are many in government especially political leadership who have stolen billions of Nigerian oil revenue and stored it away in foreign banks. While the majority of Nigerians are suffering, these politicians are living in luxury abroad and their children are in schools and universities abroad. The oil wealth that should be for the communitarian good is in the hands of a few. What gets to the people is few crumbs compared with what goes to the government and the oil multinational corporations. Corruption does not only affect the oil industry but permeates all aspects of life in Nigeria. Hagher (2022), Igbo (2019), Igbe and Leke (2019), and Odoh (2006) all agreed that Nigeria is troubled by massive corruption. It will be myopic to think that corruption does not

adversely affect human resource development and natural resource exploitation. Financial resources that should be used to develop human capital and improve the environment in which natural resources are exploited are siphoned away through corruption.

### Way Forward in Exploiting Human and Natural Resources for the Communitarian Good in Nigeria

One of the vital tools that can be used to better human and natural resource exploitation in Nigeria is education. The kind of education is not just any kind of education or traditional education. This kind of education promotes justice, good inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic relations, ecocentric values, humaneness, and communal solidarity. It is an education that makes people in the community feel and experience a sense of belonging, collaborate, and work for the common good. It is an education that promotes true patriotism. It is painful for instance to note that the management of human resources and harnessing natural resources in Nigeria have been riddled with ethnicism, sectionalism, parochialism, and economic greed. This is why this kind of education is so necessary. Nwaka (2011) argues that education is a veritable instrument to prepare people for the workforce and in a place like Nigeria foster the goals of the National Policy on Education. Agiobenebo and Ajie (2004) state that higher education is crucial to developing human resources that will harness natural resources and contribute to economic growth, and especially there should be a massive investment into the training of better manpower such as medical doctors, engineers, scientists, and other professionals. Faculty of Management Sciences (2006) states that; "...human resource is the most important of all resources. It is the only resource that is resourceful and drives other resources" and there is no replacement for human resource development (p. 5).

The type of education advocated above should also inform and influence human resource management. Managers of human resources in the workplaces in Nigeria should manage to promote diversity and promote cooperation and teamwork among people. There is no doubt that when human resources is better managed it will promote more productivity and better results. Collaboration and cooperative relationships in the workplace promote joy and harmony and this in turn affects the national economy positively as people create more. This enhances the overall good of the community. But if the workplace is divisive and ethnicized, it negatively affects the communitarian good. For people instead of focusing on how to produce more for the good of the group or community, separate themselves into parties. Education can help manage diversity and help human persons and workers in the workplace and public space to relate peacefully and harmoniously. Babawale (2007) writes that: 'Diversity, is properly harnessed, can be a source of strength for a nation. However, where it is denied, frozen or manipulated, conflicts among groups and mutual distrust between one nationality or the other becomes pronounced. The state in Nigeria has been adept at manipulating differences among the people to undermine labour and implement anti-people policies'(p.96). Today's world is a global and cosmopolitan



one. Ikeke and Alumona (2011) aver that the ideals of global citizenship and cosmopolitan values should inform the formation of human capital/resources in Nigeria.

Naturally, resources cannot be effectively harnessed for the common good if human resources are poorly developed. This is where the right education also comes into play. Hagher (2022) rightly notes that education will help Nigerians overcome many health problems and create an enlightened citizenry. Human resource is important to the growth and development of Nigeria. The Nigerian government must put in place measures and procedures to curb the brain drain and irregular migration of Nigerian human resources.

In exploiting human resources in Nigeria, government policies and attitudes can make a great difference. Human beings, human resources, workers, managers, corporations, and companies exist within a country. The government of a country has a role to play in managing both human and natural resources. Peretomode and Peretomode (2001) rightly notes that “Government regulations in health, safety, equal employment quotas, energy, and the environment” are factors that affect human resource productivity. Amid bad and poor government policies that affect human resources, human resources will be poorly exploited in corporations and companies. Good government policies can help companies, and businesses perform better and manage their workers well. Good educational policies can help in the better development of the people who will play their civic responsibilities and patriotic duties.

Natural resources should not just be exploited thinking just of economic profits or capitalist interests. The good and health of ecosystems should be taken into consideration. So also the values of sustainable development and future generations should be taken into consideration. Nigeria has many environmental policies and management agencies but there is very poor implementation of environmental laws in the country. There is an Environmental Impact Assessment Act but as is the case with other laws, it is poorly implemented due to corruption. Abe (2014) states that the government must have in place adequate measures to guarantee human rights to curb the excesses of oil multinational corporations that degrade the environment with impunity.

To mitigate the overexploitation and wise use of natural resources, Gutti, Aji and Magaji (2012) write: “To establish a system for continuous monitoring of natural resources by the government and social groups in order to encourage public participation in the activities aimed at sustainable development of natural resources like: recycling, waste reduction, afforestation, pollution control, bioremediation and game reserves, and to set up a mechanism for coordination or elimination of discrepancies arising during the implementation of some policies related to utilization of natural resources and provide appropriate sanctions.”

There is a need to move away from the mindset of seeing natural resources as simply existing for human utility or economic purposes. Nature is not simply a resource. Nature has intrinsic value and should be conserved for its own sake also. Human use of nature in Nigeria and elsewhere



should be done prudently and wisely. The effects of the abuse, misuse, and overexploitation of nature are evident everywhere such as in climate change, depletion of the ozone layer, environmental refugeeism, air and marine pollution, health hazards, etc.

Proceeds from all mineral resources should be used for the benefit of all Nigerians following just and equitable formulas taking into consideration the burden borne by those under whose ground the mineral is exploited or resourced. This being the case not only the proceeds from oil should be the concern for the government in Nigeria. It is painful to note that there are minerals especially solid minerals exploited in some states of the federation whose proceeds never get to the coffers of the federal government. This is unjust and detrimental to the well-being of all Nigerians. Abdullah (2006) notes that outside oil Nigeria has many other potent mineral resources such as limestone, kaolin, columbite, gold, silver, coal, lead, etc that should be effectively and efficiently harnessed to mitigate economic recession, factory closure, abandoned projects and increased external debts to meet the needs of all Nigerians.

### Conclusion

The paper looked at the need to exploit human and natural resources in Nigeria for the common or communitarian good. It stated clearly that the community that is of concern here is the national Nigerian community. Mineral resources and other natural resources exist for the common good of all Nigerians, and not simply the geographic location in which they are found. But since the geographic terrain in which these minerals are found bore the greatest environmental burden in the exploitation of these natural resources, those the people in those geographic places deserve more than others (in whose localities these minerals are not found). This borders on equity and justice. The paper showed that in the exploitation of natural resources in Nigeria, some of the monetary benefits that come from these resources have been corruptively carted away by some in power. Corruption and embezzlement of public funds have brought Nigeria massive underdevelopment, insecurity, youth unemployment, etc. Nigeria's human resources need to be well managed to overcome ethnicism, nepotism, cronyism, parochialism, brain drain, etc. If these are done, they will help create a better Nigeria that works for the good of all.

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