

Capacity Building Strategy for Sustainable Environmental Sanitation in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Environmental Sanitation is defined in this paper as the principles and practice of effecting healthful and hygienic conditions in the environment to promote public health and welfare, improve quality of life, reduce poverty and ensure a sustainable environment. Quality health and hygienic conditions is a fundamental right of all Nigerian citizens. While sanitation programmes and projects are relatively uniformly distributed throughout urban Nigeria, their impact on human welfare and life has been minimal. The Environmental Sanitation Policy and Programmes have been developed with scant attention to socio-cultural realities and contemporary challenges. The greatest challenge faced by the implementers of the Environmental Sanitation Policy and Programmes today is the exclusion of human capacity building as vital part of the programme implementation. This trend has contributed significantly to the high prevalence of communicable diseases that have continued to ravage the populace with grave health and economic consequences. No doubt, unhealthy population and damaged environment hinder progress towards developmental goals and there cannot be a healthy nation without healthy environment. Therefore, a wide range of actions are required to solve environmental sanitation problems in order to reduce and avert their consequential effects. This paper examines some cross cutting issues in the implementation of the existing environmental sanitation policy, programmes and projects. The paper also evolves a strategic framework for effective capacity building and empowerment of urban communities which could give credence to Sustainable Environmental Sanitation.

Keywords: environmental, programme, urban communities, capacity building, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

According to WHO/UNICEF (2007), environmental sanitation is the principles and practice of effecting healthful and hygienic conditions in the environment to promote public health and welfare, improve quality of life, reduce poverty and ensure a sustainable environment. The aim of a good environmental sanitation is to modify human environment towards the maintenance and promotion of health and prevention of diseases (Esrey et al, 2006). Therefore, there cannot be a healthy nation without a healthy environment. A reciprocal relationship exists between man and his physical, biological, social and economic environment. The day to day activities of man generally draw inputs from the natural base in his environment. This may be by way of raw materials for production or by direct utilization of the resources from the reserve in land, water and air. However, the use of these resources in turn results in the generation of various classes of waste. According to (Nwankwo, 2008), a major threat to the environment is the mismanagement of the waste and the resulting persistent and frequent epidemics from poor

environmental sanitation-related diseases such as malaria, typhoid fever, diarrhea, hepatitis, and cholera. Jha (2007) noted that the largest risk to humans comes in the form of diseases associated with poor environmental sanitation conditions.

Essential components of environmental sanitation as documented in the National Environmental Sanitation Policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria include) Solid waste management; ii) Excreta and sewage management; iii) Food sanitation; iv) Sanitary inspection of premises; v) Market and abattoir sanitation; vi) Adequate potable water supply; vii) School sanitation; viii) Management of urban drainage; ix) Weed and Vegetation Control; and x) Hygiene education and promotion (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005; 2006). In order to ensure improved environmental sanitation standards, Government of Nigeria, at various times and levels has developed environmental sanitation policies and programmes in

line with the realities and prevailing challenges (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005).

Environmental Sanitation Policies and Programmes in Imo State

The wide-ranging actions that have been taken by successive governments in Nigeria to avert the adverse health, economic and developmental effects of poor environmental sanitation conditions can be appreciated from the various environmental sanitation policies (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005 and 2006).

During the pre-independence era (1900 – 1960), several legislative controls were put in place to address the problem of Environmental Sanitation. Prominent among the controls were the Public Health Act of 1909 on Environmental Sanitation, Township Ordinance No. 29 of 1917 on Sanitation and Environmental Management and the Public Health Laws of 1957 to combat overcrowding, diseases and squalor (National Population Commission 2008). During this era, adequate sanitation was maintained by enforcement of the Public Health Laws through routine house to house inspection. The benefits of the legislative controls and measures at this time were however not universal because they were restricted to privileged areas (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005; 2006).

In the immediate post-independence era (1961 – 1980), legislation and authority on Environmental Sanitation were derived from the Nigerian Constitution as stated in the concurrent, exclusive and residual lists. Within this period, the sanitary inspectors were very effective in the maintenance of Environmental Sanitation from urban to rural communities (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005, 2006).

In the current dispensation (1981 – date), all tiers of Government have developed legislative/regulatory instruments to further address the issue of sanitation. These include among others the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) Decree No. 58 of 1988 and No. 59 of 1992 as amended; National Policy on Environment of 1989 and 1999 as amended; Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Decree No. 86 of 1992; and the creation of the Federal Ministry of Environment. The Federal Ministry of Environment had the overall mandate of ensuring a healthy environment for her citizenry. It was expected to address the problems of poor Environmental Sanitation; to engender improved productivity; and to foster equitable share of the job and joy of national economic development. This gave the impetus to the creation, at various times, several agencies responsible for environmental sanitation at the State and Local Government

levels (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005 and 2006; Anijah-Obi, 2013). Noteworthy within this period was the military regime of Buhari and Idiagbom in Nigeria (1983 to 1985) which started the monthly national environmental sanitation strategy with war against indiscipline. During this period, sanitation was improved across the nation. However, the public viewed the programme as a type of military order that had no public mandate. (Anijah-Obi et. al., 2013).

Further efforts include the development of the National Environmental Sanitation Policy of 2005. The National Policy aims at providing sound Environmental Sanitation, which shall assure sustainable environment and protection of human health. The Policy was developed in accordance with the National Policy on Environment (1989); goals of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in the creation of wealth, employment and poverty alleviation; Millennium Development Goals (MDG); World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) targets; and the aims of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) initiatives. The policy and consequent programmes were expected to improve public health and optimise the impacts of the huge investments in the sanitation and health sectors (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005, 2006; Anijah-Obi et. al., 2013).

Earlier in years 2000 and 2003 respectively, the National Council on Environment reiterated the need for there-introduced of the House to House Sanitary Inspection to detect environmental nuisances and to proffer solutions for their abatement. The council noted that the House to House Sanitary Inspection of Premises is the bedrock of environmental sanitation as it covers most of its facets (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005, 2006; Anijah-Obi et. al., 2013).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the efforts of governments in the formulation of the environmental sanitation policies and in implementing the associated programmes and projects, minimal successes have been recorded. According to Chuwuemeka, Ugwu and Igbwegbe (2012), the policies, programmes and projects have been piecemeal, uncoordinated, non-conforming to the socio-cultural norms of sanitation practices in the communities and above all devoid of an appropriate strategy to provide focus and direction for implementation. This trend has contributed significantly to the prevalence of communicable diseases and high profile of dirty environment in the country. Egun (2012) reported that environmental sanitation related diseases such as malaria, cholera, typhoid, diarrhoea, pneumonia,

tuberculosis and helminthic infestations are responsible for morbidity, mortality and majority of hospital admissions in the country. Studies have also shown that these conditions diminish productivity, erode household income and reduce educational potential and ultimately exacerbate poverty (Nkwocha and Egejuru, 2010). In addition, the prevailing dirty environment in most of our cities and the resulting health consequences has continued to discourage tourism and meaningful investments in the country. Iwuala (2012) observed that the national cost of lost productivity and huge curative health costs constitute a major drain on the local and national economy.

According to Nwachukwu (2010), most of the states in Nigeria do not have adequate facilities to achieve an ideal environmental sanitation. Nwankwo (2008) opined that environmental decay is a perennial problem in Imo State. In most urban areas of the state, there is gross environmental pollution or contamination due to poor sewage and refuse disposal, lack of safe and adequate water supply, poor food hygiene practices and poor housing. These environmental hazards have continued to provoke high morbidity and mortality rates in the society leading to adverse health, economic and developmental effects. Today, Imo State has abandoned the monthly sanitation programme and only very few states in the nation still conduct the exercise with reduced popularity, enforcement, and public participation. Unfortunately, the sanitary inspection is almost forgotten in the state and the trained inspectors are less motivated because the government currently pays little or no attention in their area of service (Ohaka et al, 2013). More so, political interference with the statutory role of Sanitary Inspectors has led to the collapse of the house to house inspection programme (Oil Resources and Allied Limited 2008). The resultant effects are the use of toilet facilities by unlimited number of people, presence of overgrown trees in living areas, ecosystem destruction and general poor sanitation in the state in particular and the country in general (Nwachukwu, 2010).

The environmental sanitation challenges faced by urban centres of Imo State today are different and more complicated than before. It is worthy of note that Imo State has abundant manpower for the implementation of her Environmental Sanitation Policy. Never the less, the greatest challenge faced by the implementers of the Environmental Sanitation Policy and programmes today is the exclusion of capacity building as a vital part of the programme implementation (Oil Resources and Allied Limited, 2008; Chuwuemeke et. al. 2012).

This paper posits that community capacity building is an appropriate strategy for effective implementation of environmental sanitation projects and programmes. According to Teferra (2010), community capacity building is an evidence-driven process of strengthening the abilities of individuals, organizations and systems to perform core functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably. It involves the transfer of competencies necessary for community groups or individuals to identify their issues and address their concerns (Dressendorfer 2005; Eade 2007).

ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION CHALLENGES IN IMO STATE

A pleasant environment that is free of hazards and promotes healthful living is a fundamental right of all Nigerians (WHO/UNICEF, 2007). Currently, the environmental sanitation situation in the country is as follows:

Solid Waste Management

Available records show that in Nigeria, 41.53% of the population dispose their refuse within their premises, 37.8% dispose into the bush and only 13% use sanitary dustbin. In all, about 81% of Nigerians used one method or the other adjudged as insanitary (National Population Commission 2013). From the study conducted in Imo State by Anunonwu et al (2009), 47.5% use refuse bins while 36.4% take to street dumping. This is not a very healthy situation since the hazards of the street dumping by this high percentage can cancel the benefits of organized refuse bins collection. According to Chuwuemeke et. al. (2012), in most cities and peri-urban centres of Imo State, refuse heaps are left unattended to. Some of the waste materials are toxic while others are non-biodegradable which pose potential health hazards to humans and the environment. The recycling of the waste is negligible while methods of storage, collection, transportation, compaction and final disposal are irregular, sporadic and very unsatisfactory. This has not only constituted visual blight and odour nuisance but also encouraged the breeding of rodents, mosquitoes and other pests of public health nuisance and ultimately questions the standard of environmental sanitation in Imo State (Chukuezi, 2010). The scenario calls for the promotion of effective strategy for sustainable environmental sanitation in the country.

Excreta and Sewage Collection and Disposal System

From the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reports of the National Population Commission (2009, 2013), 10.1% of the urban population of Nigerian has no toilet facilities of any kind whilst 61.1% use pit latrines and 28.7% use flush toilets. According to the reports, 34.1% of rural households have no toilet

facilities at all. Many urban and semi-urban areas in Imo State have no central sewage collection and disposal system. Every home in the urban areas utilizes block lined private septic and soak away pits for excreta and sewage disposal. Even in the urban and semi-urban areas that use septic and soak-away pits, there is often a lack of water to run the system and as a result indiscriminate defecation and urination at dumpsites, gutters, bushes, rivers and any available open space in the late hours of the night and early hours of the morning are common practices (Nwankwo, 2008; Anunonwu, 2009; Ohaka et. al., 2013). The greatest dangers lie in the evacuation and disposal of the excreta and sewage from the septic and soak-away pits when they fill up. Typically, the wastes are disposed at public drains, ditches, ravens, unreclaimed borrow pits, and in isolated bush or forest areas. Consequently, the surface and groundwater are increasingly polluted or the disposed wastes are washed back to nearby streams by the next rain (Ohaka et. al., 2013). The insanitary methods of excreta and sewage management in Imo State have tremendous untoward effects on the health of the public and the environment.

Water Supply

Studies in Nigeria have shown that less than 70% of the urban population has access to safe sources of drinking water while about 70% of the rural population depends mainly on unsafe sources such as open wells, rivers and streams for drinking (Omemu and Aderoju 2008; National Population Commission 2009; Adah and Abok 2013). As corroborated by Nwachukwu (2010), Krebs (2010) and Ohaka et. al. (2013), the coverage of water supply facilities to the urban and rural population of Nigeria has been inadequate and water in poor quality and inadequate quantity have continued to pose a major threat to environmental sanitation and public health. It is a common phenomenon in Imo State to see long queues of jerry cans and buckets in the cities especially during the dry season (Nkwocha and Egejuru, 2010). In areas, which are served by public water supply, the wholesomeness of the water is sometimes not guaranteed because of poor maintenance of pipes, which are prone to constant leakages or seepage of contaminants (Nwachukwu, 2007). Esreyet. al. (2006) discovered that unwholesome or contaminated water plays a significant role in the aetiology of water borne diseases such as cholera, typhoid and paratyphoid fevers. Esreyet. al. (2006) and Nkwocha and Egejuru (2010) have confirmed that environmental sanitation related diseases jeopardize both the physical, social and environmental health of all people.

Food Hygiene and Safety

Chukuezi (2010) in the study on 'Food Safety and Hygienic Practices of Street Food Vendors in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria, reported that women made up 66.67% while males made up 33.33% of the food vendors. The average age group of the vendors was 31-40 years and 23.81% prepared food in unhygienic conditions. 42.86% did not use aprons; 47.62% handled food with bare hands and 52.38% wore no hair covering while 61.90% handled money while serving food. 19.05% wore jewelry while serving food and 28.57% blew air into polythene bag before use. 9.52% of the vendors stored food for serving openly in the stalls while 23.81% stored them in the wheelbarrows. 42.86% had leftovers for serving the next day with poor storage facilities. 47.62% of the vendors washed their utensils with dirty water which is recycled and used severally by 28.57% despite the fact that only 9.52% of them complained of water shortages.

Transportation of meat from the abattoirs in passenger vehicles or motorcycles is a common practice in most towns and cities of Imo State. Contamination occurs during transportation especially while using vehicles not designated for this purpose. Unfortunately, most of the food and meat are also not routinely screened for certain serious communicable infections. Besides, food meant for sale and human consumption are hawked on the streets or in traffic and many a time displayed in open containers, thereby exposing the food to the ever-ready opportunity of contamination (Nwankwo, 2008). Findings from studies carried out by Omemu and Aderoju (2008) and Nkwocha and Egejuru (2010) showed that most illnesses among the population result from basic sanitation failures that occur during food production, processing, retailing and handling. Chukuezi (2010) observed that large percentage of the poor in Imo State go hungry and for the percentage of those that have food, its wholesomeness is questionable. The sanitation practices of the food vendors have continuously created a profile of poor environmental sanitation in the state (Nkwocha and Egejuru, 2010).

Housing Sanitation

The environmental sanitation problems are made more acute by rapid urbanization and uncontrolled population growth without commensurate expansion in environmental sanitation facilities (Emeharole and Nwankwo, 1999; Amadi 2004). As observed by USAID (2008) human development and population growth exert many and diverse pressures on the quality and quantity of housing stock and on access to it. Good housing provides basic quality of life requirements, which include environmental sanitation facilities. Unfortunately, the city fringes of Imo State are

predominated with slums and shanties where poor sanitary facilities and practices are common phenomenon. These slums with poor housing are particularly due to poor implementation of town planning laws and inadequate provision of infrastructure and services. According to Muta'aHellandendu (2014), unmet housing needs results in increase in the disease burden of the urban population, which in turn, affects their health and productivity, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Drainage System

Majority of the public drains in urban area of Imo State is used as substitute facilities for toilets and waste disposal (Ohaka et. al., 2013). Besides, the public drains are characterized by poor maintenance system and as a result the drains are constantly blocked leading to environmental problems such as flooding, erosion, landslide and stagnant pools where mosquitoes and other disease-carrying vectors breed (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005, 2006; Anijah-Obi et. al., 2013). Muta'aHellandendu (2014) stated that about 50% of Nigerians suffer at least one acute episode of malaria every year. Poor surface water drainage has remained a common feature in towns and cities of Imo State. This has grave socio-economic implications in terms of productivity and environmental sustainability.

School Sanitation

According to Anijah-Obi (2013), the general environmental sanitation in schools in Imo State is poor. Majority of the schools in Imo State does not have adequate toilets facilities. Even where provided, the facilities are not functional due to lack of water to flush. In some cases the toilets are vandalized leading to defecation at corners and nearby bushes by the pupils. Studies have shown that lack of adequate, functional and sanitary facilities in schools diminishes the motivation of children, especially the females, for school enrollment and attendance and which in turn affects learning and developmental achievements of affected school children (Anijah-Obi et. al., 2013; Lawani et. al. 2014). An unhealthy population and a degraded environment hinder progress towards development goals. According to the World Bank (2006) and USAID (2008), achieving a healthy environment is dependent on sound sanitation infrastructure. In this wise, an appropriate strategy for effective implementation of environmental sanitation projects and programmes is imperative.

THE WAY FORWARD: COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING EXPLAINED

The focused is on community capacity building which is the process of developing and strengthening the skills,

instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in the fast-changing world (Dressendorfer 2005). It is a particular way of working with and supporting communities - to build skills and experience, increase opportunities, and enhance involvement in the decisions that affect them (Teferra 2010). It believes that communities are at the heart of human development and that when they are able to perform better, sustain that performance over time, and manage 'shocks' to the system; they can contribute more meaningfully to the achievement of national human development goals. It includes aspects of training, organisational and personal development and resource building, organised and planned in a self-conscious manner, reflecting the principles of empowerment and equality. According to Nu'Manet. al. (2007) and Teferra (2010), community capacity building is the element that gives fluidity, flexibility and functionality to a program/organization to adapt to changing needs of the population that is served.

Functional Levels of Community Capacity Building

According to Eade (2007), Community capacity-building takes at three levels: individual, institutional and societal levels. Community capacity-building at the individual level requires the development of conditions that allow individual participants to build and enhance knowledge and skills. It also calls for the establishment of conditions that will allow individuals to engage in the process of learning and adapting to change. At an institutional level, community capacity building involves modernizing existing institutions and supporting them in forming sound policies, organizational structures, and effective methods of management and revenue control. At the societal level, community capacity building supports the establishment of a more interactive public administration that learns equally from its actions and from feedback it receives from the population at large (UNDP, 2011).

Underlying Principles of Community Capacity-Building

Community capacity building is underpinned by the principles of empowerment, participation, inclusion self-determination and partnership with a common defining feature of programmes and activities developed through consensus building. The approach is also reinforced by the principles of equality, collective ability and assets building. Key aspects of Community capacity-building is about taking existing strengths and giving them the opportunities and support they need to develop. It focuses on supporting community groups and organisations to improve the quality of life for their communities. Core activities at the heart of the approach include strengthening skills and structure to develop

confident, active, influential, effective and inclusive community organisations through practical support (Eade, 2007).

Features of Community Capacity Building

The starting point for community capacity building is within communities themselves. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) and Teferra (2010) identified five areas of community learning and development work that support community capacity building to include the following: working with communities to assess their needs and plan for change; supporting the development of skills and confidence of activists and organizations; promoting broad-based participation in community affairs; assisting communities to exercise power and influence; and assisting communities to provide or manage services. Effective capacity building work involves the ability to focus on the community perspective, its needs and issues, with a particular emphasis on socially excluded groups.

Community Capacity Building for Sustainable Environmental Sanitation

Sustainable environmental sanitation management involves change in a programme's planning, implementation, and resource allocation. Four steps are vital and these are: use of existing community organisations rather than the creation of new ones; improvement of both the organizational capacity of community groups and their problem solving skills; involvement of women; and the inclusion of communities in project design, management, and financing. Success in influencing behaviour change has tended to depend on four factors namely: a clear sense of purpose; use of participatory techniques; inclusion of women as promoters and educators; and simultaneous employment of a range of techniques (Teferra, 2010).

The Setting for Community Capacity Building

The National Environmental Sanitation Policies of 2005 and 2006 highlighted the need for active community involvement in matters that affect environmental sanitation, rather than communities merely being passive recipients of professional interventions (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2005; 2006). The setting for the community capacity building in sustainable environmental sanitation projects and programmes includes neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities, community and voluntary organisations. At the heart of the participatory approach are the empowerment of communities and the strengthening of their capacity to take collaborative action under healthy and supportive public policy environment.

Approach to Sustainable Community Capacity Building Environmental Sanitation

Two distinct approaches are community-based and community development approaches. In the former, community is a venue for sanitation practices, behaviour and lifestyle programmes. In the latter, community is a place for organising and mobilising people to address the challenges that affect their environment. Irrespective of the approach adopted, successful community interventions depend on the understanding and sharing of power between the community and external agencies.

The Importance of Community Capacity Building

Community capacity building is the way in which communities can work to improve their quality of life by taking up issues and opportunities that matter to them. It is also an important part of shifting from a passive, blaming culture to one of activity, integration and shared endeavour. Again, government policy encourages community engagement across a wide range of policy areas. More so, people in communities, and in particular, those in excluded or disadvantaged communities, often experience challenges that they wish to overcome or may recognize as gaps in provision that they want something done about it. Finally, most of us want to live in a society that is safe, caring, inclusive, respectful, and in which we feel valued. Many people want to work towards such a society, by learning from each other, by making connections to others, through volunteering or by seeking change.

CONCLUSION

There is no single paradigm of the best ideas for a good Capacity Building Strategy for Sustainable Environmental Sanitation. However, the positive outcomes from community capacity building are: expanded citizen participation; expanded leadership base; strengthened individual skills; the creation of a widely shared understanding and vision; the development of a strategic community agenda; evidence of consistent, tangible progress toward goals; evidence of more effective community organizations and institutions; and evidence of better resource utilization by the community. Experience indicates that a combination of certain factors must be present for programmes to be considered successful. They should, for example, improve the health of beneficiary groups; achieve financial, organisational, and political sustainability; maximize the benefits of investment by reaching the greatest number of people; enhance local institutional and community capacity for organisation and management; and protect the environment. It is worthy note also that the choice of implementing institution, the division of responsibilities in service

delivery, and the coordination of the implementation process are important for programme success

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