DOMESTIC EFFORTS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL TREATIES IN NIGERIA: ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract - The unending degrading of global environment continue to trigger efforts from every jurisdiction to quench the scourge of global environmental harm in order to usher in viable and sustainable solution to the ever-depleting global environment which is resulting in climate change and global warming. As numerous international Environmental agreementsare entered into for the sustenance of present and future generations, national laws have responsibility to ensure the effectiveness of these international agreement through proper implementation mechanisms. Using doctrinal approach, this paper examinesthe domestic efforts in Nigeria towards ensuring the effective implementation of the litany of global environmental agreements in existence. It examines the challenges facing the laws and institutions in Nigeria responsible for the implementation of International Environmental Agreements. It finally made some viable recommendations on how the law and relevant authorities can be rejigged to attract effective compliance and implementation of International obligations particularly the environmental agreements.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is evident that today, at the heart of any concept of environmental problems are laws that provides adequate regulation for human use of the natural environment."[1]The institutions that ensure the effectiveness of the rules are part of the effort in Nigeria. All targets sustainability of human environment part. More so, the need and importance of international agreements among sovereign nations cannot therefore be over-emphasized. Such necessity of agreement among different countries of the world continue to grow as days go by. Today, treaties, conventions,protocols, and numerous International EnvironmentalAgreements (MEAs) have been pioneered and developed yet it appears as if these efforts are not yielding.[2] Studies show that about seven hundred (700) MEAs are currently in place.[3]
However, it is not about the existence of these agreements. It is to what extents states comply with its obligation to comply and implement the rules and letters embedded in this international environmental law. This is because the nature of compliance to be accorded to the agreement and extent of implementation will solely be dependent on the domestic realities of individual nation that took part in the negotiation process. That is to say, to achieve national implementation of, and compliance with, treaty provisions is always a herculean task. For instance, US non-participation in global environmental institutions or failure to ratify MEAs often pose threats to climate agreements.[4] Overall, some of these factors nevertheless determine the relative success and bottlenecks that will arise from the agreements. Research shows that as at today Nigeria is a state party to a handful numbers of International Environmental Agreements. To properly xray the relevant questions related to this research, this paper is divided into five parts. Apart from the introduction, this paper looks at the second part highlights some IEAs that Nigeria has ratified. The third part examines the legal and institutional frameworks responsible for the implementation of international obligation, and in particular, IEAs. The fourth part looks at the factors constituting the impediments for Compliance and implementations of International Environmental Agreements in Nigeria. The fifth part offers some viable recommendations capable of inducing effective compliance and implementations of IEAs. Finally, the conclusion follows.

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

A. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Amended 1999 Constitution) is the foremost legal framework on international treaties. It stipulates

[1]Farrier and Paul Stein (Eds.)The Environmental Law Handbook: Planning and Land Use in NSW 4th Edition, David (Redfern Legal Centre Publishing, 2006) pg 3

[2]C. Bruch and E. Mrema '*Manual on Compliance with and Enforcement of Multilateral Environmental Agreements' United Nations Environmental Program(2006) pg 15*

[3]B Bowling 'Multilateral Environmental Agreements: A Handbook for Afghan Officials'United Nations Environment ProgrammePost-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch(2008) pg 8

[4]G Bang, Jon Hovi and Detlef F. 'US presidents and the failure to ratify multilateral environmental agreements' (2012) Climate Policy. Available at<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14693062.2012.699788> Accessed on 16th January, 2022

under Section 12(1) that no treaty shall have force of law in Nigeria except to the extent to which such a treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly.[5] Clearly, this provision is a dualist ideology which upholds that national and international law operate in different spheres. In the dualist ideology it is taken that international law can only operate at domestic level after a domestic process has brought international law into the national legal system. Therefore, "in the dualists' world, domestic law determines the applicability of international law."[6] Monism, on the other hand, is of the view that both the national and international law exist simultaneously within the national legal system. The constitutional provision that requires domestication of international agreement was brought to test before the Supreme Court of Nigeria in the case of Abacha v Fawhinmi.[7]

In that case, the Respondent at the Supreme Court was Chief Gani Fawehinmi who was arrested without warrant at his Lagos residence on 30th January, 1996 by the combined team of the men of Directorate of Security Service (DSS) and the Nigeria Police. He was first taken to Bauchi State where he was detained without charge nor being informed of his offence. He applied to Federal High Court Lagos Division for the enforcement of his fundamental praying among other things for the court to declare that his arrest and detention was illegal and contrary to the Articles 4, 5, 6 and 12 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act (ACHPR Act), and that the respondents be ordered by the court to arraign him before a properly constituted Court or Tribunal as required by Article 7 of the ACHPR Act.

The Defendants at the Federal High Court and Respondents at the Court of Appeal) by way of a preliminary objection challenged to the jurisdiction of the Court. In allowing the preliminary objection and striking out the Appellant's case, the Court decided that the Inspector General of Police had power to detain a person by the provisions of the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree No. 2 of 1984 as amended by the State Security (Detention of Persons) (Amendment) Decree No. 11 of 1994. The Court ruled that any of the provisions of the African Charter on Human and peoples' Rights which was in conflicts with the Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 107 of 1993 was void to the extent of its inconsistency.

On further appeal, the Supreme Court, among other things, looked at the ACHPR Act with reference to the provisions section 12 (1) of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which is stipulated that "no treaty between the Federation and any other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which any such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly" and held that "before its enactment into law by National Assembly, an international treaty has no such force of law as to make its provisions justiciable in our courts." The Supreme Court relied on other foreign cases to arrive at its decision.[8]Similarly, in the case of Higgs & Anor. V. Minister of National Security & Ors the Privy Council held that treaties formed no part of domestic law unless enacted by the legislature. Domestic Courts had no jurisdiction to construe or apply a treaty, nor could unincorporated treaties change the law of the land. They had no effect upon citizens' rights and duties in common law or statute law. They… might give rise to a legitimate expectation by citizens that the government, in its act affecting them, would observe the terms of the treaty.[9]

B. The National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA)

As have been explored earlier in this work, one of the efforts geared towards ameliorating the pains of millions of people all over the world is ensuring regional and national policy frameworks to match the already established international agreements. This has undoubtedly provoked the needs to establish environmental policies and enforcement agencies around the world and in Nigeria. NESREA is one of such legal mechanisms.[10]

The Act empowers the Agency to be responsible for enforcing all environmental laws, guidelines, policies, standards and regulations in Nigeria, as well as enforcing compliance with provisions of international agreements, protocols, conventions and treaties on the

[5]Amended Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (Amended 1999 Constitution section 12(1)

[6]E O Okebukola 'The Application Of International Law In Nigeria And The Façade Of Dualism' Nnamdi Aziliwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence 11 (1) 2020 pages 15 - 20

[7]Abacha v Fawehinmi [2000] 6 NWLR Part 660 p 228

[8]The Supreme Court quoted the decision of the Privy Council in Higgs & Anor. V. Minister of National Security & Ors,25 where it was held that the law of England and the Bahamas, the right to enter into treaties was one of the surviving prerogative powers of the Crown and that Treaties formed no part of domestic law unless enacted by the legislature. See also the case of Oshevire v British Caledonian Airways, where the Court of Appeal held that any domestic legislation in conflict with international conventions is void. Similarly, in the case of Chae Chin Ping v. United States, where it was held that treaties are of no higher dignity than acts of Congress, and may be modified or repealed by Congress

[9] [2000] 2 AC 228; The Times, December 23, 1999.

[10]S R Monsurat, R M Olalekan and S H Olawale 'A Deep Dive into the Review of National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act' International Research Journal of Applied Science 1 (4) 2019 pg 109

environment to which Nigeria is a signatory. NESREA has responsibility for the protection and development of the environment, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development of Nigeria's natural resources in general and environmental technology including coordination, and liaison with, relevant stakeholders within and outside Nigeria on matters of enforcement of environmental standards, regulations, rules, laws, policies and guidelines

C. The Petroleum Industry Act 2021

Nigeria's Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021, which was recently signed into law sometime in August 2021 became one of the is one of the most viable attempts towards compliance negotiated multilateral environmental agreements targeting international standard of operation in Nigeria. The Act targets to provide legal, governance, regulatory and fiscal framework for the Nigerian Petroleum Industry

The Environmental Management Plan of the Petroleum Industry Act obviously considered the high risk of negative environmental impacts and as such, carved out the need to have a plan to manage the resulting effects of the situation. For instance, the provisions of the PIA requires operators to submit for approval, an environmental management plan in respect of projects which require environmental impact assessment. As such the plan should be submitted within 12 months from the effective date of the PIA or six months after the grant of the applicable licence or lease.[11]Considering the rate of environmental pollution that emanates from oil exploration and production with negative effects on the human health, and the immediate environment, authors redefined, 'good oil field practice' to mean the concept of environmental protection and sustainability.

Interestingly PIA 2021, stipulated under the Act, the term 'good international petroleum industry practices' which highlights the need for generally acceptable standard in the international petroleum industry which is good, safe, economical, environmentally sound, and efficient in petroleum operations[12]

This shows a concerted effort of the local legislation to comply with international standard of practice which is the thrust of MEAs

III. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

A. The Judiciary

In the 2002, A UNEP Global Judges Symposium was held on the eve of Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development-WSSD, whereupon the Principles on the Role of Law and Sustainable Development was adopted. The Principle amongst other things, maintain that 'an independent judiciary and judicial process is vital for the implementation, development and enforcement of international environmental law'.[13]

The courts in Nigeria derive their power from section 6 of the constitution of the FRN(As Amended 1999). Section 6(5) specifically empowers the Federal government and State government to established such other courts as may be authorised by law to exercise jurisdiction on matters with respect to which the National Assembly and State Assemblies may make laws. The judicial powers vested in the courts in Nigeria are to be exercised and shall extend to all inherent powers and sanctions of the courts of law. The judicial powers shall extend to all matters between persons or between government or authority and to any person in Nigeria and to all actions or proceedings relating thereto for the purpose of determining any question as to the civil rights and obligations of that person.[14]

To this regard, the main roles of the judiciary in Nigeria like in other countries of the world are "adjudication, interpretation of laws and exercising supervisory and judicial review functions over administrative bodies."[15] There is no doubt that "it is pursuant to these judicial powers that the courts in Nigeria exercise jurisdiction over persons, authorities and companies, over conducts that infringe or breach environmental laws"[16]. The courts are therefore expected to be seen to exercise jurisdiction by making pronouncements that punish offenders and prevent action or in-actions that injurious to environment at the same time provide compensation for victims of environmental harms.

B. Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs)

NGOs are institutionalized groupings of people and resources, often from multiple societies, operating outside the direct authority of any particular government or collection of governments. For instance, individuals, not nations, are generally the

[11]L Afuye and D Abdulai 'Petroleum Industry Act, 2021: The Road To Compliance For Upstream Companies' 10 May 2022 Available at: <Petroleum Industry Act, 2021: The Road To Compliance For Upstream Companies - Oil, Gas & Electricity - Nigeria (mondaq.com> Accessed on 20th March, 2025

[12]M Ele 'Oil Spills in the Niger Delta-Does the Petroleum Industry Act 2022 Offer Guidance for Solving this Problem?. *The Journal of Sustainable Development, Law and Policy* 2022 pg 134

[13]C Redgewell 'National Implementation' 'The Oxford Handbook of International Environmental Law'..Edited by D Bodansky, J Brunnee and E Hey(2007, Oxford University Press) pg 930

[14] See Section 6(5) CFRN(As Amended 1999).

[15]S. A. Fagbemi And A. R. Akpanke 'Environmental Litigation in Nigeria: The Role of The Judiciary(2019)Naujilj 10 (2) Pg 29

[16]Ibid

constituent elements of an NGO. They are, in this sense, regarded as international institutions operating in parallel with the state leadership such presidents, Governors, ministers and all the arrays of state actors who dominate national affair.[17]Between 1968-1969, the United Nation General Assembly(UNGA) by Resolutions 2398 and 2581 resolved to conduct a conference which main object would be to "create a basis for comprehensive consideration within the United Nations of the problems of the human environment," and to "focus the attention of Governments and public opinion in various countries on the importance of the problem."[18]This resolution arguably contributed to the birth of theStockholm Conference (1972), which is 'The United Nations Conference on Human Environment' (UNCHE).

In recognising the roles of NGOs Principles 11 & 25 of Stockholm Conference (1972), particularly Principle 11 states that the environmental policies of all States should enhance and not adversely affect the present or future development potential of developing countries, nor should they hamper the attainment of better living conditions for all, and appropriate steps should be taken by States and international organizations with a view to reaching agreement on meeting the possible national and international economic consequences resulting from the application of environmental measures.Principle 25 followed suit and stipulated that States shall ensure that international organizations play a coordinated, efficient and dynamic role for the protection and improvement of the environment.[19]

Over the time, the NGOs have played significant roles towards sustainable environment and emergence of several IEAs as such actively shaped by international institutions on issues such as ozone layer depletion which the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) helped to shape. So also, climate change where World Meteorological Organization (WMO and UNEP) played active role. In the same manner, the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes witnessed the help of UNEP. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO and UNEP) helped in shaping Persistent Organic Pollutants.[20]

The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) was birthed in 2004 and as a non-governmental registered under the instant laws Nigerian. Its role span using legal and human rights machineries to propel the government towards transparency, accountability and protection of economic and social rights in Nigeria. It targets amongst other things use human rights law to address developmental and human rights issues generally.[21]

SERAP has featured in many cases in Nigeria in getting Nigeria to comply with its international obligations particularly with respect to international environmental treaty obligation. For instance, among numerous litanies of cases, in 2009, SERAP file against the Federal Government of Nigeria and six oil companies over alleged violation of human rights and associated oil pollution in the Niger Delta.

In that case, SERAP basically alleged "Violations of the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, to work, to health, to water, to life and human dignity, to a clean and healthy environment; and to economic and social development – as a consequence of: the impact of oil-related pollution and environmental damage on agriculture and fisheries."[22] In reaching a decision Court unanimously found the Nigerian government responsible for abuses by oil companies adding that Nigeria violated articles 21 (on the right to natural wealth and resources) and 24 (on the right to a general satisfactory environment) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights by its failure to protect the Niger Delta from the harm orchestrated on them by the oil companies that have for many years devastated the region.[23]

C. National Human Rights Institutions

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) have become viable tools towards achieving international obligations especially as it relates to human rights. For instance, in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda on SDG, Goal 16 stipulates recommends the "Existence of independent national human rights institutions in

[17]Jeremi Suri 'Non-Governmental Organizations and Non-State Actors' available at <*NGO-3-article-scan.pdf (jeremisuri.net)> pg 223 Accessed on 20th June, 2022

[18]S C Valson 'Everything you need to know about the Stockholm Declaration'(2020) Available at: <Everything you need to know about the Stockholm Declaration - iPleaders> Accessed on 20th June 2022

[19]S C Valson 'Everything you need to know about the Stockholm Declaration'(2020) Available at: <Everything you need to know about the Stockholm Declaration - iPleaders> Accessed on 20th June 2022

[20]B H Desai 'Creeping Institutionalization Multilateral Environmental Agreements & Human Security' InterSecTions 'Interdisciplinary Security ConnecTions' Publication Series of UNU EHS No. 4 (2006) pg. 12 Available at: <(PDF) Multilateral environmental agreements (researchgate.net)> Accessed on 30th June, 2022

K. kumar 'International Environmental Agreements: A Historical Overview' Available at: 8146b10ffe6909b7ddf87dadfe62039c.pdf (shivajicollege.ac.in). Accessed on 20th June 2022

[21]Adetokunbo Mumuni '**SERAP: promoting transparency and respect for socio-economic rights**: **Introduction from the Executive Director, SERAP' Available at <**Who We Are – Serap Nigeria> Accessed on 20th March, 2025

[22] Available at<Serap Nigeria – Official Website> Accessed on 28th February 2025

[23]Ibid

compliance with the Paris Principles."[24] In the same vein, in October 2015, the Global Alliance of NHRI (GANHRI) agreed on the Merida Declaration on The Role of NHRIs in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Declaration states "NHRIs are uniquely placed to play a bridging role between stakeholders and promote transparent, participatory and inclusive national processes of implementation and monitoring…"[25]

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in Nigeria plays similar role by its act of establishment in ensuring compliance with international human rights treaties. For instance, article 5(a) provides that the Commission shall deal with all matters relating to the promotion and protection of human rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and other international and regional instruments on human rights to which Nigeria is a party[26]

IV. CHALLENGES OF COMPLIANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

In interrogating the legal and institutional framework on the compliance and implementation of IEAs in Nigeria emanates mostly from poor implementation. Many factors are responsible for the lack of compliance or poor implementation of negotiated IEAs.

i. Poor Negotiation Attitude by Individual Countries: Process leading to adoption and ratification treaties plays significant role towards compliance and its domestic implementation. While researches are mostly focused on the challenges of climates change and poor attitude of states on compliance with international obligation, the process of treaty negotiation becomes and overlooked aspect. The process of negotiation is an essential platform that provides the opportunity for resolving every foreseeable barrier and diplomatic intricacies associated with the treaty under discussion. Non participation of the relevant authority during negotiation of treaty is one of the major challenges that inhibits compliance and implementation of international obligation required by that treaty.[27] For instance, there is a recent global call to end plastic pollution. In preparation for the potential treaty, Nigeria Plastic Treaty Preparatory Session was convoked and was hosted by Community Action Against Plastic Waste (CAPws). This was done in collaboration with Federal Ministry of Environment.[28]. However, beyond preparation is an actual participation during negotiation.

ii. Proliferation of Treaties: "Treaty congestion" is a serious inhibiting factor to effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements said Prof Weiss.[29] Recent years have witnessed serious proliferation of environmental treaties. Although Art. 30 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Between States and International Organizations or Between International Organizations (1986),[30] such surge in the number of environmental agreements gives room for inconsistencies, overlapping provision, duplication of aims and incoherency

iii. Domestic Constraints: peculiarity in legal and socio-economic situation often make domestic compliance and application of negotiated treaties difficult. There is the challenge of peculiarity of internal difficulties faced by developing countries such as modus of translating treaties into domestic laws for effective implementation. Section 12(10) of the 1999 CFRN(As Amended) makes clear stipulations to the effect that no such international treaty shall have force of law in Nigeria unless to the extent such law is domesticated by the National Assembly.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Provision of Pre-negotiation and Technical Assistance to Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA) from Participating Countries: Quite often, regular information and proper briefings are usually

[24]Steven L. B. Jensen 'The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda' (Paper for UN Expert Group Meeting on Tackling global challenges to equality and inclusion through the gender responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) pg 1 Available at <One pager> Accessed on 15th March, 2025

[25] Ibid

[26]See Article 5(a) National Human Rights Commission Act 2010

[27] C.E Okeke and M.I. Anushein 'Implementation of Treaties in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and the Way Forward' (2028) NAUJILJ 9 (2) pg 226

[28]Ahmed Tiamiyu - Community Action Against Plastic Waste *(*CAPWS), Nigeria Plastic Treaty Preparatory *Session(2023)*. Available at<Nigeria Plastic Treaty Preparatory Session - GAIA> Accessed on 27th March, 2025

[29]E. B. Weiss, International Environmental Law: Contemporary Issues and the Emergence of New World Order 81 Geo L.J 675(1993) pg 697

[30]Art. 30 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties Between States and International Organizations or Between International Organizations (1986)

not readily made available to relevant participating MDAs nor are these they exposed to strategic advice that are required in preparation for the complex negotiation. The recent Plastic Treaty Preparatory Session which was convoked and hosted by Community Action Against Plastic Waste (CAPws) in collaboration with Federal Ministry of Environment is one of its kind.

ii. Training and capacity building for government and judicial officers on civilized and international standard of environmental governance: Considering the continuous rise and proliferation of international environmental agreements many of which a purpose driven on specific environmental challenges, there need for more in-depth and unceasing training opportunities on government, judicial officers and by extension, all stakeholders on environmental matters to improve the capacity. This practice will ensure a more robust training program where every stakeholder including the members of the public and civil society bodies are kept in tune with recent mechanisms for environmental governance. It is recognized that the lack of information and capacity in turn inhibits political will to act.

iii. Encourage the roles of Non-governmental Institution on creating awareness: In this work, the efforts and contributions of non-governmental IEAs were explored and shown in good light. Their interests are not state-centric as such have always provided and taken unbiased position.[31] Overall, they have "played an increasingly important part in environmental treaty making. In similar trend, NGOs can be employed to use their expertise in creating awareness on the need for compliance and implementation of IEAs.

VI. CONCLUSION

As the world continue to grow and countries of the world become more aware, the gap between international law and domestic law continue to fizzle out. In essence, the barrier that inhibits compliance and implementation of negotiated international environmental agreements becomes more visible, and easy to tackle. On the face of strict legal and poor institutional arrangements towards IEAs, this paper reveals the inherent challenges and potential solutions that can ensure effective compliance and implementation of IEAs. As global environmental harm knows no bound so also the journey towards effective solution demand s cross sectoral and more advanced approach.

[31]L. E. Susskind and S. H. Ali, in their book, 'Environmental Diplomacy: Negotiating More Effective Global Agreements'(2nd Edition, Oxford : Oxford University Press 2015) pg 36

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[10] C Redgewell 'National Implementation' 'The Oxford Handbook of International Environmental Law'..Edited by D Bodansky, J Brunnee and E Hey(2007, Oxford University Press) pg 930 See Section 6(5) CFRN(As Amended 1999). S. A. Fagbemi And A. R. Akpanke 'Environmental Litigation in Nigeria: The Role of The Judiciary(2019)Naujilj 10 (2) Pg 29

[11] Jeremi Suri 'Non-Governmental Organizations and Non-State Actors' available at <*NGO-3-article-scan.pdf (jeremisuri.net)> pg 223 Acessed on 20th June, 2022

[12] S C Valson 'Everything you need to know about the Stockholm Declaration'(2020) Available at: <Everything you need to know about the Stockholm Declaration - iPleaders> Accessed on 20th June 2022

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[15] Article 5(a) National Human Rights Commission Act 2010
C.E Okeke and M.I. Anushein 'Implementation of Treaties in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and the Way Forward' (2028) NAUJILJ 9 (2) pg 226
[16] Ahmed Tiamiyu - Community Action Against Plastic Waste (CAPWS), Nigeria Plastic Treaty Preparatory Session(2023). Available at<Nigeria Plastic Treaty Preparatory Session - GAIA> Accessed on 27th March, 2025
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