

## **THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION AGENCIES IN SUSTAINING THE IMO STATE GOVERNMENT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME**

*Maurice U. Aniebo*, CLN

Library Department, Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri

### **ABSTRACT**

The indiscriminate and improper management of solid wastes in Nigeria is a serious environmental problem. This paper examines the efforts made by the Nigerian government towards inculcating environmental friendly and hygienic culture in the citizenry. In particular, the paper focuses on the Imo State "Clean and Green Initiative" (CGI) aimed at addressing the environmental problems in the state. The role of libraries, information agencies and NGOs in sustaining the vision is also discussed. The paper concludes that environmental education, access to information, systematic and aggressive public enlightenment would ensure effective participation of the people in the Clean and Green Initiative.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The *Dictionary of natural resource management* (1996) defined environment as "the combination of climatic, physical, chemical and biotic conditions that may affect the growth and welfare of an organism or group of organisms". Udo & Akpan (1997) described it as the "outer physical and biological system in which man and other organisms live". Environmental protection, therefore, is the prevention and control of damage to the environment arising from the action of people or natural factors.

A clean and protected environment is essential for human safety, good health and sustainable development. In recognition of this fact, many African cultures and societies have traditional norms and values which protect the environment. In a typical village in some parts of the South-East geo-political zone in Nigeria for instance, the precincts of shrines, sacred places and public places are kept clean. The villages converge on a particular day to clean their environment. Incinerators locally produced with red earth were used to burn garbage. The youths are mobilized to clean up public places and patch damaged roads with red soil under the supervision of the elders during festivals to ensure easy movement of invited guests.

To conserve the land, a parcel of land is usually left fallow depending on the need of the owner. Fruits and sacred trees such as iroko, cotton tree, shrubs, and so on are planted to protect the environment as well as provide fruits and vegetables. Bush burning was not rampant then and as a result, the environment was fully protected.

In recent years, however, environmental sanitation, refuse collection and disposal have posed serious problems. Public concern on the issues continues to be expressed in the media. Serious and commendable efforts on environmental protection were made by the former military regime of General Muhammadu Buhari and Major General Tunde Idiagbon. On July 6, 1985, the regime introduced the National Environmental sanitation to be observed on the

last Saturday of every month throughout the country between the hours of 7.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. With the introduction of War Against Filth (WAF), War Against Indiscipline (WAI), War Against Corruption and Economic Sabotage (WACORES) and the necessary legal backing through the Environmental Sanitation Edict No. 18 of 1984, the national clean-up exercise was sustained then.

As a holistic approach to environmental management in Nigerian, the Federal Government by Decree No. 58 of 1988 established the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA). The state and local government councils were also directed by the Decree to establish Environmental Protection Commissions and Committees respectively.

The introduction of the compulsory monthly clean-up exercise nation-wide coupled with the cash prize award of one million naira for the cleanest state capital gave Nigerians a clean-city environment. It was during this period that Owerri, the Imo State capital was adjudged the cleanest state capital in the federation.

One would have expected that after years of compulsory monthly clean-up exercise, that Nigerians would have imbibed and internalized the desirable habit of maintaining clean and healthy environment. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case as shown by heaps of solid wastes that often block the major streets in Owerri, like along Douglas/Ama J.K. road, Royce/Rotibi road. Tetlow/Mbaise road, Wethcral roundabout and Emmanuel College road. Other environmental problems in the state capital include, disused vehicles and containers abandoned on the roads, indiscriminate erection of bill-boards., sign posts, posters and banners in an unauthorized locations, illegal structures, flooding of major streets after rainfall, unregulated operation of motorcycle operators, indiscriminate location of motor parks, street trading, inadequately developed public open spaces, littering of pure water sachets everywhere, air, land and water pollution. It is clear from the foregoing that urban environmental problems are essentially people-oriented. The ideas, attitudes and behaviours of different peoples are critical variables for the problems. Access to information and acquisition of knowledge on environmental protection could reduce this trend and increase the people's contribution to the success of the government's Clean and Green Initiative.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this paper are to:

1. Examine the significance of Imo State government's environmental protection policy of "Clean and Green" initiative.
2. Discuss the roles libraries, information agencies and **NGOs** can play in sustaining the "Clean and Green Initiative".

## **Clean and Green Initiative (CGI)**

The Imo State Clean and Green Initiative was formally launched on Friday August 10, 2007 by the Senate President, David Mark. The Clean and Green Initiative is a carefully thought-out programme of Chief Ikedi Ohakim's government aimed at addressing the environmental problems in the state. According to Oguike (2007), the Clean and Green initiative is a vital

component of the new Face of Imo agenda and is in line with the federal government's "Keep Nigeria Clean" programme spearheaded by the National Orientation Agency (NOA).

On assumption of office and in keeping with his campaign manifesto of giving Imo State a new face, Governor Ohakim formally inaugurated a 15-man Environmental Transformation Committee (ENTRACO) on July 6, 2007 at the Multipurpose Hall, Owerri. According to the Governor, "the Clean and Green Initiative is aimed at transforming the urban centres of the state into serene environment in which the lives of Imo citizens are protected from the present calamitous state". The terms of reference of the committee were as follows:

1. Environmental sanitation and beautification of Imo State.
2. To ensure that the "Clean and Green initiative" campaign to restore Imo State to its former position as the cleanest state in the Federation is achieved.
3. To provide sustainable services, environmental protection as well as inspect refuse sites in both urban and rural areas of the state.
4. To improve on the current Waste Management system.
5. To initiate policies for modern technology in refuse collection, treatment and disposal in the state.
6. To deploy and supervise sanitary inspectors for effective implementation of the "CGI" programme.
7. To design and implement a master plan for managing solid waste in Imo State.
8. To liaise with the Local Government Councils and ensure that all illegal motor parks in the state are removed.
9. To liaise with the Imo State Sanitation Court and ensure the implementation of the sanitation law.
10. Any other job that may be assigned to the committee from time to time by the Governor.

The emergence of ENTRACO in Imo State has given the state capital Owerri a new lease of life. There are noticeable improvements in solid waste collection and disposal. Illegal structures have been demolished, bill boards, sign posts and banners on unauthorized places have also been removed, and campaign against street trading intensified. ENTRACO has also done well in the area of de-silting of gutters which has reduced street flooding after rainfall.

The Governor has restored the monthly sanitation exercise in the state on last Saturdays of every month from 7.00 am. to 10.00 am. To underscore the importance attached to the present campaign, government has already appointed a total of 270 environmental health inspectors to undertake regular sanitary inspection of private and public places throughout Imo State. Five mobile courts are to be set up to handle the speedy prosecution of sanitation offenders (Oguike, 2007). Under the scheme, government plans to establish modern sanitary landfills recycling and composting plants for fertilizer and other useful by-products.

The Clean and Green initiative is significant in many ways. The initiative will promote healthy living and sanitary principles among the citizenry as well as provide good environment for tourism and investment in the state. The Clean and Green initiative is not a luxury but a prime necessity that will transform Imo into a modern model state.

### **Library and Information Services for sustaining the CGI**

Public libraries perform such functions as selection, acquisition, organisation, dissemination and preservation of information materials which are crucial for national development. One of the reasons for the non-implementation of government's laudable programmes is that information about these programmes hardly reach the people directly and timely in the form or language they understand. The process of transforming the society requires the communication of the right kind of information at the right time to the target group.

Public libraries as agencies for active transmission of information have roles to play in environmental education. Aboyade (1984) explored the communication potentials of the library and the various information media for non-literates. She found that radio, posters and other visual media were useful in communication and generating discussions among the non-literates.

The Clean and Green Initiative requires series of actions grounded on improved method of information dissemination and a participatory process. Public libraries could offer the following services:

- ❖ Identify the information needs of the communities, policy makers and those involved in the Clean and Green Initiative.
- ❖ Build up collections of books, pamphlets, journal and newspaper articles on Clean and Green Initiative, sanitation, healthcare and environmental protection.
- ❖ Repackage relevant information on Clean and Green initiative into the form or language suitable for the non-literate and lower social groups.
- ❖ Disseminate relevant information to the people through various means such as **display** and exhibitions, talks, demonstrations and film slide or other audiovisual presentation.
- ❖ Reinforce specific message on CGI already given out through other information agencies.
- ❖ Capacity building for environmental protection agents through training in information literacy and handling skills.

The library should be seen as an essential agent for the successful implementation of the government's environmental protection programme. Students, rural masses, women, traders, artisans, civil servants, professionals, industrialists and so on need different kinds of information to keep abreast with the government programmes and latest development.

Public library intervention through extension and community outreach programmes such as book exhibitions, radio talks, television programmes and film shows could be useful for the enlightenment of the citizens on the Clean and Green Initiative. The people can also acquire more knowledge from the information generated by the library.

Public libraries also could liaise with NGQs, information and media houses such as Imo Broadcasting Corporation. Federal Radio Corporation and NTA Owerri to establish community information centres for the provision of information on health, nutrition,

sanitation and environmental protection in different formats and media. This will help to promote good health, clean environment and the socio-economic upliftment of the people.

### **The Role of Imo State Orientation Agency**

A re-orientation, programme for the people of the state for attitudinal change is very important for the success of the Clean and Green initiative. The blueprint on the Imo State Clean and Green initiative pointed out that "the biggest beneficiary of a Clean environment is the people yet, the highest resistant to the government environmental upliftment programmes comes from the same people." It becomes paramount that the Imo State Orientation Agency has crucial roles to play in inculcating environmental friendly behaviour and culture in the citizenry through sensitization, effective re-orientation and mobilization. The agency could also monitor government's policies and legislation on environmental protection and explain to the people the cost-benefits.

The agency should be seen as a coordinating centre for the promotion of the Imo State government's clean and green initiative. It can launch aggressive sanitation campaign and public education in urban and rural areas of the states to increase public awareness on the dangers imminent in environmental abuse.

### **The Role of the Mass Media**

The mass media organizations in the state have vital roles to play in creating awareness on government's activities and programmes. Public enlightenment programmes such as jingles, phone-in-programmes, news corner, drama, dial-a-solution, discussion programme in English and Igbo languages could be mounted and carried out on radio and television regularly. The media has also a crucial role to play in the eradication of ignorance about the good intentions of the government in making Imo State a beautiful and clean environment.

Mabawonku (2001) identified radio audio-visual recording materials like television and films, newspapers, posters leaflets, magazines and books as very useful in providing information on sanitation, nutrition and childcare to people living in urban and rural areas.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Imo State Library Board should ensure that library and information services get the people in urban and rural areas.

Public libraries should collaborate with NGOs such as UNDP, UNESCO, World Bank and Green Environmental Movements to obtain materials on environmental information which could be repackaged into the form or language suitable for the rural majority.

Government should provide the necessary fund to the Imo State Library Board to enable the library embrace ICT and provide the needed information for the sustenance of CGI.

Public libraries should be repositioned as educational institutions for the promotion of information literacy and the use of ICT.

The mobile library service should be revived and properly equipped with relevant environmental information materials to cater for the needs of people in the rural areas. There is a need for the Government to update the laws and byelaws on environmental sanitation and to ensure full implementation.

There is need also to introduce environmental education into the school curriculum from primary to tertiary levels. This will help to inculcate permanent positive healthy and environmental friendly habits in the people.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the efforts made by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Imo State Government in particular, on environmental protection. The following conclusions can be drawn from the paper. The Imo State Clean and Green Initiative will promote healthy living, and enabling environment for socio-economic development of the state. The environmental abuse witnessed in urban and rural areas are people-inflicted. People need to be educated through appropriate re-orientation strategies on the cost-benefits of the Clean and Green Initiative in order to sustain it. Access to information on environmental protection, systematic and aggressive public enlightenment would ensure effective participation of the masses in the programme.

Libraries, information agencies have crucial roles to play in the sustenance of the CGI agenda. To this end, information about environmental management and sustenance could be re-packaged and disseminated to people at urban and grassroots levels. The Imo State government's Clean and Green Initiative is a task that must be done now to guarantee a healthy and sustainable environment in the future.

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