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LITERACY AND WASTE MANAGEMENT IN SOME URBAN AREAS OF AKWA IBOM AND CROSS RIVER STATES OF NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Over the years, governments at various levels have put in a lot of effort and resources to keep the cities clean and enviable. Unfortunately, the alarming rural–urban drift has closed in on the government and exacted on resources’, leaving an urgent call for intervention. Basic problems stare the government in the face: the attitude of the citizenry that generates the waste and that of the agencies responsible for the waste management. There is still much of yesterday in today’s attitude to waste disposal as attitudes die hard. The majority of those that generate the waste, lack the capacity to see and identify what constitutes unsanitary environment, which is a strong indicator of the literacy level. Ignorance, lack of commitment, coupled with inadequate tools and non-insistence on skilled manpower by the government have connived to breed an unsanitary environment. This study envisions that if the people are adequately sensitized on proper management of waste generated and the consequence of non-compliance, Nigeria of the 21st century will reap the dividend of sound health predicated on clean environment. The sensitization could additionally be carried out through the use of our local languages in order to reach the less enlightened populace. The study’s pilot study is on two states in the south-south Nigeria: Akwa Ibom and Cross River as a microcosm of the macrocosm.

INTRODUCTION

“Cleanliness is next to Godliness”

Anyone who cherishes cleanliness is certainly a god of the environment. This ‘god’ would then be disgusted at the refuse heaps that litter our big cities and towns in Nigeria in general and Akwa Ibom and Cross River States in particular. The stench that

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oozes out of these heaps is not only nauseating but degrades the physical environment, thereby constituting a health hazard manifesting in cholera and typhoid, to mention but a few. Thus, the value of a clean environment cannot be over emphasised. According to Oputa (2010), Medical research has identified environmental factors as playing a significant role in triggering a variety of illnesses. Health conditions such as asthma, cancer, multiple chemical sensitivity, chronic fatigue syndrome, and several others are strongly influenced by exposure to toxic or allergenic substances in the environment. It is believed that over 80% of all illnesses have environment and life style causes. The question is, how many of our illiterate and marginally illiterate population have access to such critically useful information? Environmental issues have in the past forty years, or so, constituted a global menace and concern.

The Stockholm Conference by the human environmentalists and scientists noted a growing deterioration of the biophysical condition of planet earth. A summit held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil tagged “ Earth’s submit” also revealed beyond all reasonable doubt that the global environment was indeed in grave danger. At the end of the summit, an official document labelled “Agenda 21” emerged which has as its main thrust, action plans on how to resolve the earth crises and avert future danger.

Recently, the series of international conferences on sustainable development initiated by the International Society for Environmental Geotechnology (ISEG), San Diego, California, has been addressing the issues of environmental threats to both human and animal life. The urgency of the environmental challenges confronting mankind is of great importance to academic irrespective of discipline. The objective of this study therefore is collaborative in nature as it behoves both the scientists and humanists to ensure that our earth is preserved for posterity. Old practices, which were not environment-friendly, have to be discontinued. How can this goal be achieved? It is through mass awareness which can effectively be done through language and literacy.

The Akwa Ibom and Cross River States

Akwa-Ibom and Cross River States were born out of the political boundary adjustment programme of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1984. Akwa Ibom and Cross River States were formally known as South Eastern State and are two of the states that make up the South-South Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State has thirty-one Local Government Areas with its capital at Uyo while Cross River State has eighteen Local Government Areas with its capital at Calabar. Akwa Ibom and Cross River are two sister-states with two mutually intelligible languages of Ibibio and Efik respectively. These shared language asset fortunately is advantageous for dissemination of information of common interest including the waste management issue in focus.

Literacy

Literacy is generally viewed as the ability to read, write and compute. There are various levels of literacy. Orisawayi (2004) distinguishes between micro- and macro-literacy. According to him, micro-literacy embodies initial or basic literacy and functional literacy is derivable from basic education. Macro-literacy is equated to a good and balanced education of the individual which enables him or her to attain self-fulfillment and self-actualization, and thereby full integration into the society. It is more advantageous to the individual and the environment and thus to sustainable development as it appears to guarantee overall literacy of the society.

Furthermore, we agree with Smith (1978) as cited in Olajide (2002) that literacy should “guide the thought of the individual, as he or she seeks to be critical, creative and participatory.” Many individuals who are termed “literate” in our society do not seem to have allowed a positive change to take place in their behaviour, and so remain in the state of ignorance and illiteracy of some sort. Ignorance and illiteracy can constitute a barrier to cleanliness and good standard of living. If there is no access to information due to inability to read, understand and above all, put the information to proper use, there is bound to be a wrong perception of values. Part of the problem in Nigeria today, which is, militating against a clean environment, is high level of illiteracy. Behaviour cannot be changed without effective communication of information to the individual.

Effective communication eliminates ignorance and leads to a change in outlook and behaviour. It should be noted that communication is done through language, which is the prime instrument of persuasion through which an individual beliefs, behaviour, convictions and attitudes could be changed. Literacy must of necessity make effective use of language.

Waste Defined

Wastes, according to Weller (1997) are “Scrap materials, an effluent, or, otherwise arising from the application of any process or any substance or article which is required to be disposed of, which has been broken, worn out or otherwise spoiled.” Ackenfeider and Cecil (1972) define waste as ‘material that be can transported and treated and recycled, buried and burned’. Alternatively, we could say that waste is a complex phenomenon that comprises, at least, liquid (from excrement, industry), organic (from agricultural, human sources) gaseous (from excretion and emission) metabolic and non-metabolic (from excretion) waste conditioning (from nuclear reaction, for example) and radio-active (from materials science) junk. These wastes include household garbage, chemical and fertilizer waste. Construction debris, industrial solvent, medical, commercial and business waste. From the foregoing, it is clear that waste is something that is not wanted and must be thrown away, but which could be converted into something useful.

For our purpose in this study, we limit ourselves to waste generated in households, schools, business premises, motor parks and markets. The rapid economic growth in recent years, which has resulted in the rising income and rural-urban drift, has favoured a higher rate of consumption of natural and other packaged goods. This in turn has increased waste in our cities.

Waste Management in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States

Refuse in Calabar (Cross River State) and Uyo (Akwa Ibom State) urban centres are generally picked up manually first by individual households and business outfits. Later, it is evacuated mechanically. Emptied in trucks equipped with compactors. Thirdly, and sadly, the debris is dumped in an open disposal site. Ideally, garbage should be disposed of, in a sanitary landfill, in trenches, rolled over by bulldozer and buried in earth. The same-levelled (covered) landfill can be utilized as recreational parks; hence, nothing is wasted. Otherwise, refuse should be properly incinerated, rather than being left in the open that is traditionally done in the most of our cities.

To avoid air pollution, the incinerator exhaust gases can be cleaned and the heat energy utilized in order to reduce cost. Such incinerators were installed along the Isolo Express Road in Lagos during the administration of Governor Lateef Jakande. The administration of Obong Victor Attah similarly installed one near the Itam model motor park in Uyo. There is none in Calabar, however. This calls for some level of education beyond mere basic literacy. Following the Environmental Sanitation and Protection Task Force Edict No. 12 of 1988, Environmental Sanitation and Protection Agencies were set up in all the states of the Nigeria Federation and at the federal level, and charged with the responsibility of ensuring a clean environment. The edict also empowered the agencies to arrest and prosecute defaulters of sanitation rules and regulations.

The Akwa Ibom and Cross River State governments, with assistance from the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) have put in place solid waste management systems by providing central refuse bins at strategic locations within the major towns and more importantly, creating dumps sites for the disposal of public solid wastes. The two capital cities have their streets swept daily by paid staff and drain ways cleared of debris to give the environment a better and more beautiful look. In addition, small metal waste pans are provided at public places (e.g. Ibom Plaza, Millennium Park) and strategic positions along some major streets (In Calabar for example, along Murtala Mohammed High up to the city gate). With greater awareness being created in recent years, many people are becoming aware that our earth is being polluted. This has led to the formation of environmental sanitation committees in our schools and universities. Student associations are getting involved and are providing refuse bins in classrooms and strategic locations on campuses.

Unfortunately, in spite of the efforts made by the state and local government authorities, non-governmental organizations and student associations to ensure maintenance of environmental quality, many individuals remain insensitive and continue to abuse the environment through indiscriminate disposal of wastes.

The refuse disposal agents too have relaxed their efforts in carrying out their civic and social responsibilities towards the attainment of an excellent and clean environment. The public refuse bins are usually not emptied as and when due by the appropriate authorities. This has resulted in indiscriminate dumping of refuse in unauthorized places on the roadsides, in gutters, in the frontage of homes, and around the refuse bins. This situation constitutes an eye sore and a threat to human health (and it is common to find people selling and buying edibles close to such refuse bins). After a heavy downpour, it is common to find major streets littered with waste from gutters and other locations.

In most cases, the negative habit and practice of indiscriminate dumping of waste is occasioned by failure of the appropriate agencies to implement their often well-formulated policies. These agencies fail to collect and dispose wastes regularly, even when in some cases, members of the public are made to pay, at the beginning of the year, for such services. These sanitation agencies (Calabar Urban Development Authority (CUDA) and Uyo Urban Development Authority (UUDA) have on many occasions abandoned their primary duty and focused on illegal revenue collection through fines on people, who park their vehicles at undesignated locations.

Consequences of Indiscriminate Waste Disposal

Urbanization and industrialization have increased the tons of new types of waste such as toxic and other radioactive substances, which can endanger health if not properly disposed. Though nature can dispose or recycle small quantities of certain waste, a lot of damage can be done to man, the environment, through indiscriminate waste disposal.

Poor handling of solid waste has many undesirable consequences. Dumped on roadsides, streets and gutters, solid waste obstructs water drainage systems, thereby causing flooding and eventual erosion. In August 2005, the blocking of a major drain way with solid wastes in Calabar South Local Government Area led to its overflow, which flooded the whole area causing damage worth millions of Naira and leaving residents homeless.

In the same month, construction debris indiscriminate disposal of waste also obstructed a drain way causing an environmental damage to the Graduate school and Centre for Educational Services (CES) buildings of the university of Calabar with many valuable documents lost.

Indiscriminate waste dumps provide breeding places for disease-carrying agents like flies, cockroaches, mosquitoes and rodents. The stench oozing from these cause air pollution, which is hazardous to the environment and human health. Open burning of this

could result in air pollution, which can cause eye irritation or lead to blindness and respiratory problems. Waste indiscriminately disposed degrades the environment and robs it of aesthetic value.

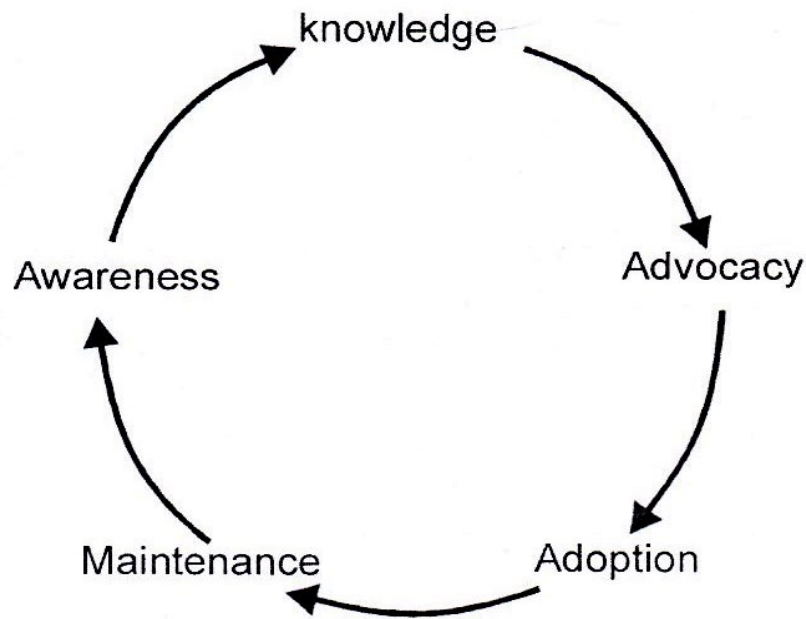
Literacy and Waste Management

Though literacy has a lot to do with competence in reading and writing, western alphabetic literacy has naively encouraged people to assume that literacy starts and ends with decoding written symbols into sound and vice versa. With the appropriate technology, almost all waste materials can be recycled, and used as substitutes for raw materials in order to cut cost and serve the environment from pollution. The essence of human perception is critical in environmental issues.

The way in which the individual perceives the environment is bound to regulate his/her relationship with it. As Ebong (1995) puts it, "the key to successful control of environmental problems lies in the planner's effort to comprehend a whole range of problems intrinsic to people's perception of their environment and their concomitant behaviour". He further maintains that "without self-understanding, one cannot hope for an enduring solution to environmental problems which are fundamentally human problems". This, for our purpose, means that the human mind has a fundamental role to play in waste management. People attach meaning to the perceived environment and the meaning influences their behaviour. It is what is in the individual's mind that directs him/her to proper or improper handling of wastes. If his values and attitudes could be changed, this would bring about a change in the society/environment.

This is more crucial in some parts of the world because the systematic form of waste disposal is a recent development, especially, treating it as an integral part of health and welfare service. And how can this change be effected? It is through literacy. Literacy that goes beyond the mere ability to read, write and compute; the kind of literacy that could change one mentally, the kind of literacy, which according to Erukoha (2002) "... equips one with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to fight and conquer his or her environment", the kind that "... Truly makes one to realize his or her humanity..." the kind of literacy that could give one a broader outlook and better perception of a clean environment and even lead to social change. For such a change to take place, awareness must be created in the individual. Awareness when created, should be adopted, maintained and advocated if attitudes and perceptions must change.

The process should be a continuous one, a chain process from one individual to the other and from one stage to the other, as represented in the following behaviour framework model adopted from Akpan (2005).



In other words, though literacy is an essential ingredient for human development and thus a means of promoting universal human values, we think that meaningful, sustainable, literacy involves not just higher levels of literacy competence but the interpretation, utilization, of ideas linked with specialized body of knowledge of the practical world. As we had mentioned earlier, literacy makes use of language by means of which one could positively teach, express positive things and values, explain, inform, direct, enlighten, praise, play, please, etc., or (negatively) cheat, deceive, lie, mistreat, misinform, misdirect, deride, inflate, annoy, antagonize, confuse, etc. (Essien 2003).

It is thus clear that literacy is associated with ordinary everyday activities of the people. It influences human perceptions. The people must possess the right kind of values, attitudes, goals, and aspirations to be able to keep high environmental standards. In other words, literacy creates awareness of the dangers of a filthy environment and certain environmental practices that are inimical to health (Okon, 2006). This is why deliberate efforts should be made to educate and inculcate in the people a sustained culture or personal hygiene and interest in the maintenance of environmental quality.

The Nigerian nation, therefore, took a step in the right direction when she adopted a National Conservation Education Strategy in 1989, which made for the integration of Environmental Education into the nation's school curricula in furtherance of educational policy which recognizes, at all levels, the need to know and appreciate the environment in order to keep it safe and healthy (National Policy on Education (NPE) 1977, 1998 & 2004).

In a bid to achieve this goal, the government is confronted with many obstacles among which are illiteracy and poverty. The provision of information to the masses is a vital part of any programme intended to improve the society and this can best be achieved when local language is used. To fail to use the local language where appropriate is to go

against the wind of development, for as Prah (1995) cited in Bassey (2002) rightly observes, underdeveloped countries in Africa remain underdeveloped partly on account of the cultural alienation which is structured in the context of the use of colonial languages.

So, a good part of the problems associated with waste management could be reduced through communication, using simple language and clear, catchy message in radio-jingles, television programmes, poster and billboards. Nigerian language and Pidgin English can, and are being effectively used for this purpose.

For instance, some advertorials on waste disposal in Calabar and Uyo urban are done in Nigerian Pidgin, Efik, Ejagham, Ibibio, Oron, Annang languages on the radio and television. In one of such advertorials on television, the negative disposal habit is shown and marked with (x) while the good habit is also shown and marked with a (✓) sign. Since a picture is worth more than thousand words, this impression lasts in the minds of the people. Again, the adverts are repeated at very frequent intervals. The cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC), Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC) and NTA Uyo and Calabar carry these pieces of enlightenment campaigns against improper refuse disposal. Through these jingles, people are sensitized, and enforced by the picture, on how to dispose their waste.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the fact that all waste and wastes management problems are human related, our solution to these problems must of necessity be re-focused on man himself-his knowledge of the environment, his attitude and orientation. Since environmental issues (waste management inclusive), is an all-human affair, every individual citizen has the responsibility to protect the environment in one way or the other so as to create environmentally, friendly society with its attendant bliss. The gospel of cleanliness must continue to be preached and practiced.

In practical terms thus, we recommended the following:

1. Orientation and sensitization of the citizens on the proper ways of packaging and managing their waste from their homes to the first-level disposal point;
2. Educating citizens on the consequences of improper disposal of refuse;
3. Formation and or re-invigoration of environmental clubs in schools and churches;
4. Putting in places proper and adequate equipment, logistics and programmes in all wards;
5. Developing waste managers capable of harnessing and sustaining waste disposal equipment to achieve the desired results.

6. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) should harness the resources from ministries of health, education, agriculture, science and technology, social welfare and national orientation agency to a more productive end;
7. Proper enforcement of environmental laws to create, re-enforce a culture of keeping our environment clean;
8. Attitudinal re-orientation for CUDA and UUDA operatives;
9. Investment in modern waste recycling technology which would keep our cities clean, create employment and engender technology acquisition.

These call for training and retraining of appropriate and adequate manpower. In all of these, literacy, and functional literacy, (and by extension language – local or foreign – becomes the tool for achieving this goal. For, as Essien (2010) rightly affirms, functional literacy should enable [even] rural people to, among other things, read sign, bill boards, posters, etc. in the local language and this will go a long way towards integrating rural communities with government. This paper's parting note agrees with Umoren (2001) that the power of effective communication as the positive meaningful contribution to the individual members of the society irrespective of the state of origin is highly invaluable to an orderly, healthful and peaceful society.

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