

Healthy Environment as a Panacea to Peaceful Coexistence

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Abstract

Humans are most times very conscious of their environment. Some, though aware of how neat or how filthy their environment may be, make do with what the environment has to offer. What emanates from the environment proclaims itself through the effect it has on the inhabitants. The effect, on the other hand, steers out how well the inhabitants will relate towards the environment which includes the inhabitants themselves. A healthy and pleasant environment is most likely to make the inhabitants very comfortable and peaceful while an unhealthy environment may make the inhabitants uneasy, uncomfortable and aggressive, which in turn could translate to chaos within the community. It is as a result that this paper took a look at what a healthy environment is and the impact it could have in making a community very peaceful. The paper highlighted how to develop a healthy environment, the importance of a healthy environment, characteristics of a healthy environment, peaceful coexistence and healthy environment as a peace-making tool. Conclusion was arrived at and recommendations were advanced among which is that environmental sustainability should be ensured and extreme poverty and hunger should be eradicated to bring about peace.

Keywords: Healthy; Environment; Peaceful; Coexistence; Inhabitants

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Introduction

A healthy environment signifies well-being of all forms of life be they humans, animals forests, plants and marine life. It is one in which all systems work well and work together, and in which all citizens enjoy cordial human relationship and good measure of rapport, which in turn could translate to favourable and enjoyable place, A broad vision of the health and well-being of individuals depends on the safety and quality of the environment available to them. The term "environment" has been modified from the traditional definition of a mere physical and infrastructure to include all the components that could contribute in the holistic upkeep of the individual [1]. These include physical/ natural environments, built environments and social environments both at home, school and the community. This, a healthy environment is not just one that also encourages physical activity and social contact.

Without these required attributes, the environment may turn out to be the opposite of what it should be, that is, it may not ensure for the inhabitants the ideals and pleasures which are required of it thereby paving ways for uneasy and terrifying situations. In the

light of the above, this paper focuses majorly on what an ideal environment should be and how such environment can assist in bringing about peace and sustaining the peace for its inhabitants.

Importance of a healthy environment

Doctors seem to spend their time these days exhorting their patients to adopt healthier habits, to exercise more, eat less, avoid alcohol and cigarette, wear seat belts, crash helmets and condoms. But perhaps, the most important risks to health are beyond people's immediate control, caused by the unhealthy habits not of individuals but of an energy hungry and throwaway society [2].

Characteristics of a healthy environment

Khalid [1] asserted that the development of a healthy environment needs begin from the time of conception. He mentioned the developmental domains and healthy environment provisions as follows

Physical development: Availability of basic health care such as prenatal and postnatal care for mothers, nutrition for mother and child, immunization, safe shelter, clean water, good sanitation

and hygiene, as well as opportunities to develop gross and fine motor skills and also protection from abuse.

Cognitive development: Availability of educational institutes and day care centres, trained staff, safe and secured surroundings, child friendly environment, exposure to activities and stories.

This includes opportunities to interact with different people, understand and develop exploration and encouragement for creativity and critical thinking.

Social development: Relationships contribute to the society and develop an understanding about one's own identity and the society and protection from abuse.

Moral development: Opportunities to create an awareness about rights and properties of others, having stable relationships, love and affection, developing positive self-image, developing a sense of security, belief system of family and society as well as what is wise and what is not wise.

Abdullatif [3] stated that characteristics of a healthy community are numerous and include the following:

- The physical environment is clean and safe.
- The environment meets everyone's basic needs.
- The environment promotes social harmony and actively involves everyone.
- There is an understanding of the local health and environment issues.
- The community participates in identifying local solutions to local problems.
- Community members have access to varied experiences interaction and communication.
- The health services are accessible and appropriate.
- The historical and cultural heritage is promoted and celebrated.
- There is diverse and innovative economy.
- There is a sustainable use of available resources for all.

A healthy environment is that surrounding which promotes the well-being and proper development of an individual [4]. She went further to highlight the following characteristics of a healthy and good environment:

- Unpolluted air
- Clean water
- Adequate food supply
- Safe shelter
- Good weather
- Good human relationship in and outside the home.

Carpenter [4] explained the above mentioned characteristics thus:

The body requires adequate oxygen in order to function well.

It is only when the air around us is not polluted that enough oxygen can be available to the body. In cities around the World, air pollution occurs as a result of smokes from machines and cars as well as smokes from factories. In the rural areas, the burning of bushes contributes to air pollution so also are firewood and charcoals that are used for cooking. Water is necessary for cooking, drinking, washing our bodies and clothes as well as cleaning our surroundings. Factories and industries also make use of water for their various activities. Water is also used for farming purposes. Therefore, it is important that we appreciate the importance of water in our environment.

For the body to function well, adequate foods supply to provide energy, build and repair body tissues as well as fight against infection is needed. When the food supply is deficient in quality or quantity, the body may be troubled. Nutrition-related problems can arise and the body will not be able to function well.

Good weather is necessary to keep man and plant alive. For example, too much or too little rain can produce poor harvest which will in turn affect the quality and quantity of food available in the environment. Too strong a wind can destroy shelters and cause injuries.

An important characteristic of a good environment is good human relationship in and outside the home. An individual who enjoy good human relationship within his family, in his working and learning environment will be happy and free from anxiety. Also, the behaviour by which people are classified as good or bad are usually as a result of their human relationship background in the environment.

Shelter is needed to protect the individual from wind, rain and other dangers. In order to get comfort in our surrounding and in the home environment, shelter is provided in form of houses. For any form of shelter to be beneficial, it must be safe.

Healthy emotional environment

Emotional environment is often referred to as emotional climate. The type of emotional environment that exists in any community usually results from the nature of human interaction that prevails.

The emotional environment of any community is of great importance. It can promote or deter several positive tendencies in individuals. Therefore, the importance of a healthy emotional environment cannot be overlooked [5]. When an individual feels that he is not loved, accepted and respected, he may lack the sense of security and belonging. Such individual may become incapable of controlling his and may display inconsistent behaviour patterns. Any emotional problem and individual brings within him to his immediate environment can either be reduced or increased depending on the nature of the emotional environment he comes in contact with. Vanmier [6], asserted that certain behavioural problems that may result from poor emotional environment include:

- Aggression
- Withdrawal
- Attention – getting behaviours

- Insecurity
- Truancy

An aggressive individual would display hot temper, he will become quarrelsome and will be full of mischief. He may sometimes steal. The withdrawn individual, on the other hand, keeps to himself, shows no interest and does not participate in activities with others. The insecure individual may be boastful to cover up insecurity or he may be shy and timid. He's most times, stays alone and may be very fearful. The individual who is attention-getting is always showing off. An individual that plays truancy may leave his home for work but may never get there. He either goes to hide or plays and returns home when the day is over.

Developing a healthy environment

The development of a healthy environment has to do with various intents. It should include the provision of nutrition as well as good stimulating and interactive environment [7]. This is because a child's rapid cognition development begins from the earliest ages, that is, from conception and continues into young adulthood. The child's first interaction with his immediate family members exposes him or her to different learning processes in a natural way. Unfavourable circumstances from the time of conception, during pregnancy and in the early years can cause high risk for coronary heart disease, hypertension, mental health problems and other conditions in adult life, such as disorders of the immune system and behavioural disorders. Parents and caregivers have to be particularly mindful of their own relationships with each other and other family members.

Young stated that the provision of basic health care, nutrition and stimulation in a caring environment foster the child's development and will result in developing good human resource for the future. When the basic needs are not met, children can gain improved critical thinking skills, self-confidence, problem solving ability and capacity to cooperate with others. It has been further elucidated in Neurosciences that the effects of early experience on the wiring and sculpting of the brains billions of neurons last a lifetime [8]. Since brain development is a continuous process, the experiences provided to the brain at an early age are highly influential in the process of wiring and sculpting the brain. Negative, as well as positive experiences in early life affect the development of neural circuits that mediate cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social capacities [9].

The Meaning of peaceful coexistence

Peaceful coexistence is a term from peace which is a state of harmony characterised by a lack of violent conflict, commonly understood as the absence of hostility. Peace suggests the existence of healthy or newly healed interpersonal or international relationships, prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare, the establishment of equality and a working political order that serves the true interest of all. In international relations, peace is not the absence of war or conflict, but also the presence of cultural and economic understanding [10].

The Challenge of peaceful coexistence

Carrol [11] stated that peaceful coexistence is the most important project of this era, but we cannot do it alone or in isolation. We must do it together. The World has become small and we are with each other, knowing of, affecting and interacting with each other more than we ever have in the history of the world. We are subject to the universal conditions of human existence like uncertainty, change, needs, loss and death. How we deal with these conditions and what we make of them depends in large part on our distinctive cultures, backgrounds, languages, histories and environments. Given these differences, is peaceful coexistence possible?

If it is determined that peaceful coexistence has been achieved in certain situations, it must be further determined what factor or factors allowed that coexistence to occur. Such factors should be encouraged, otherwise the forces of globalization that have made our world smaller will bring with it new and more barbaric forms of hatred, oppression and violence. Parker and Kramer [12] affirmed that environmental peacemaking brings parties in conflict together to work environmental issues in ways that build confidence and reduce tensions. It encompasses the entire conflict cycle from prevention, mitigation and management to post-conflict peace building.

The point is that today peaceful coexistence is an indisputable fact of life and not someone's request or suggestion. Peaceful coexistence is an objective necessity stemming from the contemporary stage of the development of human society [13].

Healthy environment as a peace making tool

Conca et al. [14] emphasized that the environment offers some useful, perhaps even unique qualities that lead themselves to building peace and transforming conflict. Environmental challenges ignore political boundaries, require a long term perspective, encourage local and non-governmental participation, and extend community building beyond polarizing economic linkages. Where cooperation does not take root, it may help to enhance trust, establish cooperative habits, create share regional identities around shared resources, and establish mutually recognized rights and expectations.

Many of the primary causes of conflict are closely related to the question of sustainable development, or rather, unsustainable development. Examples of current global trends which present formidable challenges to the achievement of both peace and sustainability include;

- The problem of population growth above the carrying capacity of the known natural resources base.
- The predominant technology.
- Mounting pressure on diminishing quantities of fresh water and topsoil.
- Disputed jurisdiction over terrified areas containing strategic resources.
- The destabilizing impact of widespread poverty.

- Increasing social inequality.
- Rising flow of migrants fleeing from wars.
- Famine and other vestiges of political, social and economic breakdown [15].

Recognizing the potential critical linkages between the environment and insecurity, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan called for integrating environmental contributions to conflict and instability into the United Nation's Conflict Prevention Strategy and the deliberations of his high-level panel on threats, challenges and change. Surprisingly, however, relatively little is known about the best design for environmental peace-making initiatives or the conditions under which they are most likely to succeed. Without better knowledge and a stronger commitment to study current efforts, the International Community may be missing powerful peace-making opportunities in the environmental domain.

Conclusion

There are significant and substantial links between a healthy environment and how peaceful the inhabitants will be. No community can hope to establish lasting peace unless it finds ways of making the environment a healthy one. One of the mechanisms for realizing national integration, security and conflict resolution can be found in an environment that has every potential for making life better for the inhabitants. Effective peace can be achieved through improved and well-managed environment that is able to deliver to the inhabitants what they deserve. The environment must be kept clean and every necessity should be made available. The degrading of the environment should be halted to make the environment better. It is only through radical change that environmental degradation and its damaging effects on human health will be halted.

Recommendations

The following are recommended as means of developing peaceful Coexistence through the environment.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger: Minimizing exposures to environmental risk factors indirectly contributes to reducing poverty because many environmentally mediated diseases cause lost earnings.

Promote gender equality and empower women: Although may be no great differences between the overall rates of environmentally mediated disorders for men and for women, women are disadvantaged in many aspects. In developing countries, women are mostly involved in collecting safe water and other essentials for the family

Ensure environmental sustainability: Environmental interventions will have a great impact on improving the health of slum dwellers that are among those most affected by health hazards which in turn trigger restlessness and chaos.

- Recognize the environmental deprivations suffered by the people and reflect them in poverty and conflict monitoring systems.
- Clarify property and access rights to environmental resources and strive for the equitable sharing of benefits.
- Enable those who depend most on the environment to gain access to justice and to participate in policy and institutions.
- Integrate health criteria into decision making, where appropriate, across multiple sectors.
- Conduct comprehensive community health needs assessments and develop state and community health improvement plans.

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