

THE STATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE 1988 TOXIC WASTE DUMP IN KOKO*

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There are, however, certain issues in the toxic waste scandal that ought to be taken into consideration. It is apparent that ignorance and inordinate desire for material wealth are at the root of the scandal.

Ezenwa Ohaeto [1, p. 11].

What has happened in our village is only a signal. It is the beginning. There must be several other places like this in this country. When people are greedy and have no respect for nature or the future, then this sort of thing happens. Unfortunately there is little we can do, we are too poor and ignored by the powers that be. Just go round this village and you will see how poverty and illiteracy can make this incident happen again.

Madam Rowoli Oritshe [2]

The issue of environmental degradation, the world over, has become very topical in the last decade. In the specific case of Africa, it became an issue for discussion and debate even more recently. Even then, it is yet to occupy the important place it deserves in policy, research, and academic circles. The majority of African governments simply have no environmental policy worth the name. Those who have such policies lack the capacity to enforce them in the face of inefficiency, corruption, lack of relevant equipment and a poor understanding and appreciation of the dangers of environmental degradation. Yet, the rate at which the developed countries have targeted Africa as a waste dump site as well as the alarming rate at which poverty, superstition, and ignorance continue to encourage environmental degradation all over the continent, call for urgent measures at the levels of public

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enlightenment, policy formulation and implementation, popular vigilance and serious research into all aspects of the problem.¹

At another level it is important to see the environmental problem as a precipitate of the deepening crisis of state and society in the African continent. Specifically, the deepening crisis of the economy, the increasing delegitimization of the state, widespread corruption among the dominant classes, general socio-political unrest and uncertainty, the drastic deterioration in the state of mind and body as well as in the quality of public infrastructures and the increasing marginalization of Africa in the international division of labor have combined with historically rooted distortions and disarticulations to render the entire continent weak, vulnerable and almost totally incapable of enforcing domestic policies, maintaining political order, resisting external penetration, manipulation and pressures [9-11]. Hence, many African countries, reeling under the yoke of a heavy foreign debt profile and debt servicing obligations [12, 13] fall prey to opportunists who look for such nations to dump toxic wastes. The crisis of declining exports, declining commodity prices, rising prices of imports, closure of credit lines even for critical imports as well as the recent diversion of assistance, interest and investment to Eastern Europe and the Middle East at the expense of Africa, have also contributed to the vulnerability of the region [14]. Finally, the general socio-economic and political decay and dislocation engendered by the orthodox structural adjustment programs encouraged by the IMF and (at least until very recently) the World Bank have also contributed in no small measure to the crisis of environmental degradation in Africa [15-18].

It is no accident that the spate of toxic waste dumping in Nigeria, Benin Republic, Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Zimbabwe, and Sierra Leone have all occurred at a time of deepening poverty, instability, and contradictions in these countries [19]. Adjustment, without policies to protect vulnerable groups has impoverished the already poor majority, almost wiped out the middle classes, weakened the indigenous petty bourgeoisie and increased the delegitimization of the state. Policies of devaluation, retrenchment of hundreds of thousands of able-bodied workers, trade liberalization, desubsidization, and general deregulation have increased foreign domination, increased the foreign debt profile and deepened social antagonism and pressures. Thus the poor majority have been reduced to a primitive form of existence as they scavenge the rivers and forests and garbage dumps without regard to environmental consequences; as local elites who cannot compete with foreign producers and can not get credit as a result of deregulation and liberalization as well as devaluation have resorted to all forms of extra-legal mechanisms including the importation of dangerous wastes from

¹ Some major studies have been done reflecting the issues of policy, planning and research. Unfortunately some of these works are either too technical or are unavailable for popular consumption. More importantly, they do not incorporate grassroots strategies to control or protect the environment [3-8].

Europe and North America to survive; and as governments, with the closure of credit lines, crippling pressures from drought and debt, declining foreign aid and declining prices for their exports are compelled to take very unusual measures to survive [20, 21]. To be sure, for unscrupulous global waste "exporters," such conditions of anxiety, vulnerability and desperation fall right into their paths of operation as they easily target these desperate, frustrated and insecure countries and in direct collusion with local elites, convert these nations to dumping sites for toxic wastes.

The critical points which we must note therefore is that the environmental crisis in Africa today, in particular the absence of serious regulations and the inability to enforce them where they exist, cannot be divorced from the overall crisis of underdevelopment, dependence, foreign domination, weak and non-hegemonic state structures, corrupt and unproductive elites, bureaucratic inefficiency and ineffectiveness, declining external assistance, and general vulnerability to more powerful external forces in an increasingly hostile and exploitative global economy.

In this article, our focus is on Koko, Nigeria, a small community in the South West portion of Delta State (formerly part of Bendel State), which until the 1988 toxic waste dump was virtually unknown to the majority of Nigerians and to the world. Though it contains a sea port, it was probably the least utilized sea port in the country. The community's isolation, backwardness, and widespread corruption in the country, as well as institutional inefficiency made it possible for an Italian, Gianfranco Raffaelli, who had lived in Nigeria for twenty years, claiming to be working on behalf of a Nigerian business outfit, The Iruerken Construction Company (ICC), to organize the importation of over 1000 crates and sacks containing over 10,000 tons of toxic wastes into Nigeria between 1987 and 1988. Rafaelli selected the obscure port of Koko and took advantage of the ignorance of an indigene of Koko, Mr. Sunday Nana, who for a paltry sum of N500 (then about \$40.5) agreed to store the wastes in his compound pending evacuation to Asaba, on the fringe of the River Niger and the hometown of one of the country's wealthiest businessmen. The importation of the wastes escaped (?) the notice of the State Security Service (SSS), Port Immigration, Port Health, Customs Quarantine, Port Police, Government Pharmacists, Navy Police and Nigerian Ports Authority officials. It was not until 12 Nigerian students in Italy collected reports from Italian newspapers, and sent these (along with translations) to Nigerian newspapers that the whole sordid episode was blown into the open.

THE POLITICS AND DYNAMICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

It was the *Vanguard* newspaper of June 2, 1988 that first published the news that toxic wastes had been dumped in Koko. This report was followed by a more detailed report in the *Guardian* of June 5, 1988 which contained photographs of

the dump and identified the owner of the dump site as Mr. Sunday Nana an indigene of Koko town. Mr. Nana in an interview with *Guardian* reporters admitted that an expatriate representing ICC imported the waste and rented his compound for a fee of N500.00 to store the more than 1,000 drums and sacks. Some of the sacks according to the report were already breaking and some of the drums had been emptied and were being used for domestic purposes such as collecting and storing drinking water by both Mr. Nana and some members of the community. The news was in all newspapers and magazines by the end of that week. The international media, especially the BBC's Africa Service, also picked on the issue. Incidentally, the news broke into the open that toxic wastes had been dumped on Nigerian soil for over a year and was not discovered until Nigerian students in Italy decided to bypass the Ministry of External Affairs which had been slow in responding to their complaints and had therefore contacted local newspapers at a time when Nigeria was launching a global campaign against the dumping of toxic wastes in Africa. In fact at the previous Organization of African Unity's Summit in Addis Ababa, Nigeria had championed the need for a continental response to the dumping or attempted dumping of toxic waste materials by extra-African powers in the continent and had succeeded in getting the body to declare such acts as "a crime against Africa" [22]. Thus at the domestic level, the Nigerian government found itself struggling to get a handle on the embarrassment by arresting journalists and newspaper editors; trying to suppress further reports while launching an investigation into the matter; recalling its envoy to Rome and requesting the Italian government to do same; setting up a machinery to establish sanctions against culprits in the future; and mapping out a course of action to take care of the discovered dump.

At the global level, environmental organizations and Western nations, India, China and Japan expressed concern and offered to help with determining the degree of toxicity and radio-activity of the dump, the decontamination of Koko town and post-evacuation monitoring. Organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Commission, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth all sent in experts with sophisticated equipments, clearly unavailable to both the Nigerian government and its scientists to help determine the degree of the danger posed by the waste dump. While the initial reports created widespread fear, panic and uncertainty among the indigenes of Koko town and its environs, the eventual reports by the various expert teams and their organizations that the wastes were "very dangerous," "could explode" and "highly toxic" but not radioactive only served to increase the fear among a largely illiterate and ignorant community. As the Minister for Works and Housing Brigadier Mamman Kotangora put it on June 27, 1988, "everything there is toxic and poisonous while there is possibility of radio activity." He went on to explain that expert records showed that the drums and sacks contained "organic vapors, corrosive reagents, flammable liquids, acid, poison, large component of paint and pigment residues,

and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB)” [23, see also 24, 25]. It was reported that since all the 1,000 drums and sacks could not be tested, it was impossible to rule out completely that the waste was not radioactive. Information on the health implications of the dump was released by the various agencies and experts and it was made known that such health hazards range from cancer of various types through stunted growth and birth defects to brain damage, miscarriages and other “physiological and pathological effects” [26-30]. Nigerians in their panic started “discovering” toxic waste dumps in every nook and corner of the country [31-35]. Ministers started making conflicting and contradictory remarks on the dangers of the waste mostly out of ignorance and the need to satisfy curious journalists. Hence on a particular day, the waste would be simply “toxic but not radioactive” and the next day, the waste would be “hazardous,” “toxic,” “radioactive” and “poisonous” [36]. To make matters even worse, the public started avoiding Koko town. Commercial vehicle drivers would accelerate on getting to the junction leading to Koko, and private car owners would hold their breath and wind up their window glasses. Traders stayed away from the community market and persons who had visited Koko were avoided like plague. The New Nigeria Bank Limited, the only bank in Koko, closed its offices, activities at the port came to a standstill and non indigenes deserted the town. A community leader summed up the feeling of fear, isolation, exploitation and uncertainty thus:

It was simply unbelievable. Even my friends, those I have known for over thirty five years in nearby communities stopped coming to visit me. Once, I visited one of them, he did not allow me into his living room. To get me away from his house, he said he was going fishing. It was embarrassing. Except for journalists and the foreigners, people treated us like lepers. Even the journalists and government officials, one dared not offer the traditional kola or a cup of water. Their usual reaction was like you were trying to poison them. We felt betrayed and isolated. It almost became a thing of shame to say you are a native of Koko [37].

The conditions above among others determined the reaction of the Koko community to the toxic waste dump. The community’s reaction was made more militant by statements from several public officials that the community was going to be evacuated and relocated on another site. What was more, in the very early period of the episode, government concern was not with evacuating the waste, decontaminating the town, providing basic amenities and reassuring the people. Rather, it was with playing politics, apprehending those who had collaborated with the expatriates who had since fled the country, regaining some lost credibility and making its presence felt with long-term promises which did not address the immediate needs of the people.

It was this realization of political opportunism and posturing that galvanized the chiefs, community leaders, women, youth associations and “special” interest groups to devise several strategies to:

1. give as much publicity to the toxic dump as possible in order to attract government attention;
2. incorporate other demands of the community into demands arising from the toxic waste episode;
3. hold public rallies and protest marches wherever possible especially if prominent political figures were visiting;
4. oppose all plans to move them from Koko as that would mean “evacuation to hell”;
5. insist on the immediate evacuation of the waste as the most urgent solution to the problem and;
6. use their chiefs, community organizations and spokespersons to demand free medical check-ups for every citizen of Koko.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND RESPONSE TO DEGRADATION

It was obvious to the Koko community right from the onset of the toxic dump episode that the only way to resist government manipulation and the diversion of attention away from the critical problems affecting their community was to organize and be united. The toxic waste episode was one such issue, which united the community more than any other issue before. This is not to say that there were no divisions and attempts by certain interest groups to capitalize on the issue to advance their personal interests within and outside the community. Yet, the community was able to resist being evacuated and to get the government to evacuate the toxic waste and to provide medical check-ups for all in the town.

It is important however, to note that the majority of the residents if not every one in the community had no knowledge of toxic wastes. They readily admit that they could not distinguish between what was toxic and what was not except by its effect. Environmental issues beyond the pollution of land and marine life by oil prospectors never occupied any critical place in community discourses or politics. Lucky Akaruese, a relative of Mr. Nana noted that “even those who are educated can easily be victims of accommodating toxic materials in their homes. After all, at the national level even the symbols of what is radioactive and what is not are unknown to the vast majority of Nigerians” [38]. Akaruese’s position is supported by Abideen Igbehin when he notes that the “ugly Koko toxic waste affair that rocked the country three years ago could have been avoided if security officials at the port had knowledge of international signs used in identifying such lethal materials. All the nearly 2,000 drums of toxic waste that were dumped in Koko by Italians in 1987 and 1988 bore the appropriate coded warnings, but the ignorant officials could not decipher them” [39]. Ignorance only explains part of the affair. The real problem was corruption, inefficiency, the abuse of power by prominent military and public officials and the wealthy and the vulnerability of the poor. One can therefore understand that the villagers were as stunned as the nation when they

discovered that they had been living with thousands of tons of toxic materials for almost two years.

A typical example of how the episode increased community politicization which broadened the demands of the community for basic needs is reflected in the opposition to government plans to evacuate the community to an unknown location. When the news spread across the community, "there was instant opposition to it from both the old and the young." It was incredible that "in spite of the toxic waste dump and all the exaggerations and public education as to the implications of the dump, that without exception Koko people insisted that they would move no where" [40]. Meetings were held at various levels and the chiefs were given the final power to take a decision and speak for the community. On June 18, 1988 following a mass meeting of the community ten chiefs led by Kaka Okotie issued a statement in which the community opposed the idea of relocation arguing that they were unprepared to experience "the horrors of evacuation and refugee status" [41]. They stressed the fact that their present predicaments were appalling enough and they should be spared the agonies of abandoning their homeland, their sacred places and an environment to which they were accustomed. They called on the Federal Government to,

1. allay the fears and anxiety of the people occasioned by news report of government intention to evacuate the inhabitants of Koko which has compounded the psychological problems now being experienced by Koko people;
2. "remove without further delay the entire toxic waste in order to minimize the danger of continued exposure to the toxic radiation";
3. ensure "general screening of all inhabitants of Koko to identify the afflicted persons (if any)" and;
4. carry out an expansion of the state hospital at Koko in both facility and personnel to cater for the treatment of victims of radiation.

As one of the chiefs noted, "the stubbornness with which we voiced our opposition to the plan to move us left no one in doubt that we would rather die than leave Koko and become strangers in another land" [42]. Even Mr. Sunday Nana in whose compound the waste was dumped, vehemently opposed the idea of being relocated. It was at this point that the issue of compensation was introduced by prominent members of the community. They insisted that the Port belonged to the Federal Government. It was the duty of the Government to employ capable officials to inspect all imports. The toxic waste was inspected and cleared by the representatives of the government. Now that it has been declared very dangerous, the government should compensate every Koko indigene financially. The government tried to downplay this demand and though compensation was never paid, it remains a thorny issue in the community to this day.

It is interesting to note the extent to which an unfortunate development as the dumping of dangerous wastes can politicize an otherwise relatively apolitical

community. Residents easily tell you that the episode was like “going to school.” For the first time they say hundreds of journalists, expatriates, government vehicles, scientists, scientific equipments, political figures and national discussions revolved around Koko [43]. In sum, the Chief was stressing the exposure the community received as a result of the episode as a blessing. He also noted that the episode taught them a lesson; to always struggle for their rights. Thus, in order to press their demands several popular groups emerged within Koko and at the national level dedicated to public education and to raising environmental consciousness. As we shall show later these groups simply disintegrated with the evacuation of the waste as people redirected their attention once more to coping with the pains and costs of structural adjustment. However, between June and December 1988 two major groups: Koko Defence Group (KDG) and People United to Save Koko (PUSK) were created. At the national level the Nigerian Environmental Defence Unit and the Nigerian Citizens for Action Against the Dumping of Nuclear and Toxic Waste in Nigeria and other African Countries (CNCATW) were launched [44, 45]. As well, Koko Womens’ Progressive Association and the Market Women Association held several meetings to discuss matters relating to the episode. The 500 member strong dockworkers union was to play a very prominent part in the community’s struggle as it was its members who off-loaded the waste at a time when they were completely ignorant as to the content of the drums. At Iwere Grammar School, some students came together to form the Koko Youths Environmental Group (KYEG) under the leadership of one Thomas Oritshe. It is unfortunate that this group, like most of the others, kept no minutes and has been unable to keep functioning. According to Oritshe, “we decided to organize because of the toxic waste. After the thing died down, many of the members refused to attend further meetings. We could not get other senior adults interested in our plans. So we just let the group die like that” [46]. At the level of influencing policy positions adopted by the community, these organizations played their respective roles of public education, mobilization, collection and collation of information, information dissemination, assisting the experts with interpretation and movement of equipment and in reassuring the community generally that the problem was not without solution.

The case of the dockworkers was in some respects peculiar. The Union Chairman, Silver Ajaino complained bitterly as to how the government delayed in extending medical check-ups to its members even after this had been provided for all others in the community. He expressed the fears of his union’s members when he noted that “We (dockworkers) are the people who received (off-loaded) the waste. We are afraid of our lives. We don’t know where we are now. . . . We have no medical attention. . . . When we worked on these chemical ships, there were no materials for work; things like hand gloves, safety shoes and masks. There was nothing at all. So as dockworkers, we were working these ships with bare body. We didn’t even know it was poisonous” [47]. Union members interviewed, in spite of the check-ups they received later, still express a lot of doubts as to the

future of their health. They all believe that their exposure to the waste during and after off-loading and during evacuation will eventually kill them [48].

Dockworkers had cause to protest several times during the episode: over poor working facilities, over poor pay, over lack of medical check-ups, and over the non payment of allowances even after they had helped with the evacuation of the waste. They also assisted the organizations mentioned earlier with information on the ships that brought the wastes, the names of officials on duty at that time and the need to hold regular meetings to review developments as well as plan new strategies.

STATE RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

The response of the Nigerian state, its agents and agencies reflected clearly that of a government that lacked any form of coherent environmental policy. Unfortunately, rather than admit its limitations and immediately launch a program for environmental control and monitoring, the Nigerian government initially decided to play politics with the Koko issue. First, as soon as the news on the dump was published, government agents detained the journalists and editors responsible for the stories. Then, embarrassed by the development the government became defensive and moved to "discourage further reports on it" [49]. On June 10, 1988, the owner of the property where the waste was dumped was "picked up at his residence adjoining the waste dump site" by plain clothes security men [50]. As government officials became better educated on the problem and as they realized that the scandal could not be suppressed and that detention of persons was not a solution, more direct and better thought out policies were introduced:

1. The government recalled its ambassador to Rome and sent the Italian Envoy to Nigeria home with a protest letter [51];
2. A special military tribunal, The Miscellaneous Offences Tribunal, Lagos Zone was designated to try all those involved in the scandal and several arrests were made of customs officials, clearing agents and businessmen including a woman [52];
3. Crop harvesting was stopped in Koko and the house of Mr. Sunday Nana was compulsorily acquired by the Federal Government. The Minister for Works and Housing announced that the house would become a research station and that the government planned to construct another three-bedroom house for Mr. Nana [53];
4. A quick decision was reached by government, along the lines advocated by the residents of Koko to evacuate the waste and return it to Italy. Following this decision an Italian ship *MV Piave* was detained on the orders of the government and placed on a "standby to transport the controversial toxic wastes . . . to its country of origin" [54, 55]. Following the detention of the

ship, the government issued a press statement where it stated that “the federal government views with serious concern the recent criminal and illegal importation of dangerous industrial wastes as a calculated and organized conspiracy to embarrass and impede the campaign for safe African environment” [56];

5. In addition to the above, a Technical Committee of Experts was set up to evaluate the extent of damage and make appropriate recommendations; assistance from developed countries and international agencies was solicited in a bid to determine, reduce or contain the contamination; and rapid work on a law on toxic waste was commenced [57-59]; and
6. the government continued its campaign at the levels of the UN and OAU to prevent the dumping of toxic wastes on African soil [60-63].

While the steps taken by government above, taken together, appear comprehensive and far-reaching they were hardly enough to galvanize Nigerians into taking environmental issues seriously. The government did not try in any serious way to capitalize on the opportunity to educate Nigerians about the dangers and implications of environmental degradation and it did very little to set up structures and institutions that will promote debates and increase environmental consciousness in the country. Rather, government officials went about threatening the culprits with death. Chief Duro Onabule, Chief Press Secretary to the President was quoted as saying (without any legal backing) that “We will rather do away with 20 stupid Nigerians than allow them to endanger the lives of millions of Nigerians and fellow Africans in neighboring states” [64, 65]. Though the government was later to set up a federal environmental agency as well as promulgate a decree on toxic wastes, developments since the episode shows very clearly that the government failed woefully in terms of demonstrating to Nigerians the urgent need for environmental conservation and protection.

If the government failed at a national level, it failed even more at the local level—Koko. There was hardly any seriousness at mobilizing the people and educating them on environmental issues. There were no attempts at extending such public education and mobilization to other port towns and cities. As soon as the waste was evacuated and returned to Italy, the journalists left and so did the expatriates and public officials. Except for the occasional return of post-evacuation monitoring groups, no public education on the environment is going on in the country in any coherent, consistent and serious sense [66].

CONCLUSIONS

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from our discussion thus far. The Nigerian state is yet to fully appreciate the dangers inherent in uncontrolled exploitation of the environment. There are public officials who even argue that since Nigeria is not “a developed country with sophisticated industry and since

she is not a nuclear power, we don't have any problem with the environment" [67]. Such wrong impressions are equally widely held by the majority of Nigerians: ". . . how can such minor acts like bush burning, excreting in the waters, throwing garbage into rivers etc cause environmental degradation?" a Koko farmer asked [68].

True, the government promulgated the Harmful Wastes (Special Criminal Provisions, etc.) Decree No. 42 of 30th November, 1988 as a direct response to the toxic waste episode. The decree prohibits and declares as unlawful activities relating to the purchase, sale, importation, transit, transportation, deposit and storage of harmful wastes, notwithstanding the provisions of the Customs and Excise Tariff (Consolidation) Decree of 1988 or any other enactment or law. According to Decree No. 42, any individual who without lawful authority carried, deposited or dumped or is in possession for the purpose of carrying, depositing or dumping any harmful waste on any land or in any territorial waters, contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone of Nigeria or its inland waterway shall be guilty of a crime. Such a person if found guilty shall be *sentenced to imprisonment for life*. In addition to such punishment, any carrier, including aircraft, vehicle, container and any other thing used in the transportation or importation of the harmful waste and any land on which the harmful waste was deposited or dumped shall be forfeited to the Federal Government. From the above, it is clear that the government was taking no chances or leaving any loopholes. Unfortunately, the Decree means very little if it is not backed up with public education on the environment, encouragement to popular groups and other associations to organize around environmental issues or to incorporate such issues into their usual programs. As well, the Decree will mean little if the underlying conditions which promote general disrespect for rules and regulations, which promote greed and corruption and which militate against accountability are not addressed. In spite of similar draconic decrees against oil workers and others employed in the so-called essential services, the workers in these sectors still go on strike [69, 70].

In spite of decrees stipulating various harsh punishment including the death penalty (at various times) against foreign exchange trafficking, arson, armed robbery and drug trafficking, these activities have continued to boom in Nigeria. The point therefore is that in a country like Nigeria where the rich and powerful can get away with anything, where money can buy anything, where justice can easily be manipulated by the rich, where top military officers are practically above the law and where the state commands little legitimacy, the mere existence of a decree makes very little meaning. The fact that the government has anchored its response to the waste dump on the decree and the creation of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) through Decree No. 58 of 30th December, 1988 shows very clearly that the response is not fundamental enough and that it is in large measure cosmetic.

The FEPA was created out of the defunct Environmental Planning and Protection Division of the Ministry of Works and Housing. Responsible to the Minister

of Works and Housing, the new agency has the status of a parastatal. The enabling decree spelt out its responsibilities as including,

1. the establishment of Federal water quality standards and effluent limitations;
2. air quality and atmospheric protection;
3. ozone layer protection;
4. control of the discharge of hazardous substances, and;
5. enforcement process, including power to search, seize and arrest as well as procedures in respect of suits against the Agency.

Though Dr. Evans Aina, the Director-General of FEPA has a reputation for efficiency and commitment to the environment, like all typical parastatals in neo-colonial Nigeria, the Agency will be operating under severe social, administrative, political and financial constraints. As well, that it is responsible to the Minister, shows very clearly the depth of seriousness to which the government is taking the issue of the environment especially when other agencies with less important programs are responsible to the Presidency. As well, we do not see, clearly stipulated, provisions for the Agency to pursue public education and environmental consciousness campaigns in such a way as to move it to the top of the national agenda. More importantly, it was difficult to find any person at Koko who has seen a copy of the enabling decree, who was aware of the functions of FEPA, who had an idea on how to get in touch with the organization and who believed that the existence of FEPA could prevent the dumping of toxic wastes in Koko the very next day.

More importantly, Decree No. 58 of 1988 spells out very mild sanctions for contravening the Decree and subverting the policies and programs of the Agency. For instance, any person who “knowingly or recklessly makes any statement in purported compliance with a requirement to furnish information which is false in material particular” according to Section 34 (1) of the Decree “commits an offence and shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding N200 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 1 year . . .” The fine of N200 (less than \$10) means little to people involved in the toxic business. Section 35 which prescribes a fine of N20,000 or a two-year jail term for any contravention of provisions of the decree is equally mild just like the N500,000 fine prescribed for “a body corporate or . . . a member of a partnership or other firm or business . . .” These all go to show that it is wrong to anchor the issue of environmental protection and awareness on decrees and government institutions alone without corresponding policies to encourage and enable the people incorporate such campaigns in their regular day-to-day activities.

For the people of Koko, they have not been able to sustain the organizations and interest groups which emerged with the toxic dump episode. Obviously, the depth of poverty in the community especially with the pains of structural adjustment sinking in, has diverted attention from the dump to other matters of survival. As

Lucky Akaruese put it, “it has happened and it is over. The people are glad to have their lives and their community back. They are glad that they were not evacuated. They are even grateful for some of the “benefits” of the incident. But it is no longer an issue for discussion. The waste has been returned to its owners” [71]. In any case, Akaruese continued, “many of the young people who were active here during the crisis have gone to other cities, especially Benin-City and Lagos as well as Warri in search of jobs and other opportunities” [71]. To be sure, most of the villagers are often willing to discuss the episode. Such discussions, however, unfortunately, often revolves around the role of the expatriates, their sophisticated equipments, the visits of the ministers and military governor of the state and the money some of them made from various activities including helping to reload the waste for shipment to Italy.

At Iwere Grammar School, the sort of consciousness and concern which had been generated during the episode have quietened down or simply evaporated. Staff members do not see a reason why such debates should continue when the waste has been removed and the owner of the dump site has died. As one of the teachers put it, “what is there to talk about. We are dying of poverty. Our salaries cannot even carry us for two weeks. At times we are paid very late and you are talking about environmental consciousness. Go to the school library and see how many new books came in there in the past five years. Go and see for yourself how many books on this environmental consciousness thing you can find there. Many students have dropped out of school because their parents cannot pay their fees. The government does not care and so, we too, do not care” [72]. Such feelings of frustration was echoed by virtually all staff members interviewed. Even those responsible for teaching the sciences and social studies expressed similar frustrations and non-challant attitude to environmental issues. As one of them noted, “. . . it is not that we do not *mention* environment issues in our classes. It is just that we do not take it as any special issue. We teach what we are directed to teach and the environment, at the level you are asking, is not one of them. I do not want to lose my job for causing *wahala* (sic. trouble). We need materials, information, resources and directives before we can do such things” [73]. As to why they do not pay attention to environmental campaign as a voluntary activity such as through social clubs, most of the staff members simply laughed at the idea. A typical response was:

Once I leave this school after closing, I refuse to spend one second of my time for any other cause that will not help my immediate survival. I go to my farm or go fishing. I do not have time to waste. In any case, what power can we have? We can even be arrested or killed for making too much noise about importation of toxic waste. You are a Nigerian. Tell me, who imported the toxic waste that was dumped in our community in 1987 and 1988? What happened to them? What happened to the two Italians? I have fees to pay, mouths to feed and countless problems to take care of. I have no time for such social activities [74].

Such positions only go to demonstrate the increasing frustration among the people, an increasing feeling of disillusionment, cynicism, and powerlessness in the face of repression, neglect and poverty. Yet, it demonstrates a poor understanding or appreciation of the strength of collective actions as well as to the methods for increasing the power, influence and effectiveness of popular organizations through networking and coordination.

The dockworkers who were deeply involved in the clearing of the waste are perhaps the only group that has continued to reflect on the episode with some degree of concern. Interestingly, the continuing interest in the issue arose from "the exposure to the waste when it first arrived at the port and their exposure to it during evacuation. Many of us workers still believe that we would eventually die from exposure to the waste just like Mr. Nana. We reject the government's report that he died of TB" [75]. The union took a strong stand during the toxic waste crisis organizing protest marches, holding press conferences and educating its members. Prior to the reloading of the waste, the union demanded "the immediate, comprehensive and free treatment of all dockworkers who off-loaded the toxic waste consignment after they were certified free of health hazards by health officials"; "the trial of all port health officers that certified the vessels safe for workers to work in"; "immediate medical check-up for all dockworkers at the Koko port . . ."; and "provision of protective materials of international standard for all dockworkers that would be engaged in reloading the waste." However as one of the union activists noted, "the government never takes issues affecting workers seriously. In my twelve years as a member of this union, I cannot remember an issue the government took seriously. Even when we make demands, they just brush them aside. But we have to keep struggling because we know that the rich and powerful will never give up anything without a fight" [76]. This respondent was correct. Two years after the workers had helped in reloading the waste they had not been paid their allowances. When the Director of FEPA visited Koko in January 1990, he was welcomed by placard carrying dockworkers demanding payment of their allowances and other entitlements which had at that time been paid to others who were involved in the exercise. However, it is easy to see that alertness to environmental issues is very high among the workers at the port. This is undoubtedly linked to their direct involvement in the loading and off-loading of ships. They have developed a natural "suspicion for all ships especially those coming from Italy." The union has also tried to educate its members on international codes and signs depicting toxic and hazardous materials.

It will however be incorrect to claim that these developments translate in any way to commitment to environmental protection. The workers who are suspicious of ships from Italy and other parts of the world are directly involved in other forms of environmental abuse. Environmental issues are not directly incorporated into any form of worker education programs. They do not have linkages with other popular groups that are concerned with environmental issues. The union has not

deliberately designed any comprehensive program of environmental awareness among its members. Even then, poverty, ignorance, and frustration have taken a toll on the political postures of the dockworkers which was so apparent during the episode,

Let us face reality. If a ship with toxic waste comes here right now, and I am well paid for it, I will off-load it. Do you know how much a chicken cost now? Do you know the price of frozen fish or a bag of garri? My landlord just doubled my rent and it has become hell for me to manage. I must tell you the truth, I even think of suicide at times. Yet, I earn more than most dockworkers here. When you preach this message of environment and so on, many of us cannot survive without doing exactly those things you preach against. In any case, what options do we have. The government has no concern for the poor. Inflation is killing all of us. Life is hard, very very hard [77].

The point being made above cannot be taken lightly, for, in contemporary Nigeria, the concern of the people for issues not directly related to survival from day to day, is very low. The relationship between poverty and environmental abuse is adequately captured by Ezenwa Ohaeto,

If the man (Sunday Nana) had known what the white man had deposited on his land, perhaps he would not have been willing to accept the paltry sum of money for the storage. I say, perhaps, because the times are hard. Few men would hesitate to sell even their blood to provide meals for their various families. . . . Perhaps the man had been pushed to the wall by the varied economic policies that have not revived the economy of Nigeria. . . . The various Nigerians who have destroyed the country's economy, making it impossible for people such as Nana to obtain honest employment are part of the problem of the country. A poor, starving man may not hesitate to enhance the rate at which the country could be destroyed if he feels that it would alleviate his sufferings [78].

In addition to the above, union officials complained that they were harassed by security agents during and since the episode. Most of the incidents of harassment are not sanctioned by the state. They are carried out by corrupt police and state security officers in search of "extra income" through the use of their powers to arrest and detain. They also capitalize on the ignorance of the people, the very exorbitant cost of justice and the apparent privatization of state power by the rich and powerful as well as by persons in uniform in contemporary Nigeria.

In any case, the national headquarters of the union has not mapped out any concrete response to the environmental question. In fact, many of the officials argue that it is not the business of dockworkers to talk of the environment, "our job is at the docks. We might be alert to the importation of dangerous materials into the country. But make no mistake, we are not policemen and we will not do the job of port police, the navy and others" [79]. Such views expose the limited consciousness and objectives of struggle pursued by union leaders who often fail to

see the relevance of environmental issues as going far beyond the specific concern of particular unions, departments or individuals [80-82].

The situation is not different among the youths and market women. The women appear generally relieved that the waste has been removed and the markets returned to normal. They even shower some praise on the government for "developing" their town. But they have no program whatsoever to guard against future incidents. What is striking though is that when educated as to what possible role they could play as mothers, members of the community and in their respective associations toward promoting community vigilance and consciousness about the environment, they agreed that such roles were important. As Mrs. Yellow Okotie put it, "You seen now, suppose you no tell us about wetin we fit do, we for no know. We need people wey go come educate us and let us know wetin we women fit do for our village" [83]. What such pleas for education and support indicate is that the people are not necessarily anti-environmental issues even if poverty and a feeling of alienation from the state and its policies continue to militate against their ability to organize and generate activities around environmental issues. Rather, what is evident is that public and popular education and mobilization is urgently required to encourage the people to appreciate the essence of such concerns.

The Chiefs on the other hand reflect a dual and paradoxical form of consciousness on environmental questions. On the one hand they maintain a tough stance on the issues of the environment: "It will never happen again. Our forefathers lived here and it is not under our rule or in our time that we will allow people to kill all Koko people" [84]. They are unanimous in their condemnation of the dumping and all agree on the need to alert the populace and in fact, all Nigerians to the dangers of environmental degradation. Yet, they are completely at a loss as to what they can do now that the government removed the waste, made good on some of its promises and life has returned to normal. Many claimed ignorance as to what exactly they could do and as one of them noted, "there is a limit to which you can flog a particular issue. We were all here during the crisis so what am I going to tell others? If strangers like you come here, yes, I can tell you stories. But for Koko people, who does not know what happened?" [85]. While such positions may be valid, it only reflects the complete absence of any clearly worked out program of public education which includes information not only about what happened or about toxic wastes alone but about other forms of environmental degradation—oil pollution, water pollution, indiscriminate dumping of refuse and human waste, uncontrolled tree felling, unregulated fishing, widespread bush burning, ignorant use of chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides, air pollution and so on. To be sure, many of the inhabitants of Koko including most of the Chiefs never gave any serious thoughts to environmental issues before the toxic waste was dumped in their community. Yet, the experience does not appear to have stimulated the sort of enthusiasm, concern and commitment to environmental issues. Of course, the chiefs readily admit that they need further education devoid of the emotions and politics of the dump episode and they show a clear appreciation of a

future with a badly abused environment especially if such abuse affected the main means of livelihood—the waters. But, this is not the immediate concern of the chiefs. Their immediate interest is in government provision of basic amenities and expansion of existing facilities in the community.

During the excavation, the government ensured that the road surface and sides from the dump site entrance to the port was scrapped. About 8,900 tons of contaminated soil, packed into 5,648 bags were removed from the dump site and the total area excavated was 8,007 metres [86]. In December 1988, representatives of the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing and the Italian Government began the decontamination of Koko to remove “the last traces of toxic waste” [87]; see also [88]. The decontamination exercise involved the excavation of 60cm depth of top soil from the dump site; refilling the excavated site with uncontaminated soil from approved pit; removing the surface layer of the road that leads to the port and covering it with asphalt; scrapping the Koko port area and covering it with asphalt; sinking bore holes in strategic location in the community to monitor the quality of ground water; planting fast growing plants especially cassava, corn and beans on the refilled areas to determine whether “any residue of the toxic waste” remained in the soil; taking “hard-dug soil sample” to test if the underground water had been contaminated; and monitoring the vegetation and animals in the community from time to time as part of a post-impact monitoring program [89]. In spite of this and other measures taken by FEPA since its creation, the community still feels neglected [90].

Today, Koko Port is open to traffic once again following recommendations from a five-man Ministerial Team led by the Director of FEPA which inspected the decontamination and rehabilitation of the community [91; see also 92]. However, Sunday Nana died on Saturday March 3, 1990 [93-96]. Though the government reported that his death was not connected with exposure to the toxic waste, it is impossible to find anyone in the community who believed the public version: “They just do not want us to panic. Government has lied to us before. We know that many of us will die eventually from this exposure to the waste” [97]. But the issues for the future go beyond the death of Sunday Nana and the distrust between the community and the government.

Organizations like the Nigerian Environmental Study Team (NEST) the only serious non-governmental environmental group in the country deserves all possible support and encouragement to expand its scope and activities and enrol more members. The government needs to map out a clear and comprehensive environmental campaign to be incorporated in school curricula and in the activities of its agencies. Such a campaign must draw on lessons of the Koko experience and on the developments in other parts of the world. There is an urgent need for international organizations with specialization in environmental issues to expand their activities to Nigeria, encourage the creation of chapters and directly invite activists and scholars to start chapters in the country. Such chapters must be supported with materials, equipment and financial resources to make them

independent and effective. Social groups, popular organizations, civil rights movements and community associations even religious organizations must begin to see the protection of the environment as intricately tied to the future of the country and its citizens. There is an urgent need for these interest groups to incorporate concern over and commitment to environmental issues into their activities. Beyond these prescriptions however, is the urgent need to address the deteriorating quality of life, spreading disillusionment and frustration among non-bourgeois forces, the increasing delegitimization of the state, political decay, uncertainty and instability and general social and psychological dislocation which combine with other contradictions to direct attention to atavistic behavior, promote withdrawal and cynicism and make the masses of the people indifferent to environmental issues and vulnerable to manipulation in ways which promote environmental degradation [98-104].

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