

Environmental Protection in Nigeria: the Role of Librarians

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Abstract

This study has looked into the role of librarians in preventing the effects of environmental pollution and degradation in Nigeria. Questionnaire was used in collecting data for the study. 120 copies of the questionnaire were shared among Nigerian Librarians who attended the 51st Annual Conference/ General Meeting of the Nigerian Library Association held at Calabar, Nigeria from 9th to 14th June 2013. 107 copies of the questionnaire were properly completed and returned. From the analysis, the mean score 3.75 represented the librarians, who agreed they should participate in creating awareness on environmental protection through information dissemination. Wrong disposal of waste materials (3.54) was among the major factors the librarians agreed were responsible for environmental pollution and degradation in Nigeria. The following mean scores: 3.42, 3.24, and 2.78 respectively, represent availability of different helpful resources through which the librarians can provide the required information. A leading effect of environmental pollution and degradation as found in the study was death (3.77), and one of the positive measures to reduce these effects was dissemination of appropriate information (3.34).

Keywords: Librarians; Environmental Protection; Nigeria

Introduction

An environment simply means the surroundings where man lives and carryout his daily activities. Man breaths air, drinks water, and eats food prepared in his environment. It is recognized that man's healthy environment promotes his healthy living. However, according to Uchegbu (2002), an environmental pollution is the release of potentially harmful substance into the environment. Thus, as harmful substances are released into the air, water or food through man's activities, it is polluted and becomes harmful to life. This shows the need for people to protect the beauty of their environment. When we talk about environmental protection, we refer to the protective measures given to land, water and air: the three main sustainers of life. Olamigoke, Badmus-Agbite and Olowofila (2011), remind us that the 5th of June every year is chosen by the United Nations General Assembly as the World Environmental Day since 1972. The idea has been to draw the attention of people to the need for environmental protection.

A good example of a state in Nigeria with clean and an inviting environment is the Cross River State.

We believe that people in the state must have been provided with information on the need to avoid diseases

such as diarrhea, dysentery and malaria, which easily spread in dirty and degraded environment.

Land degradation is caused by various forms of erosion leading to detachment, transportation and deposition of soil particles and minerals at different positions down the slope. Lands subjected to this condition often become costly to use in support of life. Streams and rivers are polluted through deposition of eroded materials from highlands. Adegoye (2000) pointed out that the problem with Nigerian environment has to do with industrial activities and industrial fumes which pollute streams and rivers; uncontrolled logging and tree felling, uncontrolled fuel wood extraction, overgrazing, bush burning, non-reclamation of mining waste-lands and pits. Air pollution on the other hand, occurs through various economic and domestic activities of the people, leading to the release of harmful gases such as sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and carbon dioxide (Uchegbu, 2002)

The duties of librarians revolve around selection, acquisition, organization, preservation, and dissemination of useful information to people with information needs. Information, which librarians use in rendering services to people, means data or facts which can be used for decision-making or to solve a given problem. It is a class of events and it occurs for a purpose

(Agboola, 2010). Information is central to human existence and the basis for political and socio-economic liberty (Osuigwe, 2011). Since librarians live in the society, where they practice their profession, they have a crucial role to play in environmental protection. They can provide relevant and useful information (as information specialists) designed to encourage people to maintain a healthy environment. Olajide (2008) has pointed out that people in the rural areas need information on how to prevent malaria. He supports the idea of establishing public libraries and creation of adult education classes for enlightenment of people on the factors responsible for the spread of diseases. Librarians are in the position to make use of audio-visual materials to pass information to the people, especially in their local language, showing the dangers of environmental pollution and degradation.

Statement of the Problem

Environmental Problems in Nigeria should concern everybody. In 2012, many farm lands were washed away and some communities were rendered homeless by flood, leading to environmental degradation. Refugee camps were built in the affected states, while government provided food items and money for settlement of affected communities. There are also cases of malaria arising from the effects of mosquito bites. Poor road construction, unplanned settlements, poor farm activities and indiscriminate disposal of wastes are to a large extent responsible for environmental pollution, degradation and breeding of mosquitoes in Nigeria. The problem is to what extent can the librarians in this country help in reducing the factors responsible for environmental pollution and degradation ?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. show that Nigerian librarians can use their professional practice to create awareness on environmental protection
2. ascertain what the librarians agree are factors responsible for environmental pollution and degradation in Nigeria.
3. find out sources of information which the librarians agree can be used to provide Nigerians with helpful information on the subject.
4. ascertain through the opinion of the librarians, the effects of environmental pollution and degradation in Nigeria.
5. find out actions, the librarians think should be taken by Nigerians to reduce environmental pollution, degradation and their effects.

Methods

The descriptive survey research method was used in this study. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. It was made up of five parts: (i) awareness on the need for environmental protection; (ii) ways Nigerian environment is polluted and degraded; (iii) availability of information sources on environmental pollution and degradation; (iv) effects of environmental pollution and degradation; and (v) actions to be taken by the librarians. One hundred and twenty copies of the questionnaire were produced and distributed among librarians who attended June 2013 Annual Conference/General Meeting of Nigerian Library Association held at Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. 107(89.1%) copies of the questionnaire were properly completed and returned. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The criterion mean was 2.50 and each item's mean was weighed against the criterion mean to determine its level of agreement or disagreement. The mean score 2.50 and above were considered positive responses to the question items.

Literature Review

Causes and Consequences of Environmental Pollution and Degradation

According to Adegoye (2000), Nigeria has environmental problems arising from drought, desertification, and different forms of water erosion and urban flooding causing blockage of drainage systems. The environment is stressed, polluted and degraded through various chemical, physical, biological and social activities of the people. There are roads without gutters in many of the local government areas. These roads are often damaged by flood. Solid wastes block drains and cause flooding (Onwasigwe, 2008). There are used tyres and empty water-proof bags, which are scattered at some road sides and they provide living accommodation for mosquitoes. As unremoved wastes degrade urban environment and constitute an aesthetic nuisance, open burning of wastes leads to air pollution with carbon monoxide (Onwasigwe, 2008). According Uchegbu (2002), the sources of air pollution include automobiles, industrial activities, combustion engines and domestic fire. He also agreed there is noise pollution arising from socio-economic and religious activities of human beings and these cause vibrations in the surrounding.

According to Ukoli (2000), Urbanization and industrialization have made waste management difficult in Nigeria. To Osinusi (2007), there are indoor and outdoor air pollution materials such as wood, coal and Kerosene burnt through cooking. The continued use of

wood and charcoal for cooking in developing countries leads to the release of dangerous gases such as carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide and sulphur oxides which the people breath (Bruce, Pere-Padilla and Albalak, 2000).

According to Swaddiwudhipong, Karintraratana and Kavinum (1995), the outbreak of shigellosis (dysentery) in many developing countries is due to consumption of water from dirty environment arising from poor sanitation. The disease does not have age limit of its infection. They stated that such water is polluted by bacteria which can also contaminate food handled carelessly in the environment. Both Ballester and Sunyer (2000) have pointed out that contaminated water causes gastrointestinal illness, while chemicals in drinking water cause various types of cancer. Diseases such as Cholera, tuberculosis, dysentery, diarrhea and typhoid fever are water borne. Stagnant dirty water especially in the gutters attracts mosquitoes which cause malaria. Uchegbu (2002) has also pointed out that polluted streams and rivers have colour and they reduce the quantity of available oxygen, leading to the formation of ammonia and hydrogen sulphide. This type of water does not support life. On the other hand, erosion damages roads linking states, and communities in Nigeria. (Anosike and Obi, 2013); (Anyanwu, 2013).

Air pollution causes drowsiness, headache, chicken pox, measles and whooping cough (Uchegbu, 2002). He is also of the view that atmospheric pollution causes depletion of the ozone layer, while deforestation can lead to desertification and environmental degradation. It is equally clear that noise pollution causes nervousness, lack of concentration, and hinders communication. According to Osinusi (2007), 23% of all deaths are caused by environmental factors. For children within the ages 0-14 years, death attributable to the environmental pollution is up to 36%.

The Role of the Librarians in Environmental Protection in Nigeria.

It is through dissemination of relevant information that librarians help people in Nigeria stop engaging themselves with activities responsible for environmental pollution and degradations. Libraries where the librarians work are professionally organized collections of graphic and non-graphic materials for exploitation (Ochogwu, 2007). The organized relevant information and knowledge is made available to Nigerians to encourage them recognize the need for environmental protection. According to Olamigoke and Badmus-Adegbite (2011), Nigerians, especially women need information on the dangers of environmental pollution. Displayed

information in posters showing an environment littered with refuse and allowed to be destroyed by erosion would help the rural and urban dwellers understand the need for environmental protection. The illiterates can understand the devastating effects of dysentery by looking at the relevant posters on the subject. They can also learn about other subjects of their interest from poster collections in the library (Ike, 2005). Filmstrips, video tapes, and radio cassettes enhance the work of rural librarians in meeting the demands of their clientele (Adewale, 2001).

Workshops and conferences on environmental protection are organized by librarians in their libraries (Gericke, 1998). They invite people from different professions to participate in the workshops. Librarians provide conference halls for health professionals who organize workshops on various health problems (Ugwoke, 2010). They conduct programmes, provide library users with print and electronic access to information on environmental preservation, safe sanitation and sustainable farming strategies (Nnamdi, Uzuegbunam and Alor, 2014). Librarians provide internet services in public libraries to help students and health professionals have access to various health information (Ugwoke, 2010). They also make use of newspapers and magazines to promote health activities (Anyaku, 2014). According to (Ugwoke, 2013), librarians are trained to help all people in search of knowledge, especially in the area of health. In support of the war against illiteracy which is one of the causes of environmental pollution and degradation, IFLA/UNESCO (2001) recommended that public libraries should promote education through provision of relevant reading materials, and access to appropriate information at all levels. Ukoli (2000) called for public educational outreach programmes which should be located at communities, work places and schools. Librarians with their mobile libraries embark on public educational outreach programmes on safe sanitation, using films and CD-ROMS for community health information in the language understood by the people. They maintain files of variety of information, print and non print on the identified needs of the people (Ocha, 1995). Computers are also used to organized and preserved the identified information needs, especially as it concerns the environment.

Results

Likert scale was used in structuring the question items. Likert scale measures the degree of agreement or disagreement. It provides the respondents with the options of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and strongly Disagree (SD). Each question item was allowed a total of ten points shared in the following

order: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 Therefore, 10 points divided by 4 = 2.5. Mean score 2.5 and above were positive responses, while those below were negative responses.

Table 1: Mean Response on the Extent Librarians Agree they Should Join Other Information Workers in Creating Awareness on Environmental Protection in Nigeria.

Item	X	Decision
To what extent do you agree librarians should join other information workers in creating awareness on environmental Protection in Nigeria?	3.75	Accepted

Data(3.75) presented in table 1 above showed the librarians agreed they should participate in creating awareness on environmental Protection in Nigeria.

Table 2: Mean Responses on Factors Which the Librarians Agree Contribute to Environmental Pollution and Degradation in Nigeria

Factors	X	Decision
i. Wrong agricultural practices leading to erosion	2.85	Accepted
ii. Congestion of settlements	3.22	Accepted
iii. Wrong disposal of waste materials from industries	3.54	Accepted
iv. Wrong disposal of waste materials from homes	3.60	Accepted
v. Burning of petroleum products	3.32	Accepted
Vi. Smoke from cooking and industrial activities	2.87	Accepted
Vii. Poor road construction	2.90	Accepted

In table 2, the mean scores were 3.60, 3.54, 3.32, 3.22, 2.90, 2.87, and 2.85 for items I-VII, respectively. The table has shown the entire items were rated positive.

Table 3: Mean Responses on the Availability of Information Sources the Librarians Agree Can Contain Useful Information on Environmental Protection.

Sources	X	Decision
i. There are audio-visual materials such as videos, CDs and maps in the libraries	2.78	Accepted
ii. There are chapters in books and articles in journals with information on the dangers of environmental pollution and degradation in Nigeria.	3.42	Accepted
iii. There are good and well illustrated articles in newspapers and magazines on environmental pollution in Nigeria.	2.87	Accepted
iv. There are Internet services with information on environmental pollution and degradation	3.24	Accepted

Table 3 above has four items. The mean scores of all of them were positive. They were in the following order: 3.42, 3.24, 2.87 and 2.78 respectively. Chapters in books and articles in journals (3.42) and Internet Services (3.24) had the highest mean scores.

Table 4: Mean Responses on the Effects of Environmental Pollution and Degradation in Nigeria

Effects	X	Decision
i. It can cause death	3.77	Accepted
ii. Displacement of a community	3.40	Accepted
iii. It can cause diseases such as cancer	3.44	Accepted
iv. It reduces economic activities	3.40	Accepted
v. It can reduce social interaction between communities	3.10	Accepted

In table 4, there are five items. All of them were rated positively. The mean scores stood in the following order: 3.77, 3.44, 3.40, 3.40, and 3.10, respectively. It can be seen that death (3.77) had the highest mean score followed by diseases (3.44) caused by environmental pollution.

Table 5: Mean Responses on the Actions the Librarians Should Take as Solutions to the Problems.

Actions to be taken by the librarians	X	Decision
i. Purchase and process illustrated materials on environmental protection.	3.34	Accepted
ii. Monthly display of books, magazines and newspaper articles on the dangers of environmental pollution and degradation.	3.34	Accepted
iii. Provision of film shows, CDs and videos on how to avoid environmental pollution in the country	3.54	Accepted
iv. Organization of workshops on sustaining the environment	3.49	Accepted
v. Provision of Internet services	3.07	Accepted

Data in table 5 above show there are five items (I -V).They were rated positive. The mean scores were in file following order: 3.54, 3.49, 3.34, 3.34 and 3.07, respectively. Film shows, CD-ROMs and videos (3.54) had the highest mean score.

Discussion

The study has shown that Nigerian librarians agree they should join other information workers in the country to create awareness on environmental protection. This is in recognition of the fact that environmental problems affect every life in the environment (Adegoroye, 2000).The librarians share common environment with other people in the society. The findings also show that there are many wrong uses of the environment by Nigerians. The wrong uses include congestion of settlements, poor agricultural practices, poor disposal of waste materials, poor road construction and smoke from cooking and industrial activities (Ukoli, 2000); (Uchegbu, 2002). Illiteracy among the people causes them to embark on poor agricultural practices, and wrong disposal of waste materials.

Non-availability of sufficient lands, poverty, and the desire of many Nigerians to live close to their business centres often give rise to their congested settlements. Good toilet facilities are sometimes lacking in such settlements.

On the availability of sources of helpful information for preventing environmental pollution and degradation in

the country, the librarians agreed there is information in books, journals and the Internet. It means the librarians are in the positions to help the country through information dissemination. Librarians in every type of library in the country (public, academic, medical, and special) are given the opportunity to educate other Nigerians on the dangers of environmental pollution. According to Okeke(2013),the Federal Government of Nigeria approved the release of N10 billion for the Great Green Wall project aimed at addressing the issue of environment. It is believed in every informed society that prevention is better than cure.

The study has also shown that the effects of environmental pollution and degradation in Nigeria include death, diseases, displacement of communities, and reduction in socio-economic activities. In Delta State of Nigeria, camps were built for flood -displaced communities in 2012. The implication is that the country suffers in terms of loss of human and material resources arising from environmental pollution and degradation.

It is encouraging to note that librarians in Nigeria have known the actions they should take to help prevent environmental pollution and degradation in the country. By using films, CD-ROMs, and videos, they can communicate with both the illiterates and literates on preventive measures. They can also organize display of resources monthly on the issues of environmental management. Organization of workshops/seminars supported with Internet services are also considered useful.

Conclusion and Recommendations The problems of environmental pollution and degradation in Nigeria are many and they should concern every Nigerian. The earlier the problems are prevented through creation of awareness by both the government and the librarians, the best for all.

Thus, Nigerian librarians as information managers should lay hands on useful resources, acquire and process them for dissemination of relevant information to the general public. There should be public enlightenment using films, CD- ROMs and slides on the dangers of environmental pollution and degradation.

Nigerian libraries, especially the public libraries should create a database on information related to environmental pollution and degradation. The resources should include print and non-print materials.

Nigerian government should make adequate funds available to the libraries to enable them discharge their duties effectively. The librarians should be regularly given funds by their parent bodies with which to organize workshops on environmental protection.

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