

LIBRARIES, LIBRARIANS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: THE IMO STATE "CLEAN AND GREEN" INITIATIVE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This Paper discussed the role of libraries and librarians in environmental management vis-a-vis the Imo State "Clean and Green" initiative. The paper reveals that in developed and other developing countries, government partners with libraries and librarians to educate the public on environmental issues. In Nigeria, however, libraries and librarians are not recognized as formidable partners in the fight to protect, maintain and beautify the environment as evidenced in the composition of the Imo State Environmental Transformation Committee (ENTRACO). The paper highlights that for environmental problems to be successfully managed in Nigeria, libraries and librarians should be supported to play their rightful roles as depositors and purveyors of knowledge and information that will help the people to develop healthy environmental attitude as well as create awareness on the need to protect the environment.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental management is a process that entails (i) recognition of environmental problems; (ii) emergence of public awareness and political commitment to address these problems; (iii) formulation of environmental policies; (iv) expression of policies in regulations and legislation; (v) implementation and enforcement of policies, (Lovei and Weiss, 1998).

The framework for analyzing environmental management is usually established for efficient and effective management. Brassers and Honigh (1986) described the framework of analyzing environmental management by a simple three-phase model: in order to achieve something, first, one should want to achieve it (commitment and goals); second, one should know how to achieve it (instrument, rules); and third, one should have the power (administrative and institutional framework) to achieve it.

The above steps are evident in the Imo State government's bid to "Clean and Green" the state, Osuntokun (1997) stated that cities in the Eastern part of Nigeria which are relatively new and smaller than those in the West and North provide better environment for healthy living than their oversized counterparts.

The above statement gives credence to the wide-held belief that Imo State was the cleanest state some years back. Today, however, the state is in a sorry state of decay, neglect, degradation and overwhelming pollution with devastating sanitary conditions, disturbing landscape, complete aesthetic loss and thereby prone to increased

probability of epidemic outbreak. The lives of the inhabitants are thus endangered. One can then say that the "Clean and Green" initiative of the present administration is a timely intervention. How well this intention is translated to reality is left to the test of time. However, the strength of the foundation laid and the level of commitment and determination in its implementation will be significant explanatory variables to the achieved results.

The “Clean and Green” Environmental Policy

The “Clean and Green” initiative of the incumbent Governor Ikedi Ohakim was launched on Friday, August 10, 2007. Preparatory to this, the Governor constituted the Imo State Environmental Transformation Committee (ENTRACO) (Opara, 2007).

The Governor constituted a 147-man transition committee to develop the policy thrust of his administration, "the New Face of Imo". He subsequently set up another 4-man technical committee to aid implementation (Imo State Planning and Economic Development Commission, 2007). The emphasis of the "Clean and Green" initiative is on sustainable waste management, environmental beautification, environmental protection and environmental safety for the well-being of the state and its inhabitants. Government intends to use modern technological tools of refuse collection, treatment and disposal to execute the programme.

The unique, innovative and creative aspect of the programme is the “Green” initiative. By the "Green" aspect, the gutters will be drained; slabs will be created to form footways and street lights restored. The government plans to plant one million trees in the state within the first one year of this administration. Major streets in Owerri are to be paved with ornamental trees and flowers to give it the aesthetics of a modern city. The work of the Land and Environment Sub-committee focused on:

- ❖ Review of the master plan for Owerri and provision of master plans for Orlu and Okigwe and diligent implementation of the master plans.
- ❖ Digitalization of land records.
- ❖ Embarking on urban renewal and beautification for a clean and green Imo State [the Clean and Green Initiative (CGI)].
- ❖ Improved management of solid waste (modern sanitary landfills, recycling and composting plants, regular drain dislodgement).
- ❖ Effective use of sanitary inspectors.
- ❖ Systematic and aggressive public enlightenment to ensure effective participation in sanitary and environmental management.
- ❖ Implementation of law and by laws on sanitation,
- ❖ Focus on waste to wealth through Private Public Partnership (PPP).

- ❖ Development of adequate policies/laws that will guarantee healthy and sustainable environment. (Imo State Planning and Economic Development Commission, 2007).

Composition of Imo Environmental Transformation Committee (ENTRACO)

The membership of ENTRACO is a broad-based representation with the aim of making the "Clean and Green" initiative, a programme of the people- This is intended to make the people of the state internalize the clean and green programme as something they are to live with and ensure its success without allowing an outside force to try to coerce them into compliance.

The Imo ENTRACO thus has representatives of such vital segments of society as traders, commercial transport operators (including “okada” or “inaga” commercial transport operators). The inclusion of a representative of the traders is a laudable judicious choice, considering the fact that most of the wastes generated in Owerri are from the markets. The ubiquity of motor parks, the refuse, noise and other forms of waste generated from there, gives support to the inclusion of the leadership of motor parks operators. Opara (2007) reported that Owerri has over ten (10) illegal motor parks with its attendant problems in terms of waste generation and traffic congestion. It is however, worthy of note that librarians and the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), Imo State Chapter, who generate, acquire, store, process and disseminate information in all aspects of life for societal consumption and wellbeing are conspicuously left out in the composition of ENTRACO. This lends credence to the lack of recognition of librarianship as an instrument of governance by successive governments in the state and the country at large.

The omission of librarians in vital government committees where their professional expertise would otherwise have been of great value has been a re-occurring unpleasant decimal in Nigeria generally. In many instances, even core (professional) librarian's jobs/appointments have been given to non-librarians.

Environmental Problems: Causes and Management

Environmental problems are varied and worldwide. Some environmental problems are natural while others are man-made. The man-made environmental problems are more common and varied. Most of them are directly related to the population of a particular region or city and the level of development associated with the region or city.

The various activities of man on the environment over the years are the root sum of the environmental problems being experienced the world over today. Jayavasu in Kolb (1991) stated that environmental problems are interrelated and the roots of the

problems are human in nature. Therefore, to understand the environmental problems, one needs to begin with the human factor.

Ayoade (1997) also stated that the climate exerts influence on man and his socio-economic activities in many and diverse ways. Man in turn influence climate through his various activities. Thus environmental problems such as deforestation, desertification, pollution (noise, air, water) and solid waste generation tend to increase as the human population increases. Available statistics show the following:

1. **World Population Growth:** By 1960, the world population was 1.65 billion. By 1950, it has increased to 2.5 billion. By 2000, it increased to 6 billion. By 2005, it increased to 6.45 billion. By September, 2007, it is believed to have reached 6.6 billion and by 2050 it is expected to have reached 9 billion. (Wikipedia).
2. **World Urban Growth:** By 1900, world urban population was 220 million (13% of world Population). By 1950, it has increased to 732 million (29% of world population). By 2005, it has reached 3.2 billion (49% of world population). By 2030 it is expected to have reached 4.9 billion (60% of world population)- (Wikipedia).
3. **World Size of Cities:** In 1940, only one out of one hundred people was living in a "million city". By 1960s, one out of sixteen people was living in a "million city". By 1991, one out of eight people was living in a "million city"

Based on available statistics, Jayavasu in Kolb (1991) concludes that depletion of resources is an unavoidable problem. More lands are needed for settlement and agricultural uses, just as fertile lands are being ruined by industrial and residential development. Land for public utilization, i.e. city parks, recreation areas, garbage disposal, etc., are more difficult and expensive to find. While the city is requiring labour forces for development, the urban poor, the main city labourers, can hardly find room to live. As a result, an increasing number of unhealthy slums are recorded in most cities. Water demands for personal, agricultural, business and industrial uses are greatly increased while water supply is diminishing. Pollution is thus a result of population outgrowth, urbanization and industrialization.

Though the above scenario is worldwide, the problem is compounded in Imo State and Nigeria generally by lack of political will and abuse of public resources thereby making the problem of environmental pollution seem insurmountable.

The available statistics indicate that population increase, urban growth, and size of cities are contributing significantly to the increase in environmental problems. There is thus an urgent need to seek for ways to manage these problems.

Different countries have different ways of dealing with environmental problems. Osumokun (1997) suggested a decongestion of our crowded cities through the building of new and smaller towns while the centres of the old cities should be pulled down and turned into green belts. This is because in Nigeria, we do not have the know-how or the resources to sustain cities inhabited by millions of people.

Ayoade (1997) on his part stated that given the crucial role of the atmosphere and climate in the earth total environment, it is imperative that man must control, if not totally eliminate, those activities of his that may adversely affect climate and the earth atmosphere. There is only one atmosphere and one planet.

Public awareness is also one of the key measures in preventing and solving environmental problems. Lovei and Weiss (1998) are in agreement with the above statement by noting that the key to sound environmental management is the degree of importance that the public and its representatives assign to environmental matters.

If the issue of environmental problems is to be effectively managed thus, everyone must be involved the government at the federal, state and local levels; traditional rulers, town union leaders, village heads, societies, non-governmental organizations, landowners, teachers, students, professionals, etc. Therefore mechanism for interaction and consensus building among all affected parties becomes important elements of environmental policymaking.

Environmental Problems and Management: Role of Libraries and Librarians

Libraries and librarians play significant role in the management of environmental problems. Kolb (1991) stated that as one of the institutions that serve as depositories of knowledge and information, libraries can play an important role in disseminating information and organizing activities that create public awareness and understanding of important national concerns, such as that of the protection of the environment. To illustrate, this correlation, UNESCO and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration organized a sub-regional workshop on the role of public and school libraries in promoting awareness on environmental issues and problems. The workshop was organized within the framework of the UNESCO Network of Associated Libraries (UNAL) (Kolb, 1991).

Libraries and Librarians are well suited to play this role because libraries are considered as non-formal educational institutions which provide books and information in order to help people to develop healthy ways of thinking, positive participation in day-to-day economic, social and political activities and favourable dynamic behaviour. The services are geared towards motivating creativity and innovations for improving the status, quality and productivity of society as a whole. Libraries are considered as democratic institutions for education, culture and

information which provide continuing and life long education and through a collection of knowledge, offer accurate information and current thinking on vital issues (Krolak, 2005).

The role of libraries in helping the people to develop healthy ways of thinking and participation in daily community living and favourable dynamic behaviour is a role which the federal, state and local governments in Nigeria should encourage by providing adequately for the library to enable it change the poor orientation of the populace to environmental problems and management. The Imo State government's "Clean and Green" initiative in particular will be channeled to a focused and successful path should the present administration recognize the role of libraries and librarians in this project, else the hindrance created by the widening gap between the government and the citizenry may be a stumbling block that may derail the good intentions of the project.

Some library activities used in promoting awareness of environmental issues are:

- Acquiring and providing books and information materials related to the environment;
- Providing information dissemination services through Journals/newspapers clippings, selective bibliographies, guides in finding information, current awareness services, selecting and re-packaging information materials and mobile libraries;
- Organizing activities to create public awareness on environmental issues and problems such as campaigns, workshops, meetings, forum lectures, exhibitions, film/video shows, rallies, as well as radio/television programmes;
- Mobilizing students and other youths to take interest in protecting and preserving the environment by arranging programmes such as book talks, storytelling, plays, songs, and quiz contests on environmental themes, encouraging school children to read and share what they have read on environmental issues with friends and family members;
- Reinforcing the initiatives of environmental groups and organizations through library activities.

Krolak (2005) also highlighted the role of libraries and librarians toward environmental issues when he stated that, they are no longer passive keepers and preservers of books, rather, they have evolved to become facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on service, identifying user needs and communicating solutions. Modern libraries are unfolding the community's learning potentials by providing information on community issues, such as health, employment, continuing education and local history.

The availability of systematic public information on the environment is a powerful tool to facilitate the interaction of policymakers with the general public. Lovei and Weiss (1998) are of the view that the public have a right to information on issues concerning them, the right to expect that environmental policymakers will act according to publicly expressed environmental objectives, and that government officials will be competent and well trained to implement policies.

Viscusi (1996) however stated that the public has a tendency to overestimate risks that have received substantial media attention even if such risks have low probabilities. Librarians thus bring their professional competence to play by providing equitable access to unbiased information to both government and the general public.

Government in developed and some developing countries, realizing the importance of libraries have partnered with them for the beneficial purpose of providing the right information to both the government and the public. In the United Kingdom, public libraries secured government funding in the mid 1990s for computers in every library as part of the "People's Network Project" (Bertelsmann in Krolak. 2005), a project that assures that no one needs to be excluded from the information revolution. Also libraries in UK, Denmark, Finland, the USA and Singapore are modern examples of highly developed library systems that are an integral part of a national education and information strategy based on library laws and appropriate funding.

Involvement of Libraries and Librarians in Environmental Information Management

Many countries have come to appreciate libraries as a veritable tool for reaching out to citizens and, by implication, has an ability to contribute to their cultural and formative development. This facilitates the development of the citizens at all levels; as workers, as producers of economic, cultural and social wealth, and as human beings in general (Martin, 2006).

The Hon. Deputy Governor of Bangkok, Dr. Jitbhong Jayavasu, who is also the president of Green Globe Society, at a workshop on environmental issues awareness, expressed his appreciation that the library groups will join hands in actively promoting awareness on environment! issues.

In Nigeria, however, not much can be said on the support of the government to libraries and librarians to encourage and enable them discharge their rightful role even in the present day democratic Nigeria. The government and other relevant organs have failed to see the library as the true local gateway to knowledge, which provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social group.

The government also seems ignorant of the fact that libraries in Nigeria are agents that can enhance the citizens' constructive participation in governance, and that the development of democracy depends on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information which libraries can provide given the required recognition and support.

It is thus left to librarians in I mo State and Nigeria in general to make the government and other agencies to realize the very significant role libraries and librarians can play in environmental protection. This can be done by planning series of national seminars on the formulation of a national policy on the development of library and information services; promoting active participation of librarians in international and national campaign, conferences, radio/television programmes, as well as membership in voluntary and professional organizations (stale, national or regional) and by sensitizing government authorities, mass media, teachers, parents, community leaders and international non-governmental organizations on library programmes and services.

Problems Affecting Libraries and Librarians in Promoting Awareness on Environmental Problems and Management

There are obstacles which libraries and librarians have to overcome in order to take more active role in promoting awareness on environmental problems and management. Some of these are:

Studies on environmental problems as well as information on noteworthy environmental activities are scattered and not made accessible to users. Most environmental projects and activities are not documented thus causing duplication or overlapping of work.

There is the absence of appropriate national policy on library development that should guide the overall co-ordination and provision of necessary resources to enable libraries and librarians provide adequate service.

Most libraries in developing countries lack the required financial support and qualified staff necessary to provide expected library services. There is also poor public awareness of the role of libraries and librarians. This situation has been attributed to lack of political support by all levels of government. This is best demonstrated by libraries being given very low priority, if at all, and a poor share of the department's budget.

The relationship between libraries, librarians and different individuals and institutions like the media, need to be enhanced, in order to ensure their support. The relationship with parents, teachers, government and non-governmental organizations, and other

community leaders also needs to be enhanced to ensure adequate participation in library activities and the maximum utilization of services.

The absence of librarians in important government positions where key policy decisions are made. Librarians need to begin to take active interest in international, national and state politics.

Challenges to the "Clean and Green"¹ Initiative

Some problems that may arise with effort to protect the environment are:

- **Funding:** Cleaning and Greening a state that for years has reeled in refuse and squalor is capital intensive which is why the government should endeavour to adequately meet the financial commitment it entails.
- **Political Maneuverings:** Some political opponents/personalities who may not be comfortable with the current administration or the "Clean and Green" initiative may want to discredit the programme. The government thus needs to exhibit a lot of political will to achieve the aims of this projects
- **Committee's Excessiveness:** There is the tendency of members of ENTRACO to overzealously go beyond its terms of reference. Some members may even be tempted to divert money and materials meant for the project.
- **Citizens' Resistance to Change:** Cleaning and Greening a state like Imo will lead to retrieval of green areas and other public lands that have been illegally acquired by certain personalities including the removal of shops, motor parks and markets constructed at unauthorized places. This will no doubt generate resistance from those affected.
- **Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons:** The "Clean and Green" project will lead to the displacement of persons and businesses as a result of the removal of illegal structures. There is then the need to rehabilitate the people in order to give the project a human face.
- **Problem of Sustenance:** Maintaining environmental cleanliness involves continuously putting into practice those behaviours/activities that will rid the environment of refuse and poor sanitary attitudes. The need to sustain the "Clean and Green"¹ initiative is thus a big challenge,

CONCLUSION

Environmental problems will continue to occur and increase as the world population increases and urban migration and the size of cities increase. The key issue then is management. For the environmental problems to be successfully managed in Nigeria, libraries and librarians must be supported to play their rightful role as depositors of knowledge and information that will help the people to develop healthy ways of thinking, positive dynamic attitude and also organize activities that will create awareness on the need to protect our environment.

The “Clean and Green” programme of the present administration in Imo State is timely and commendable. However, the membership of ENTRACO has to be broadened to include librarians, horticulturists and ornamentalists whose professionalism will greatly boost the success of the project,

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