

## EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENT DEGRADATION ON QUALITY OF LIFE

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### ***Abstract***

*The detrimental effects of environmental degradation on standards of living cannot be exaggerated. The connection between environmental decline, living standards and sustainability has emerged as a topical issue in international development debates especially in West Africa where ecological pressures and socio-economic weaknesses coincide. This paper fundamentally explores how environmental degradation affects quality of life and sustainability in West Africa emphasizing health, economic stability and ecological equilibrium. Human sustainability refers to the capacity to uphold or assist a process continuously and avert resource depletion. The trajectory of negative impact and adverse effects on quality of life have led to environmental degradation emerging as a vital global issue with extensive consequences for human welfare*

*and sustainable growth. The research employed a descriptive design and heavily relied on secondary data sources to illustrate how elements like air pollution, deforestation, biodiversity decline, and water contamination diminish living standards and jeopardize long-term sustainability. Findings indicated that environmental harm adversely impacts life satisfaction, heightens disease burden and hinders economic productivity especially among at risk groups. The research also shows that deforestation and pollution greatly lower quality of life whereas better environmental management boosts well-being and sustainability. The paper concluded that effective and sustainable environmental practices, robust governance and cohesive policy frameworks are crucial for enhancing quality of life and guaranteeing ecological sustainability. Recommendations with policy implications were made along with robust suggestions for direction of future research*

**Keywords;** *Environmental degradation, quality of life, sustainability, wellbeing.*

## **Introduction**

Environmental degradation in West Africa represents combination of damaged environment and socio-economic inequalities that impact quality of life in the region. The identified West African nations mostly

affected include Coastal West Africa comprising Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Togo besides the mining belts of Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Guinea and the Sahel region of **Nigeria**, Niger, Burkina Faso and Niger. Depletion of natural resources that include deforestation, land degradation, and coastal erosion driven by rapid urbanization, unsustainable agriculture, resource extraction and other human factors have contributed significantly to decline in quality of life and environmental decline globally. Quality of life (QoL) is a multidimensional concept that includes physical health, psychological well-being, economic stability, and social relationships. Increasingly, scholars argue that environmental conditions are fundamental determinants of quality of life, as access to clean air, water, and natural resources directly affecting human well-being Sustainability. In essence, sustainability are about preserving to meet needs of tomorrow. Essentially, environmental sustainability is a core pillar of sustainable development and emphasizes the protection of ecosystems and efficient use of resources. The relationship between environmental degradation, quality of life and sustainability has become a central issue in global development discourse, particularly in developing regions where environmental stress and socio-economic vulnerabilities intersect and more research is needed not only to deepen understanding of the dynamics but to elevate the knowledge to in-depth levels.

Unarguably, environmental degradation, resource scarcity and pollution are major drivers of unprecedented level of insecurity, conflicts, violence, and multifaceted displacements particularly in developing countries all with implications on quality of life. When the natural environment no longer has the capacity to longer support livelihoods that include farming and fishing, the populations become vulnerable leading to increased crime, social tension, and the rise of violent groups. The International Institute of Sustainable Development have pointed out the link between poor Environment and Insecurity as well as resource scarcity and conflict. The depletion of natural resources, such as the shrinking of Lake Chad, drives competition among communities for water, arable land, and fishing spots and the consequence is violent conflicts and clashes. An environmental; degradation such as oil spillage and pollution in the Niger Delta or desertification in the North Nigeria destroys traditional economic activities and force people, particularly youth into poverty, making them susceptible to criminality. On the other hand, ecological degradation, including floods and drought, causes mass displacement resulting in displaced populations (IDPs) often facing extreme poverty and lack of opportunities that exacerbate urban crime and violence. Pollution and environmental degradation, including urban waste and contamination, have been found to directly cause severe

health issues and decrease quality of life through increasing frustration and violence.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In recent decades, the relationship between quality of life and environmental degradation in the West African region has gained increasing prominence in academic and policy debates. Environmental degradation drastically lowers the quality of life in West Africa through severe public health crises, rampant food insecurity and massive economic losses. Air and water pollution cause millions of premature deaths, while land degradation and coastal erosion destroy livelihoods, displace communities, and stifle regional economic growth. It has become clear that human well-being cannot be adequately assessed using conventional economic indicators alone, such as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Instead, it is essential to incorporate substantive environmental dimensions—such as air quality, thermal regulation, biodiversity conservation, and secure access to water resources into the analysis. This integrative approach acknowledges that healthy ecosystems directly influence both mental and physical health. Despite growing awareness of environmental issues, environmental degradation continues to worsen globally with severe consequences for human well-being. Many communities, particularly in low-income and vulnerable regions, are

disproportionately affected by environmental decline. In Nigeria, issues such as deforestation, soil erosion, flooding, air and water pollution and desert encroachment have disrupted livelihoods and increased health risks. For instance, rural populations dependent on agriculture faces reduced productivity due to soil degradation, while urban residents suffer from poor air quality and inadequate waste disposal systems. Besides the growing literature, there remains a critical research gap on how environmental degradation affects quality of life across social and geographic contexts. There is a lack of integrative models that connect environmental conditions to both objective and subjective indicators of well-being,

The problem is further compounded by weak environmental policies, lack of enforcement, poverty, and limited public awareness. As a result, environmental degradation continues to undermine efforts to improve living standards and achieve sustainable development. There is therefore a critical need to examine the extent to which environmental degradation affects quality of life and to identify strategies that can mitigate its negative impacts. Habitat degradation and fragmentation not only may decrease food availability and restrict the movement of humans and animals within the region. Thus, understanding this relationship is essential for policymakers, researchers, and development

practitioners seeking to promote sustainable human development.

Despite global efforts to promote sustainable development, environmental degradation continues to intensify and elevate to astonishing levels posing serious threats to quality of life and long-term sustainability. Air pollution, deforestation, water scarcity, and climate change have significantly reduced access to essential resources required for healthy living. Empirical evidence shows that environmental degradation has a direct negative impact on life satisfaction and well-being, particularly in developing countries and marginalized communities. In Africa, for example, environmental degradation has been linked to declining quality of life due to its effects on agriculture, health, and economic productivity.

Furthermore, environmental degradation undermines sustainability by depleting natural resources and disrupting ecological systems necessary for future survival. Rapid urbanization and weak environmental governance exacerbate these challenges, leading to increased pollution, poor sanitation, and loss of biodiversity. Despite the growing body of research, there remains a gap in understanding the integrated relationship between environmental degradation, quality of life, and sustainability. While attention is frequently given to the economic and social effects such as

malnutrition and disease outbreaks, the impact on overall quality of life have not received adequate attention. Many policies address these issues separately rather than holistically, resulting in ineffective interventions. Thus, there is a critical need to examine how environmental degradation affects both present well-being and future sustainability and to develop integrated strategies that address these interconnected challenges bringing to the fore behavioral components of environmental degradation.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following are the objectives of the present study

1. To examine the causes of environmental degradation
2. To assess the impact of environmental degradation on quality of life.
3. To evaluate the implications of environmental degradation for sustainability.
4. To identify vulnerable populations affected by environmental degradation.
5. To propose strategies for promoting environmental sustainability and improving quality of life.

6. To contribute to body of knowledge and make recommendations that can shape the direction of future research

### **Significance of Study**

The study is significant in various ways namely by deepening understanding and exposing the dynamics of environmental degradation and impact on quality of life and contributing to body of knowledge in environmental degradation and quality of life an area that has received little attention and by enhancing the understanding of environmental conditions that impact quality of life as well as providing theoretical and policy-relevant contributions to the emerging field of environmental justice and sustainable development. The paper, informs sustainable resource management policy and shapes climate justice initiatives and constitute a strategic evidence-based tool in the hands of environmental and economic planners. with aim to protect the environmental ecosystems and promote quality of life and sustainability. The paper provides significant insight into the overall impact and dynamics of environmental degradation on human wellbeing and sustainable development by exposing behavioral contexts and gaps in knowledge and practice.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study is limited to understanding the effect of environmental degradation on quality of life and sustainability in West Africa region with focus on identifying types of environmental degradation and what constitutes quality of life and sustainability

## **Conceptual Framework**

In order to understand the complex relationship between environmental degradation and quality of life, studies have postulated that it is necessary to draw upon interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives that transcend purely economic interpretations of well-being and quality of life which is extrapolated to analyzing environmental issues in quality of life. Typically, environmental degradation includes pollution, deforestation, desertification, biodiversity loss, and climate change. These processes disrupt ecosystems and reduce the availability of natural resources. A conceptual framework linking environmental degradation to quality of life (QoL) generally integrates ecosystem health with human well-being, exploring how pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change diminish physical, mental, and economic conditions. Common frameworks utilize the capabilities approach (impact on life choices) and human needs theory impact on subsistence/health to measure

degradation's effect on human prosperity, as highlighted in studies on the following. Environmental degradation is thus not merely an ecological issue but a multidimensional crisis that affects health, economic stability, and social justice.

### **Quality of Life**

Quality of life encompasses physical health, mental well-being, income, housing, and social relationships. Environmental quality plays a significant role in determining these factors. It denotes the extent to which an individual or community is satisfied with aspects of life.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability involves maintaining ecological balance while promoting economic development and social equity. Environmental sustainability is essential for long-term human survival.

The key components of the framework are summarized as follows

- **The Degradation–Poverty linkage:** This explains how environmental damage exacerbates poverty, which in turn leads to further exploitation of natural resources resource.

- **Impact on Health and Well-being:** Environmental degradation, particularly from pollution, directly decreases longevity and increases mortality.
- **Ecological Impact:** Using environmental impact assessments to link consumption directly to environmental degradation and QoL
- **Integrated Assessment approach:** Combining qualitative (perceived) and quantitative (measured) data on both environment and quality of life, as explored by the
- **Policy Focused Models:** Focus on "pay as you pollute" initiatives, environmental management, and sustainable development goals (SDGs) to reverse degradation.
- **Human Factors:** Conceptualizing the relationship as a bi-directional cycle, where human activity causes degradation, which in turn modifies human behavior and population structure

## **Review of Related Literature**

Globally, Quality of life has constantly been threatened by environmental degradation. Numerous reports warn that environmental degradation has intensified its impact on human well-being. According to WHO, air pollution indoor and outdoor causes over seven million premature

deaths annually, with particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) remain a major contributor to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Although Africa emits only 3% of global greenhouse gases, it faces disproportionate consequences such as extreme droughts, loss of arable land, and increasing food insecurity all leading to decreased quality of life. These inequalities are further exacerbated by geopolitical asymmetries and institutional weaknesses in the most vulnerable regions. Numerous studies have explored the link between environmental degradation, quality of life, and sustainability. A study of twenty-four countries found that deforestation and air pollution significantly reduce quality of life, while improved sanitation enhances well-being. MDPI Research in Africa shows that environmental degradation has severe negative effects on quality of life, particularly due to climate-related impacts on agriculture and livelihoods. Studies on life satisfaction reveal a consistent negative relationship between environmental degradation and human well-being. Urban research on its part highlights that water pollution and environmental stress significantly reduce perceived quality of life in cities. Sustainability research indicates that improvements in environmental performance and ecological management contribute positively to quality-of-life outcomes. These studies demonstrate that environmental degradation has both direct and indirect effects on human well-being and sustainability. Several

studies have established a connection between climate change and mental health. According to the World Bank (1992), environmental degradation includes deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss. Environmental degradation is often caused by human activities such as industrialization, mining, urbanization, and unsustainable agricultural practices. The World Health Organization (2018) identified climate change as a major threat to mental well-being, linking it to stress, trauma, and depression. Berry et al. (2010) introduced the concept of “eco-anxiety,” describing chronic fear of environmental doom. Clayton et al. (2017) emphasized that climate change affects mental health through acute events such as disasters and long-term environmental changes. Johnson et al. (1997) described environmental degradation as the reduction in the capacity of the environment to meet social and ecological objectives. Similarly, Mohammed et al. (2021) defined environmental degradation as the depreciation in the quantity and quality of environmental resources such as land, air, water, flora, and fauna. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2021) reported that climate-related risks include psychological distress and social conflict. Cunsolo & Ellis (2018) highlighted the emotional impact of environmental loss, particularly among indigenous and rural populations. These studies demonstrate that climate change has both immediate and

long-term psychological and quality of life consequences.

### **Methodology**

This study is a descriptive in nature relying primarily secondary data sources. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journals, international organization reports and environmental studies. A qualitative analytical approach was used to examine relationships between environmental degradation, quality of life and sustainability. The study synthesizes findings from multiple contexts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

### **Results and Findings**

The study suggests that progress in quality of life is certainly accompanied by degree of environmental improvements an indication that the environment is equally a predictor of quality of life. The findings highlight the urgent need to incorporate sustainability criteria into well-being policies. Findings from reviewed literature revealed a direct health impact i.e. Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, grief, emotional stress and depression occurred following natural disasters and climate related uncertainty. The Indirect Mental Health impact includes mental stress, degree of anxiety and psychological distress which are consequences of food insecurity and economic hardship.

There is abundance of research evidence that Air pollution which is harmful to humans contributes to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and this has negative impact on quality of life. Evidence from reviewed literature indicate that access to sanitation services has a positive and highly significant effect on quality of life. Environmental stress increases health issues and reduced agricultural productivity due to soil degradation and Loss of livelihoods in farming and fishing communities also Increased health healthcare costs that eventually affects quality of life and sustainability. In terms of social impact on quality-of-life issues such as migration due to environmental stress and erosion leads to loss of livelihoods in farming and agricultural productivity all which have negative impact on quality of life and sustainability. The undeniable fact is that the sustainability impact arises from the depletion of natural resources, Loss of biodiversity and reduced capacity for future development disrupts ecological systems necessary for sustainable development, making it difficult to achieve long-term economic and social goals The findings further revealed that improving environmental quality is essential for enhancing human well-being improving quality of life and achieving sustainable development. In all, there is strong evidence that degraded environments and exploitation cause loss of biodiversity, contamination of water sources and poor living conditions in urban areas significantly reduce life

satisfaction. These results align with proven theories which emphasize the critical role of preserved natural environments for maintaining public health and quality of life.

## **Discussion**

The primary purpose of study is to examine the impact of environmental degradation quality of life and sustainability. Result has clearly established a clear relationship between key environmental variables and quality of life globally consistent with previous studies. Environmental degradation is significantly associated with a decline in well-being and quality of life which aligns with the findings of most studies Likewise, recent research indicates that the loss of vegetation cover affects biodiversity, microclimate, and equitable access to green spaces, especially in vulnerable regions. This effect is more severe in communities with a high dependence on ecosystem services, as observed in contexts of artisanal mining or accelerated deforestation. In contrast, access to sound environmental practices and basic sanitation services shows a strong positive relationship with quality of life. It has also been pointed out that effective environmental management, such as improved sanitation and reduced pollution are crucial for improving life expectancy and well-being, especially in developing nations. The present study seeks to analyze the relationship between environmental degradation and

quality of life globally. The aim is to identify the mechanisms through which environmental factors such as biodiversity loss, air pollution, and water insecurity impact human well-being, particularly in contexts marked by structural vulnerability contribute to reduction in quality of life.

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals the need for adopting a multidimensional and context-based approach when analyzing the relationship between environmental conditions and quality of life. The fact is Environmental degradation poses a serious threat to both quality of life and human sustainability. The impact of environmental degradation is widespread and extensive affecting health, economic stability, and social well-being. The findings from reviewed literature study emphasized that improving environmental quality is essential for enhancing human well-being and achieving sustainable development. Research concluded that science environmental degradation poses a serious threat to both quality of life and sustainability, an urgent action is necessary to halt continued degradation of the environment otherwise community, national and global effort towards quality-of-life improvement will be undermined. It is important to reiterate that the impacts

of degradation are widespread with adverse consequences on health, economic activities and social well-being. The study concludes that improving environmental quality is essential for enhancing human well-being and achieving sustainable development. There is a clear understanding from findings that without urgent action, environmental degradation will continue to affect quality of life and undermine sustainability.

## **Recommendations**

The study made the following recommendations

In view of the importance of life satisfaction and quality of life, there is need to promote community-based support systems and resilience programs to improve quality of life and sustainability. It is equally important to encourage and expand interdisciplinary research on quality of life. It is as well recommended that there is need for behavioral and attitudinal changes towards environment on the part of communities in the region. The study further recommended strengthening habitat planning, environmental policies and enforcement mechanisms, promoting sustainable agriculture and resource management, massive investments in renewable energy and clean technologies

besides improving waste management and sanitation systems. The study also recommended increased public awareness integrating environmental sustainability into development planning and introducing environmental education as a compulsory discipline in schools and further highlighted the need to support environmental research and data collection efforts on environment impacts. In all, the study emphasized that improving environmental quality is essential to improving long-term life satisfaction and wellbeing of people. It is also recommended that all countries in the region comply with 2015 Paris agreement a legally binding successor to Kyoto protocol calling for reduction in emissions to improve quality of life and sustainability

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