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Environmental Policy

Paul A. Adekunte[1], Matthew N. O. Sadiku[2], Janet O. Sadiku[3]

[1]International Institute of Professional Security, Lagos, Nigeria
[2]Roy G. Perry College of Engineering, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX, USA
[3]Juliana King University, Houston, TX, USA

ABSTRACT

Environmental policy refers to the strategies, laws, and institutional frameworks designed to regulate human activities that impact the natural environment. It addresses key issues such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion through regulatory measures, market-based instruments, and voluntary initiatives. It is guided by principles such as sustainable development, the precautionary principles, and the polluter pays principle. Environmental policy operates at international, national, and local levels. Global agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, and the Convention on Biological Diversity are demonstrations of coordinated international efforts to address environmental challenges. Despite progress, effective implementation remains constrained by political, economic, and institutional challenges. Therefore, strengthened governance, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based decision-making are crucial to achieving long-term environmental sustainability and resilience. This paper focuses on the benefits and challenges of environmental policy to humanity.

KEYWORDS: *Environmental policy, climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, ecosystem degradation, polluter pays principle, precautionary principle, sustainable development goals.*

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental policy is the body or set of rules, principles, and measures that are adopted by governments, organizations, corporations, and international bodies to manage human impacts on the environment and protect the ecosystems, human health, and natural resources for present and future generations. It also as well aims to prevent, reduce, or mitigate harmful effects from activities such as pollution, conserve biodiversity, land conversion, and resource depletion [1, 2]. It emerged as a distinct field in the mid-20th century in response to increasing industrialization, pollution, biodiversity loss, and the growing concern of public awareness of environmental degradation. It spans multiple issue areas, including: air and water pollution control, climate change mitigation and adaptation, waste management, biodiversity conservation, safeguarding wildlife and endangered species, land and resource management [3].

The implementation of an eco-energy-oriented policy at a global level is to address the issue of climate change [4]. Policies concerning energy or regulation of toxic substances including pesticides and many types of industrial waste are part of the topic of environmental policy, as shown in Figure 1. This policy can be deliberately taken to influence human activities and thereby prevent undesirable effects on the biophysical environment and natural resources, as well as to make sure that changes in the environment do not have unacceptable effects on humans [5]. Some notable environmental policies and agreements include: the Paris Agreement, EU Emissions Trading System (EUETS), and High Seas Treaty.

Environmental policy is made up of two major terms: (i) environment, and (ii) policy. The environment refers to the physical ecosystems, but it could also take into consideration the social dimension (quality of life, health) and an economic dimension (resource management, biodiversity) [6]. Policy is defined as a

"course of action or principle adopted or proposed by a government, party, business or individual," [7]. The focus of environmental policy is on the problems emanating from human impact on the environment, which is important to human society by having (a negative) impact on human values. Such human values are often labeled as health or the "clean and green" environment. In practice, policy analysts provide a wide variety of types of information to the public decision-making process [8].

HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

1. Early Foundations (Pre-20th Century)

Environmental policy did not begin as "environmentalism," but it started as public health, conservation, and resource management.

19th Century Public Health Laws

- Industrial cities in Europe and North America faced pollution crises.
- The UK's **Public Health Act of 1848** addressed sanitation and water contamination.
- In the U. S., urban sanitation reforms followed similar patterns.

Conservation Movement (Late 1800s-Early 1900s)

- This was driven by concerns over deforestation and wildlife depletion.
- In the U.S., President Theodore Roosevelt expanded national parks and forests.
- Establishment of the National Park Service in 1916 institutionalized conservation [9].

2. Post-World War II Environmental Awareness (1945-1960s)

Due to rapid industrialization, chemical production, and nuclear testing raised new concerns.

Ecological Science & Public Alarm

- The book *Silent Spring* published by Rachael Carson in 1962 exposed the dangers of pesticides like DDT.
- This book is widely credited with launching the modern environmental movement [10].

3. The Modern Environmental Policy Era (1970s)

The 1970s marked the formal birth of environmental policy as we recognize it today.

United States

- First Earth Day (1970).
- Creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- Passage of:
  Clean Air Act (1970)
  Clean Water act (1972)
  Endangered Species Act (1973)

International Milestone

- United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972).
- First major global environmental summit
- Establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) [11, 12].

4. Sustainable Development Era (1980s-1990s)

Environmental protection expanded beyond pollution control to environmental sustainability.

The Brundtland Report (1987)

- Published by the World Commission on Environment and Development.
- Introduced the concept of "sustainable development."
- Report titled *Our Common Future*.

Definition:
"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The Rio Earth Summit (1992)

- This was held in Rio de Janeiro.
- This summit produced:
  Agenda 21
  Convention on Biological Diversity
  UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) [13-15].

5. Climate Policy & Global Agreements (1997-2015)

During this period climate change became the central focus of environmental policy. Let's consider the:

Kyoto Protocol (1997)

- Legally binding emissions targets for developed countries.
- Adopted under the UNFCCC.

Paris Agreement (2015)

- Adopted at COP21 in Paris.
- Aim: To limit global warming to well below 2°C.
- Nearly universal participation [16, 17].

6. Contemporary Trends (2015-Present)

Modern environmental policy includes:

- Climate justice
- Biodiversity protection
- Circular economy models
- Carbon pricing systems
- ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) frameworks
- Net-zero pledges

Recent biodiversity focus is on:

- Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted in 2022 and sets out four long-term goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030,

focusing on conservation, sustainable use, and benefits-sharing.

Policy approaches increasing integrate:

- Economic instruments (carbon taxes, emissions trading)
- Corporate accountability
- Indigenous rights
- Global equity considerations [18-23].

BENEFITS OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Some of the major benefits of environmental policy include [24]:

1. The Protection of Natural Resources

Environmental policies help conserve forests, water, soil, and wildlife by regulating how these resources are used.

- It helps to prevent overexploitation of resources such as timber, minerals, and fisheries.
- It helps to support conservation programs and protected areas.

For example, the United Nations Environmental Programme promotes global policies for protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, as shown in Figure 2.

2. Reduction of Pollution

Environmental policies help regulate emissions and waste disposal to reduce pollution in air, water, and land.

- Limits industrial emissions and vehicle pollution
- Controls hazardous waste disposal
- Improves environmental monitoring systems

Many policies are influenced by global agreements such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change [25].

3. Protection of Public Health

Environmental policies reduce exposure to harmful pollutants that can cause diseases or health issues, as shown in Figure 3, such as:

- Asthma
- Cholera
- Lung cancer
- Waterborne diseases

Cleaner air and water improve sanitation and ensure safe drinking water to enhance overall quality of life [26].

4. Promotion of Sustainable Development

Environmental policies help to encourage development that meets present needs without harming future generations.

- Promotes renewable energy
- Encourages sustainable agriculture
- Supports green technology

This concept is known to align with the global goals of the United Nations under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [27], as shown Figure 4.

5. Economic Benefits

Environmental policy can create economic opportunities via:

- Promoting green jobs
- Encouraging eco-friendly innovation
- Reducing costs associated with environmental damage

For instance, renewable energy industries supported by environmental policies create employment opportunities [28].

6. Climate Change Mitigation

Environmental policies help reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and slow global warming. This supports global action on Climate Change and reduces risks such as [29]:

- Extreme weather events
- Rising sea levels
- Biodiversity loss

7. Conservation of Biodiversity

Environmental policies help protect plant and animal species and prevent extinction by establishing protected areas and wildlife conservation programs [30].

8. Improved Waste Management

Environmental policies promote recycling, waste reduction, and proper disposal of hazardous materials, thereby reducing environmental contamination and improving urban sanitation [31].

9. Environmental Awareness and Education

Environmental policies often support environmental education programs that increase public awareness about conservation and responsible environmental behavior [32].

10. International Environmental cooperation

Environmental policies do encourage countries to work together (collaborate) to address global environmental issues through agreements such as the Paris Agreement and others [33].

CHALLENGES FACING ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

The following are some of the challenges facing environmental policy:

1. **Economic Pressure and Cost of Implication**: Environmental regulations often require industries to invest in cleaner technologies, waste management systems, and pollution control measures. This is being resisted by many companies as they increase production costs and may reduce profits [34].
2. **Lack of Political will**: Governments may fail to implement or enforce environmental policies because of competing political interests,

corruption, or pressure from powerful industries [35].

3. **Weak Institutional Framework**: This is the lack of strong environmental institutions by many countries that are capable of monitoring, regulating, and enforcing environmental laws [36].
4. **Inadequate Funding**: Environmental protection programs most often require large financial investments for conservation, pollution control, and environmental monitoring. Hence, limited government budgets can hinder implementation [37].
5. **Low Public Awareness**: Citizens lack of knowledge about environmental problems or the importance of sustainability can lead to failure of environmental policies. In other words, limited understanding of environmental issues can hinder policy support [38].
6. **Conflict Between Economic Development and Environmental Protection**: The dependence by developing nations on natural resources like forests, minerals, and oil for economic growth, creates tension between development and conservation [39].
7. **Technological Limitations**: Many countries lack access to modern technologies that are required for renewable energy, waste recycling, and pollution control [40].
8. **Poor Enforcement and implementation of Environmental Laws**: Even when strong environmental laws exit, enforcement may be weak due to corruption, lack of trained personnel, or inadequate monitoring systems [41], as shown in Figure 5.
9. **Global Nature of Environmental Problems**: Issues such as climate change, ocean pollution, and biodiversity loss cross national boundaries, making them very difficult for individual countries to solve alone [42].
10. **Population Growth and Urbanization**: Rapid growth in population increases the pressure on natural resources, leading to deforestation, pollution, and increased waste generation [43].
11. **Global Coordination**: International cooperation is crucial but is often difficult [18, 44].

SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES FACING ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Some of the solutions to environmental policy problems or challenges include:

1. **Strengthening environmental regulations**: In this case, governments can reduce environmental damage by creating and enforcing stricter laws on pollution, waste disposal, and emissions. Policies like carbon emission limits, environmental impact assessment (EIA), and industrial waste regulations help protect ecosystems and public health. For example, the United Nations Environmental Programme promotes global environmental regulations and supports countries in developing environmental laws [45, 46].
2. **Promoting renewable energy**: Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power would significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) and environmental pollution. Global agreements like the Paris Agreement encourage countries to reduce carbon emissions and adopt clean energy technologies [29, 47].
3. **Environmental education and public awareness**: Educating of citizens about environmental protection will encourage sustainable behavior such as recycling, energy conservation, and responsible consumption. Programs supported by UNESCO promote environmental education globally [48, 49].
4. **Sustainable resource management**: Policies should promote the sustainable use of natural resources such as forests, water, and fisheries. Sustainable management prevents depletion and protects the ecosystems.

   Organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) support sustainable agriculture and forestry policies [50, 51].
5. **Economic instruments for environmental protection**: In this case, governments can make use of economic tools like carbon taxes, pollution fines, and green subsidies to encourage environmentally friendly practices. For example, the World Bank promotes carbon pricing systems to reduce emissions. **Carbon pricing** is a policy tool used by governments to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by putting a **financial cost on emitting carbon dioxide (CO_2) and other greenhouse gases (GHGs).** The types of carbon pricing include: carbon tax, and emissions trading system (Cap-and-Trade) [29, 52-55].
6. **International cooperation**: Environmental problems most often cross national borders, making international cooperation very essential. Therefore, global agreements and organizations help countries coordinate environmental policies.

For example, the United Nations coordinates global environmental initiatives [56, 57].

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

The role of AI in environmental policy is to help in improving data analysis, prediction, and policy implementation, as shown in Figure 6. Traditional environmental management methods struggle with complex datasets and uncertainty, while AI can process large amounts of environmental data quickly and accurately. AI key roles include [58-62]:

1. **Environmental monitoring and data collection**: AI analysis satellite imagery, sensors, and environmental datasets to detect changes in ecosystems.
   - It detects deforestation, pollution, and illegal mining.
   - Monitors air quality, ocean health, and wildlife populations.
   - It enables real-time environmental surveillance for regulators.
   - This improves early detection of environmental damage and supports faster policy responses.
2. **Climate change modeling and prediction**: In this case, AI enhances climate forecasting by processing massive climate datasets and identifying patterns faster than traditional models.
   - AI predicts extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and heat waves.
   - Improves climate risk assessment for policymakers.
   - It supports long-term climate adaptation strategies.

AI-driven forecasting systems can provide earlier warnings of disasters, helping governments plan mitigation strategies.

3. **Energy and resource management**: This is where AI contributes to sustainable energy policies by optimizing energy systems. Examples include:
   - Managing renewable energy grids (wind, solar).
   - Improving energy efficiency in buildings and transportation.
   - Reducing greenhouse gas emissions through smart infrastructure [63].

For example, AI can optimize heating, ventilation, and lighting in buildings, reducing energy consumption by 10-30%.

4. **Environmental law enforcement**: AI supports regulatory agencies by identifying environmental violations. Its applications include:
   - Monitoring illegal logging and fishing.
   - Detecting pollution from industries.
   - Tracking compliance with environmental regulations.

This helps to strengthen environmental governance and improves accountability.

5. **Sustainable agriculture and land use**: AI help policymakers design sustainable agricultural policies by analyzing soil, climate, and crop data. The benefits from this include:
   - Precision agriculture that reduces fertilizer and water use.
   - Predicting crop yields and climate impacts.
   - Supporting sustainable land management strategies.

CONCLUSION

An effective environmental policy will require a combination of strict regulations, renewable energy adoption, public education, sustainable resource management, economic incentives, and international cooperation. The legal aspect of environmental policy also plays a vital role in environmental protection by establishing laws, rights, and enforcement mechanisms. All of these can be achieved via national legislation and international agreements by which governments can regulate environmental activities, protect ecosystems, and thereby help address environmental challenges and promote sustainable development worldwide. In other words, smart environmental policy actions would involve: (i) subsidies for solar panels, (ii) electric vehicles incentives, (iii) urban tree planting, (iv) waste recycling, and (v) pollution monitoring using satellites and sensors. A smart environmental policy protects nature while allowing economic progress by using science, technology, and incentives instead of only strict bans. More information on Environmental Policy can be obtained in the books in [64-71] and the following related journals:

Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning
The Journal of Environment & Development
Marine Policy
Natural Resource Forum
Land Economics
Nature Reviews Earth & Environment
Environmental Science & Policy
Environmental Politics
Climate Policy
Sustainability
Environmental Policy and Governance
Journal of Environmental Economics and Management
Ecological Economics

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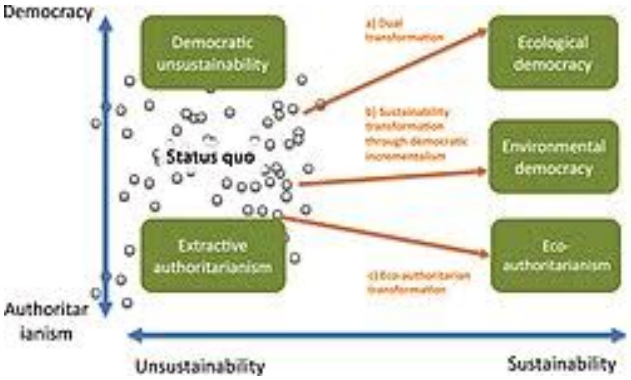

Figure 1. Environmental policy
Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_policy

Figure 2. Environmental protection
Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_protection

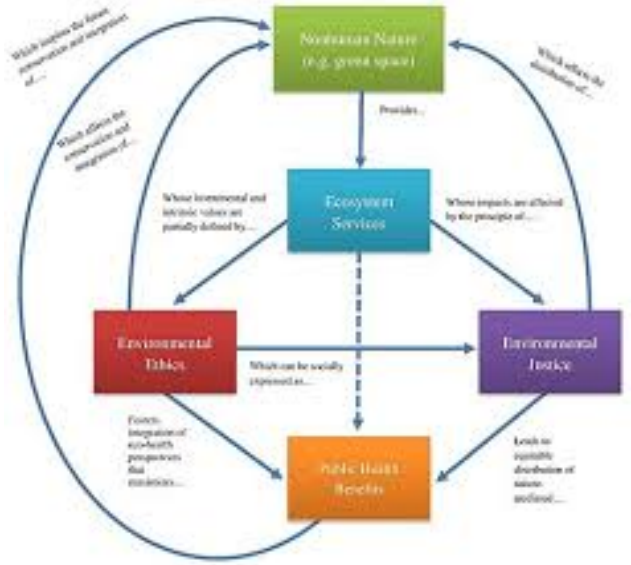

Figure 3. Environmental health
Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_health

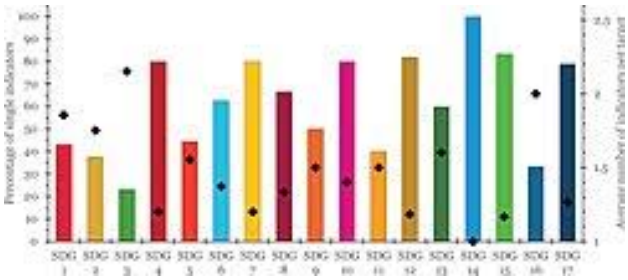

Figure 4. Sustainable development goals
Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_Development_Goals

Figure 5. Environmental law
Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_law

Figure 6. Environmental impact of artificial intelligence
Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_impact_of_artificial_intelligence