ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION IN THE DYNAMICS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT
This Study focuses on the role of Communication and the application of its approaches, principles, strategies and technologies to Environmental Management and protection in Nigeria. It is argued that despite some serious attempts by the Governments, (Federal, States and Local) to establish Agencies to address environmental issues, the overall positive impact is not noticeable. Various reasons for this failure were advanced and the need for the use of communication and the Media to help strengthen the management of Environmental Education and Awareness for sustainable development was advocated. The Study further advocates for freedom of access to information on issues about environment, both from the governments and various Agencies on environment, to the public, Media and all who need such information. It could help to change attitudes. Various Communication approaches and tools are suggested which must involve multi sectorial grouping of Stakeholders with defined targets, monitoring and evaluation packages inclusive. Environmental Communication will be a useful tool for national development if its various positive aspects are skilfully utilized.

INTRODUCTION
Environmental communication refers to the study and practice of how individuals, institutions, societies and cultures craft, distribute, receive, understand, and use messages about the environment and human interactions with the environment. This includes a wide range of possible interactions; from interpersonal communication to virtual communities, participatory decision-making and Environmental Media Coverage. From the perspective of practice, Alexander Flor (2003) defines environmental communication as the application of communication approaches, principles, strategies and techniques to environmental management and protection.

With the commitment of Nigeria to a National Environmental Policy, setting up goals and strategies for implementation, what positive results can the country hold as gains? The last devastating flood disaster in 2012 resulting in an unprecedented loss of human and material resources were concrete testimonies that nothing significant has changed in our techniques of environmental management and protection, especially among the vulnerable sectors of the society.
In Nigeria the first attempt to establish an Agency to address environmental issues on a national scale was in 1975 when the Division of Urban Development and Environment was created in the Federal Ministry of Economic Development. It was supposed to handle pollution and other matters. Subsequently the Division was relocated in 1978 to the Federal Ministry of Industries. In 1979, the Environmental Planning and Protection Division were established as part of Federal Ministry of Works and Housing. In 1988, following the dumping of toxic wastes in Koko Port in Nigeria, involving local collusion with international polluters, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) was created by Decree No. 58 of 1988 as a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing. In 1992, the FEPA was transferred to the Presidency through Decree 59 of 1992. Various states in the federation, subsequently established their own State Environmental Protection Agencies, in response to the national environmental policy recommendations. The further extension of the environmental protection agency activities and units to the Local governments recommended in the FEPA Decree, the National Environmental Policy and the Agenda 21 has however not been achieved anywhere as expected.

Diverse reasons have been given why most of the Agencies and their activities have failed to make the necessary impact. Some have put it as originating from Nigeria’s colonial mis-amalgamation of very diverse nationalities—both culturally and politically. Others include:

1. The limitation of significant efforts in most areas of environmental activities at all levels, especially at the local and community levels.
2. Poverty level, a major determinant factor in some of the causes of environmental damage in the country, does not seem to be improving. On the contrary the rich seem to be getting richer and the poor getting poorer. The middle class is not doing better.
3. Corruption in the country has increased with rapid impunity. Without the eradication of corruption in the country most good programmes will continue to suffer from deprivation.
4. Poor regulatory and enforcement system.
5. Uncoordinated activities of the various Regulatory agencies and bodies on whose jurisdiction lie the fight against the abuse of the environment.
6. Poor funding and management of available resources.
7. Inadequacy of the Nigerian Educational curricula at all levels to incorporate adequately contemporary environmental issues, and many others.
Among the various reasons why a serious gap exists between the huge input into the programmes and the expected benefits in positive results, especially among the community members, and policy makers in their various perceptions and practices can easily be traced to gross underestimation of the important roles of communication, information dissemination and marketing of the environmental products. A noticeable, but positive shift in the application of some aspects of the media is now being deployed sparingly, since the last flood disaster, by some states that were significantly affected.

At the various state and Local government levels there should be significant and sustained efforts to sell, to all stakeholders the obvious gains and implications of positive environmental activities. If the management of Environmental Education and Awareness for sustainable development is to make more positive impact, communication elements must be made central in the achievement of the policy goals of the Federal government.

In the United Kingdom and the U.S, the emphasis is on the freedom of access to information on the environment, and the regulations place a duty on bodies to make available, information to the public and individuals who need them. The collation of environmental information and research findings and the wide publicity given to them throughout the country must form the basis for action.

ISSUES IN ENVIRONMENT.

Brief information about environmental core issues will serve as a guide to the communication efforts which are necessary. Application to specific issues that affect the country most will be concentrated upon in this paper.

The Natural Environment encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally on Earth or some region thereof. It is an environment that encompasses the interaction of all living species. There are an estimated 8,000 Species of all living things with 6,500 of them living on the land (Aljazeera 2013).

The concept of the natural environment can be distinguished by components:

a. Complete Ecological units that function as natural systems without massive human intervention, including all vegetation, microorganisms, soils, rocks, atmosphere, and natural phenomena that occur within their boundaries.

b. Universal Natural Resources and physical phenomena that lack clear-cut boundaries, such as Air, Water, and Climate, as well as Energy, Radiation, Electric Charge, and Magnetism, not originating from human activity.
The Natural Environment is contrasted with the built-up environment, which comprises the areas and components that are strongly influenced by humans.

It is the common understanding of the natural environment that underlies environmentalism—a broad political, social, and philosophical movement that advocates various actions and policies in the interest of protecting what nature remains in the natural environment, or restoring or expanding the role of nature in this environment.

Goals commonly expressed by Environmental Scientists include:

- Reduction and cleaning of pollution with future goals of zero pollution
- Clearly converting, non-recyclable materials into energy through direct combustion or after conversion into secondary fuels.
- Reducing societal consumption of non-renewable fuels
- Development of alternative, green, low-carbon or renewable energy sources.
- Conservation and Sustainable use of scarce resources such as Water, Land, Air.
- Presentation of representative or unique or pristine Ecosystems.
- Preservation of threatened and endangered Species extinction.

The establishment of Nature and Biosphere reserves under various types of protection and most generally the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems upon which all human and other life on earth depends.

Sources of Environmental Degradation.

In discussing general environmental issues, especially as they affect us in this part of the world, it is important to look at two broad categories: sources of environmental degradation and environmental pollution.

By environmental degradation we would mean all those causes of environmental deterioration which result from inaction in the things we should have been doing to prevent them or from things arising from action by people beyond the control of our own particular community. By sources of environmental pollution we mean those sources which result from our own actions due to material or pollutant by-products, especially when we fail to take full pro-active actions to eliminate them at source.

Among some of the commonest but troubling sources here include the following:
a. Global environmental pollution.

The potential dangers of Global Warming are being increasingly studied by a wide
global consortium of Scientists. They are increasingly concerned about the potential
long-term warming on our natural environment and on the planet. Of particular
call is how climate change and global warming caused by anthropogenic or
human made releases of greenhouse gases, most notably carbon dioxide, can
intricately have adverse effects upon the planet, its natural environment and humans’
existence.

These include: loss of ice caps in the arctic regions, rising sea levels, with their
attendant floods, land losses, and some aspects of the expansion of world deserts.

b. Natural Soil Erosions.

The major cause of environmental degradation, which occurs in the country as a
result of our inaction, is soil erosion of naturally (geographically) prone areas of the
country.

c. Inadequate Farming, Mining, Poor Road Construction and Residential
   Expansion.

These are essentially as a result of human actions and inactions leading to
environmental degradation, and deterioration and pollution. Most of our urban
housing activities and residential areas are located in unplanned environment and
haphazardly. This leads to inability to plan good drainage systems and other places
for social services to serve those communities.

d. Other major Environmental challenges in Nigeria.

Most of the troubling environmental activities in Nigeria include Environmental
health issues like waste management, air pollution, pesticides, insecticides and other
public health issues. Desertification, wildlife: the management of all non-
domesticated plants, animals and other organisms. All these are impacted by human
activities.

It is no longer in dispute that mankind is today faced with a catalogue of environmental
problems that seem to threaten the supportive ecosystems and indeed human existence on
earth. At first, it appeared that better life on earth solely depends on vigorous
industrialization, economic prosperity, and political stability. The pursuit of comfort and
advancement in technology seemed to have driven many nations of the world towards
uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, neglect for abatement measure in industrial processes and poorly managed environment (FEPA, 1999). The impact or effects of these unchecked activities of human race to improve its lot has been subject of intense interest all the world over, even as its ex-post losses stares us directly in the face.

ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATION AND THE MEDIA

From the FEPA (1999) document the activities highlighted over a long period there is clear evidence that communication and the media were not given due and deserving attention in support of the environment. Of all the print publications, out of about 40 published local seminars, conferences and workshops, only two of them at that period, organized by the Nigerian Conservation Fund targeted communication and education. The international conferences listed had no single one on communication and the role of the media on sustainable environmental issues. How then does the public appreciate the overwhelming challenges of environmental and public health issues and the need to constantly protect their environment? There is no doubt that reporting the environment through the print and the electronic media and various other ways, is the vital gateway to awareness, behaviour modification and positive change. Informing the public is now a critical part of the job.

Environmental Communication has been credited with the specialized knowledge and tools to reach the target audience in a persuasive and highly professional manner, and to foster effective or inspiring communication that alleviates environmental issues. As an academic field, environmental communication emerged from interdisciplinary work involving communication, environmental studies, environmental science, risk analysis and management, sociology and political ecology. Flor (2003) considers it as a significant element in the environmental sciences. ‘Environmentalism as we know it today began with environmental communication...’ According to Flor, Environmental Communication has six essentials:

1. Knowledge of ecological laws.
2. Sensitivity to cultural dimension.
3. Ability to network effectively.
4. Efficiency in using Media for Social agenda setting.
5. Appreciation and practice of environmental Ethics.
6. And conflict resolution, mediation, and arbitration.
Environmental communication is also a type of symbolic action that serves two functions. Those functions are pragmatic and constitutive. Environmental communication is pragmatic because it helps individuals and organizations to accomplish goals and literally do things through communication. Examples of this include educating, alerting, persuading and collaborating.

Environmental communication is constitutive because it helps to shape people’s understanding of environmental issues, themselves and Nature; it shapes meanings we hold of these things. Examples of this include values, attitudes, and ideologies, vis-a-vis Nature and environmental issues and problems.

Nigeria has been spared the constant agony of managing major serial traumatic natural disasters as can be seen happening in most parts of the world, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, ocean surges, and prolonged drought resulting in massive starvation and great loss of lives. We have been lucky so far.

However, some of the international observations about Nigeria’s situation include the one from the U.S Energy Information Administration. April, 2000:

‘Air and marine pollution are major problems in Nigeria that are further exacerbated by the fact that Nigeria does not have pollution control policy, until recently, however, there has been no great incentive for plans to implement pollution abatement policy. The Federal government has indicated that it is no longer willing to tolerate oil companies absolving themselves of their responsibilities to reduce pollution.’

The high state of environmental degradation and pollution by the Oil and Gas industry has deprived the people of the producing areas the peace, health, and the development enjoyed by others in Nigeria (Charles-Owaba 2008).

From the Faversham House Group Ltd. 2001 Edie Weekly summaries August 17, 2001: ‘The Nigerian environment had been degraded over the last twenty years by Oil companies and that between 1976 and 1996 there were a total of 4,647 oil spills just in the Niger Delta region and that Nigeria is the number one nation for producing gas flares. Every year scores of Nigerians die from explosion from leaking pipes, which are usually blamed on sabotage.’

The situation has since grown larger, with more devastating impact on the country’s economy and development and a huge toll on the health of the people. Similarly, other areas of environmental degradation and mismanagement include urban congestion, poor factory and occupational health administration, poor agricultural management and devastating consequences of insecticides and pesticides.
According to the desertification map of the world, presented by FAO, WMO and UNESCO in 1977, about 15 percent (or about 140,000km2) of Nigeria is prone to desertification. It has since gotten worse, no doubt.

The forest being an integral productive component of the environment, as well as the protector of other components of the environment (Soil, Water, Air), and the repository of sociological, physiological and psychological life support, requirements for human beings, occupies a central position in environmental health management.

Average annual deforestation in Nigeria was running at three and a half percent (3.5%), FORMECU (1993), while Evans (1992) reported that urbanization consumes 12million hectares of forest per annum globally, while FAO (1991) projected that the world population will reach 85000 million in the year 2025. An expected, 17million hectares of forest will need to be destroyed annually to meet the various infrastructural needs of this burgeoning population.

Area under reserve in Nigeria is now estimated at 5.34% of the country’s total land area (Popoola and FORMECU, 1991), instead of the 25% Stockholm 1972 recommendation.

In the area of environmental health it is a fact that many inestimable and human activities have left our environment prone to several health hazards. One of such several activities is the food processing and industrial waste management pattern that has contributed immensely to soil, air and water pollution. The effect on human health by diverse industrial pollutants is of two types: direct and indirect.

In the first type, toxic substances, dangerous mechanisms or devices outside the processing company’s environment come in direct contact with the human body system. Depending on the concentration or intensity they may cause death; damage to body parts or organs resulting in sickness, disease or some form of disability.

Some of the common health problems caused by the Nigerian industrial and environmental health hazards include inexhaustible list of over 20 different illnesses and death. In addition to the problems already mentioned, which are multi-faceted that affect Nigeria which communication and the media as tools must address include:

a. Problem of crowded living which is endemic.
   b. Problem of crowded development which is now intractable.
   c. Growing problem of citing of soak-aways, pit toilets in crowded developments and slums with health consequences.
d. Indiscriminate citing of commercial activities close to the right of way of most commercial streets.

e. Many drains, streams, rivers, lagoons and other water bodies are easy receptacle for waste disposal.

f. The environments in which foods are cooked for household consumption and for vended foods are generally unhygienic.

g. The inadequate recreation facilities and spaces. Most of the approved open spaces have been encroached upon by commercial and other developments.

h. The increasing level of rural neglect in development and associated poor infrastructure development has strengthened rural poverty.

THE COMMUNICATION APPROACH

It will involve the application of the entire communication process, from Message planning, Audience Analysis, Media Relations and Advocacy, and the use of Social Media which will provide all the knowledge and tools needed to reach specific target audiences in a persuasive and highly professional manner.

There will be the need to diversify the approach of communication and the media using both the pragmatic and the constitutive aspects to reach the target audience. The pragmatic approach will help both the individual and the organisations to accomplish goals and do things about specific environmental issues through educating them, alerting them, persuading them, and collaborating with them. While the constitutive approach will help through communication and media contents to shape peoples’ understanding of environmental issues, themselves and nature. This will result in change of values, attitudes, ideologies towards environmental issues and problems, which will result in positive national development.

STAKEHOLDERS AND THE AUDIENCE

Communication and media as tools for the improvement of the quality of environment, on which our lives depend, are both used and consumed by human beings who serve as agents for their management and audience as beneficiaries. It is essential to note that the different levels of the stakeholders are diverse with unique, characteristics and abilities in information processing.

For the purpose of this study we will be looking at some wide variety of clientele and what types of Communication and media will be suitable to bring knowledge, education and adequate information on issues about the environment to them. It must involve multi-sectorial
grouping with defined programmes of action, well defined targets, monitoring and evaluation packages inclusive.

The groups must include: Federal and State ministries of environment, FEPA, SEPA, Manufacturers’ Association of Nigeria, Federal and state ministries of Industries, Federal ministry of Works, Ministry of Information at both the Federal and the states levels. Others will include: The National Assemblies, State legislative Councils, Some professional associations, NAFDAC, NGOs, CBOs, Local governments, Manufacturers Association, Educational institutions and other agencies that has to do with some aspects of the environment, such as the private waste management agencies; those in mining and transportation industries; women and children; organisations within the communities, religious bodies, paramount rulers and village heads. All must be involved in different capacities, either as producers, financiers, advocates, product marketers or consumers as audience.

Finally, there must be multi-national and international Agency collaboration since they form part of the larger society and operate most businesses that contribute immensely to the problems of environmental degradation and pollution in Nigeria. It is important to realize from the onset, without pretence that production, packaging, distribution and transmission, where necessary of communication and media products is a serious and financially expensive business. With the country bedevilled by putrefying levels of corruption and gross incompetence, coupled with low budgetary provisions, in addressing issues of great importance, Nigeria will need resources to meet the huge and troubling environmental challenges facing it. Communication and all Media efforts that can effectively make highly visible impacts on addressing environmental issues in the country must be a co-ordinated and well targeted curriculum (content and methodology), and must be both on long and short term basis.

Presently, a lot of uncoordinated efforts are going on to use the media to address some environmental issues as occasional Radio and Television jingles, Public Service Announcements, and half-hearted noises and threats about dumping of refuse in unauthorized places.

Since informing the public about environmental issues is a critical part of environmental communication we should look at all available tools to sensitize, educate and inform all segments of the society on the gains a well managed environment can bestow to all. Programme managers must identify the existing benefits for particular audience and
specific behaviour, the possible new effects, and fewer barriers. The centrepiece of social marketing is the target audience and the benefits it wishes to receive for adopting new behaviours.

TOOLS FOR COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA.
There must be a multi-media approach, well coordinated and marketed if the impact assessment can produce results that are positive for the country. The approach will combine the following tools targeting varying levels of people in the society.

- Traditional Media: the Town Crier, Talking Drums, Drama, Dances, Songs, Minstrels, Festivals, Mass meetings of various towns Unions and Associations, clubs, etc.
- Print Media: News Papers, Magazines, Posters, Fliers, Calendars, etc.
- Electronic Media: Radio, Television, etc.
- The New Social Media: The Internet and all the appropriate Web pages and Sites, etc.
- Others: Stickers, T-Shirts, Caps, etc.
- Advocacy: Workshops, Targeted Visitations, Seminars, Conferences, both local and international.

MESSAGES

It has been stated that the total essence of this study is about the Environment and human interaction with it, and with special focus on Nigeria and the Nigerian society. It is about how the individuals, Institutions, the society and various cultures and groups will craft, distribute, receive, understand and use messages through a range of possible interactions, including media coverage and tools and strategies to achieve environmental management and protection.

It is important to note that institutions and Agencies and levels of stakeholders in environmental management and protection and Non-governmental organisations must incorporate a robust communication and media tools to make the desired impact. Messages and communication efforts must be event-specific and with emphasis on a specific audience. The communication and media objectives must be clear with each specific target. Each message must contain the benefits and gains both to the individual, society and the community. It is also necessary that certain amount of knowledge about the target audience is desirable. This will influence to a certain degree, the choice of message content, the production and packaging mode and distribution and transmission. Environmental issues can be generated from all existing environmental problems and benefits, findings in research in
all areas of concern, attitudes, government policies, environmental hotline service, a set of resistant skills, or a community’s efforts, etc. Each of these and many more as detailed earlier could be sold to any audience. Product development and selection is the search for benefits valued by the audience.

For example, if an NGO decides to reach those in government through advocacy on desertification the target audience will be the Policy Makers at all levels of government. The messages to them will be contained in Electronic media and other more robust modes like the Radio, Television, Print, such as: Magazines, leaflets, lectures, workshops, etc. Assessment of audience media usage patterns should determine:

- What sources of information about environment issues are available to the target audience? To whom do they listen and for what types of information?
- What channels of information reach users most effectively?
- What language are the users comfortable with? What visuals do they understand?
- How accessible and acceptable are the communication or Media channels and their prior experience in the use of educational materials or activities?
- Cost of use.

Finally, it is necessary to state that, there must be the specified objectives for each target audience. Communication objectives are best stated in terms of:

I. Access (to materials or medium)
II. Exposure (to a message)
III. Knowledge (of a product or a skill)
IV. Trial (of a behaviour)
V. Adoption (continued practice of a behaviour)

Mix of Communication Channels (Media Mix) must be taken into consideration. Different Communication channels do different things for different segments of each target audience. Posters alone, or Radio alone, or Community meetings alone, that are used in isolation from each other and without comprehensive plan will not be effective. In general, an effective communication component should use a combination of channels that maximize exchange- otherwise known as two-way communication.

It is important to conclude that audience behaviour will form the basis of all communication efforts in the social marketing of environmental issues. The degree of awareness of individuals, the communities, the policy-makers and other targeted groups, and their active
participation will form the bottom-line of our local evaluation of success. Therefore planners must tailor all environmental activities to a target audience, tied to a specific behaviour.

If an appropriate communication, information and education blueprint for action is given to the country, it will form the way forward. Implementation will be part of it.

Protecting and managing the environment in any country, including Nigeria is an essential business for such countries to develop adequately, fulfilling the vital indices for sustainable development. The goals of environmental Scientists should form the minimum aspiration of all countries in the world, especially the establishment of Nature and Biosphere reserves under various types of protection and most generally the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems upon which all human and other life on earth depends.

Efforts have been increasingly focussed on the mitigation of greenhouse gases that are causing climatic changes, on developing adaptive strategies to global warming, to assist humans, animals, and plant species, ecosystems, regions, and nations in adjusting to the effects of global warming.

The IPCC in a Landmark Report (Sept. 2013) issued by Scientists from 195 countries meeting in Stockholm, says, they are now 95% certain that global warming is due to ‘human activities’ since 1950s, and that 93% of extra heat is stored in the oceans, while more heat wave and flooding are expected. It predicts increase in temperature world wide from 2.6 degrees centigrade to 4.5 degrees centigrade by the next decade.

With the planet earth and our natural environment already endangered, no meaningful social, economic, and political development of any nation can be sustained unless positive and well thought out environmental action plan and programmes are put in place and monitored constantly. This will ensure sustainable development of our nation and the world.

REFERENCES