

Towards achieving the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals: The imperative of reforming water pollution control and waste management laws in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is among the group of developing countries that have adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) blueprint as a veritable vehicle for poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development. However, the pollution of its surface water from discharges from domestic, industrial and agricultural waste degrading the quality of fresh water available to human needs and poor environmental sanitation cast serious doubt on Nigeria's ability to meet the United Nations' (UN) MDGs as most of the citizen still obtain water for domestic use from natural sources. This paper examines the efficacy of the legal framework that protects water from pollution. It concludes these laws are inadequate to meet the contemporary challenges of managing water that is an essential component to meet the UN's MDG. Consequently, it suggests that further reforms are required to revise the legal framework to tackle these present challenges.

Keywords: Water; Pollution; Environmental; Sanitation; Nigeria; Law

1. Introduction

The UN Summit of 2000 that set the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015 remains the most influential of recent major target-setting events. The MDGs are a renewed commitment to overcome persistent poverty and address many of the most enduring failures of human development [1]. It consists of eight goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators. One of the

major targets towards achieving these MDGs includes the reduction of the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by half by 2015. Though water and sanitation is not the primary focus of the MDGs targets, it is inter-linked with practically all the MDGs and is thus all important. For instance, gender equality has been proven to be positively associated with better sustained and better used community water supplies and sanitation [2]. Also the incidence of water-related diseases is directly relevant for improvements in the health

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situation and has an impact on school attendance (reduced time and health constraints for attendance due to improved water supply and sanitation services). The provision of adequate water and sanitation services furthermore has positive impact on the general health and nutritional situation [3]. In essence accessibility to safe drinkable water and environmental sanitation is an important key towards achieving the MDGs. Nigeria has adopted the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs blueprint for economic growth, sustainable development and poverty eradication. However, the poor state of environmental sanitation in the country and the high rate of water pollution particularly surface water which is an important source of water for domestic use by most of the citizens, casts serious doubts on its ability to provide the required quality and quantity of water to meet human needs and ultimately, the MDGs [4]. Pollution for the purpose of this paper is defined as man made or man-aided alteration of chemical physical or biological quality of the environment to the extent that it is detrimental to that environment or beyond acceptable limits [5].

The paper analyzes the legal framework for the sanitation as well as the control and management of water pollution in Nigeria. It is divided into four sections including this introduction. The next section highlights the major causes of water pollution in Nigeria while the third section analyzes the legal framework regulating the control and management of water pollution. It is worthy to note early on that Nigeria has a myriad of laws that are relevant to the sustainable use and conservation of water resources in addition to private remedies in torts. This section highlights the shortcomings in the regulatory framework as discussed. The fourth section proffers suggestions and recommendations to improve the legal framework to facilitate the realisation of the target of provision of accessible water and sanitation in the MDGs.

2. Sources of water pollution in Nigeria

The sources of water pollution in Nigeria can be broadly categorized into three including municipal, industrial and agricultural sources. These are highlighted below.

2.1. Municipal water pollution

Municipal water pollution consists of wastewater from homes and commercial establishments. Municipal water pollution increased significantly from the 1970s due to the increased population and prosperity in the country as a result of oil-boom that improved consumption habit [6]. Unfortunately, these changes were not matched with adequate planning and measures to combat and counteract the natural effect of the tremendous domestic waste generated particularly in the cities and urban centres [7]. Disposing of domestic wastes including sewage, human and animal waste, biodegradable wastes like papers, polythene bags directly into drains, gutters, streams and rivers became the norm. Wastes from pit-latrines that remain a common feature of Nigerian towns and villages also contribute to pollution of water bodies. This has consequences which include scarcity of oxygen for aquatic animals and leads to their death and further pollution of the water [8]. Many water bodies that flow through many of Nigeria's cities and urban centres are polluted this way.

2.2. Industrial water pollution

Industrial by-products including chemical substances used in the manufacturing process are often discharged as untreated wastes and effluents directly into rivers, estuaries, lagoon or the sea. For instance, industrial wastes from the Lagos metropolis that are discharged daily into the lagoon through the streams feeding it have adversely affected marine life, navigation, and the aesthetic value of the city [9]. The affected rivers have become permanently bluish green in colour and are characterized by high levels of potential hydrogen (pH), sodium compounds and lead content. These and other related factors have made the water unsuitable for domestic and recreational uses [10].

2.3. Oil-induced pollution

Oil pollution is perhaps the most significant cause of water pollution in the Niger Delta region. The water bodies of the riverine Niger Delta region that hosts upstream activities is directly impacted by exploration and production activities. These include dumping of drill mud and oil soaked wastes, oil spillages and gas

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