

Environmental Impact Assessment as a Tool for Sustainable Development: The Nigerian Experience

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Key words:

ABSTRACT

Ever since the 1972 Stockholm UN conference on the Human Environment, which established the nexus between under development and environmental integrity, environmental issues have become transnational. Awareness has generated of the devastating impact of uncontrolled exploitation of environmental resources. The threat to wild-life, ecosystem, fauna and flora and indeed the security of the human race has created organisations whose primary goals and objectives are the protection and preservation of the environment.

Furthermore, the 1992 UN conference on Environment and Development, otherwise known as the “Earth Summit” of Rio de Janeiro generated an action plan for sustainable development in the 21st century, which has become the policy instrument that drives environmental programmes in most developed countries. Sustainable development was defined broadly as the ability of the present generation to meet its needs without compromising the potentials of the future generations to meet theirs. In fact Principle 3 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development provides that “The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations”.

Yet, in the bid to develop via industrialization, developing countries are constrained to pursue the same development models whose fall out assault and degrade the environment. How to develop creatively, without compromising the native integrity of the environment now constitutes a major challenge.

Environmental Impact Assessment is the perceived tool for achieving the desired balance. Nigeria is one of the few developing countries that have specific relevant legislation and therefore this paper assesses Nigeria’s Environmental Impact Assessment Act 1992 and its practical relevance as an environmental management tool especially in respect of core infrastructure projects.

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