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JOURNAL OF
AFRICAN STUDIES



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NO 5 & 6



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MAY & OCTOBER 1999

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JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES
NUMBERS 5 & 6/MAY and OCTOBER 1999

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ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND PRESERVATION IN NIGERIA

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This paper is largely concerned with collecting data on the role of two environmental agencies, Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) and the Nigeria Environmental Study/Action Team (NEST) in dissemination environmental information, and to find out how effective these have been on the level of awareness of a select group of people. The result of the study indicated that FEPA and NEST used some media of information to pass information on the environment across to the people. However, it was discovered that few people among the information user group have a faint knowledge about the existence of these environmental agencies and what they do. It is necessary that environmental agencies should involve information scientists, educators and librarians in helping them with their communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

The state of the world's environment is of growing concern to scientists, environmentalists, educators, librarians, information scientists, etc. This is because as Rodda (1991) observes, "if the environment is ill from environmental diseases and development which depend on the (wise) use of environmental resources". If the environment is improved, both the economics and people will become healthier. Conversely the present deterioration of the environment has come about mainly as a result of human activities therefore; a better understanding of the environment does result in a more effective

developmental strategy. There is yet a major need for education on the environment and for increasing the environmental awareness of the people. According to moemeka (1983) environmental information "aims at developing a citizenry that is aware of and concerned with the total environment".

This is aimed, among other things, at sensitizing everybody to the need to handle the environment with a great care so that its capacity for sustaining the population can remain undiminished (Igbonurike, 1991). In addition to increase our understanding or environmental issues, the exchange of information through specific and periodic reporting requirements is one of the most important tools for monitoring the domestic implementation of national and international obligations. Environmental information is necessary in a multicultural society like Nigeria so as to facilitate adequate implementation of objectives and policies of environmental.

In pursuit of this, libraries and information centers have an important role of disseminating information to all citizens. But until every recently libraries in Nigeria have different kinds of information to the populace but the area of environmental information has been grossly neglected.

Environmental information literature materials found in Nigeria libraries seem too limited. Such materials are also either deliberately and inadvertently rarely associated with the environmental but with other broader fields on the environment like geography, ecological studies etc. Location and cataloguing of cards under these broader fields make any search on environmental education difficult. Moreover, the field of environmental information is an aspect of information studies, which has not really been expounded in Nigeria in Nigeria and because of this, the little information disseminated by libraries has not really led to much improvement of the environment, hence environmental agencies take to disseminating these information in their own ways.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The shortcoming in the library professional practice in Nigeria allows a gap which is expedient to bridge but which scholarly activities have not so far attended to. Experts in the field of environmental science did much of the scholarly work in the area of environmental information; information professionals on this subject have done little or nothing. In other words it is altogether natural that people should be informed of the risk to which they are exposed. Environmental information according to Modupe (1994) is public enlightenment whereby the people are made to understand that the consequences of their action are to avert any further degradation of the environment. The public enlightenment should be through workshops, seminars, film-shows symposium, lectures, the print-media etc. at all level of administration including preserved information in record centers like the libraries.

To achieve this people have to be properly informed about the environment by giving them a through education (CONNECT: 1994). This education, to a large extent, depends on the information they can get from libraries and information centers. Aickin (1990) disclosed, "the public at large has a right to information about the way in which the environment is being used. According to Chokor (1989) "public environmental awareness is a synthesis of people conception, interpretation and perception of environmental issues". In Modupe's (1994) paper he stated, "the people in Nigeria tend to be ignorant of the relationship between their environment and their health". It is therefore necessary that the attitude of the people living in the cities and towns must change toward environment. This could only be achieved if the dissemination of environmental information is not left to environmental agencies alone.

THE STUDY AND ITS METHODOLOGY

It is these shortcomings that this work attempts to bridge. Against the foregoing background, the study covers the activities of selected environmental agencies in Nigeria especially in relation to dissemination of environmental information to selected citizens in Nigeria and also to evaluate the effectiveness of their methods in relation to the attitudes of the information user group. Two environmental organizations have been chosen, Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) and Nigeria Environmental Study/Action Team (NEST), a governmental parastatal and non-governmental organization (NGO) respectively. These agencies have similar objectives in that their main concern is to enhance human health and welfare through environmental management by giving timely and adequate environmental information.

Two sets of questionnaires were used; the first set of questionnaire was given out to valuate the roles played by FEPA and NEST in disseminating environmental information while the second set of questionnaire for the information user group was divided into two section first section tested knowledge and function of these environmental agencies and the second section tested their awareness and usefulness of the information given by these environmental agencies.

ANALYSIS AND RESULT

For effective information dissemination FEPA and NEST have some roles they play by organizing different activities. It is also evident that FEPA and NEST, to some extent, use almost the same channel (media) to disseminate the information they have to the people. However, there are slight differences, NEST involves itself in visiting schools. They also disseminate information to the people through

publications of their activities in newsletters and even by writing individual letters to their registered members on issues that might be of interest to them. They organize public lectures in order words they are involved in public advocacy that is they give support to the public on things concerning the environment. FEPA makes use of the Radio and Television stations to disseminate any information they have to the public (this happens when they have programmes), which to some extent covers a large audience. They have publications such as "THE NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT" which is a quarterly newsletter aimed at informing the public at large on Nigeria's environmental activities at the national and international levels, they also publish captions in daily newspapers like Daily times, Sketch and they organize public lecturers.

Both environmental agencies have different activities they organize to disseminate information to the public and this is organized in different parts of the country and it covers different topics. FEPA organizes seminars; symposiums, workshops, conferences and public lecturers form time. They had an essay contest for secondary school students all over the nation titled "the environment we wish to live" in 1988. They have also organized exhibitions e.g. the exhibition organized for schools at Lagos titled "environment and sanitation". And they have organized many press briefings on the state of the environment. NEST had also organized many conferences, seminars and symposiums over the years. They had an exhibition at International School, university of Ibadan titled "The environment' some years ago. The major objective of the activities organized by FEPA and NEST is to have citizens that are environmentally sound that is they must have enough knowledge about the environment to improve their immediate surroundings and to avoid hazards.

FEPA and NEST were asked how they monitor the information given out to the public to see that it benefits the people and that it is being utilized effectively. FEPA's response was that they always ask for opinion and criticism of their activities from the people and that at the end of any organized activity people are told to put in their criticisms or opinion for that particular programme by coming to

give some suggestions for further improvement or they might write to the agency when they notice anything wrong with their activities or schedule of work/programme. NEST monitors her information through opinion and criticism like FEPA, they have Round Table talks whereby people who are not speakers at their activities have their chance in contributing their views (especially at conferences, workshop etc). They also monitor information given out through "on the spot assessment", they expect the people concerned to begin to make use of the information they are given immediately. They both concluded that they effect criticism by modifying the strategies used in their programmes for example both organization has a library and their collections is of importance to researchers in that it gives them different information needed and the improvement would lead to a better public enlightenment through information and education that can be retrieved from their libraries.

The researcher inquired on the type of groups that these environmental agencies disseminate information to and whether they have some special groups they concentrate on. FEPA disseminate environmental information to industries and tertiary institutions while NEST concentrates more on rural women, teachers and journalists.

Environmental issues are many and vast; that is why these organizations concentrate on those listed below for effectiveness. Since FEPA concentrates on industries (food, manufacturing and petrochemical industries) and students in tertiary institutions. Environmental concern like toxic waste, ozone layer, noise, air and water pollution including solid waste disposal is of importance to industries when they have information on these issues they will manage their industries well in terms of these environmental concern and less havoc will be done whereas students needs information on noise, air/water pollution, wildlife conservation and solid waste disposal. NEST disseminate information on deforestation to both rural and urban women so that they will plant trees as they cut them for firewood, etc. women especially the market traders need information on solid waste disposal so that the pollution it brings will also reduce. Population

growth is also of concern to NEST in order to inform the women and educate the student so that present increase in population growth will decrease when these groups are educated and informed.

From the response of these environmental agencies it was discovered that their major constraint in disseminating environmental information is that of finance since they were both created in 1987 (NEST) and 1988 (FEPA) which was a period when the naira started to loose value, they lack enough funds to carry out their programmes to procure materials for their libraries etc. and this to some extent hinders the progress of their job.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES FROM INFORMATION USER GROUP

A breakdown of the information user group include fifty industrial workers taken from Exide Batteries and Nigeria Bottling Company (NBC) makers of coca cola drink (25 workers each). Questionnaires were also distributed among fifty students, twenty five students from the university of Ibadan (UI) and twenty five students from Ibadan Polytechnic, the University students includes both undergraduates and postgraduates students while the polytechnic students included both OND and HND students (ordinary diploma and Higher diploma) and fifty trader selling different wares were also used.

Knowledge of Environmental Agency

The respondents were asked if they know about FEPA and NEST as environmental agencies in Nigeria. Their responses imply that more than half of the students used are aware of the existence of environmental agency in Nigeria whereas 40% of the women traders know about the existence of environmental agency in Nigeria implying that most of our women traders in the market are not aware about the

existence of environmental agency in Nigeria. And the total number of industry workers that has knowledge about the existence of environmental agency in Nigeria from Nigerian Bottling Company are just 36.4% and from Exide Batteries 80% that is more respondents from Exide Batteries know about environmental agency while less people from Nigerian Bottling Company knows about the existence of environmental agencies in Nigeria. In other words few people among the respondents knows about the existence of any environmental agency either governmental or non-governmental.

Sources of Information

The few respondents that know about environmental agencies in Nigeria were asked to identify the sources from which they got to know about FEPA and NEST. The respondents were allowed to indicate more than one source through which they came to be aware of these environmental agencies.

It was discovered that majority of the respondents came to know about these agencies (FEPA and NEST) though the mass media that is TV station, Radio station and the newspapers. These sources proved to be a common means of getting to know about the existence of environmental agencies in Nigeria because the people are more familiar with these media sources than other sources (personal contact, poster etc.) Environment on stipulated sanitation days and those who admonish people around them were least indicated.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These environmental agencies, FEPA and NEST, are trying their best to see that the people in Nigeria get adequate, correct and timely information they need in the environment to avert disaster that might at anytime and to see that the people do their own part by not disrupting the environment. Though the agencies are trying their best in

disseminating environmental information, it was discovered that few people among the three groups (students, industrial workers, traders) used in this study have a faint knowledge about the existence of environmental agencies in Nigeria. For those that indicate that they know about the existence of environmental agency in Nigeria the TV station, Radio station and Newspapers seem to be their major source of information.

FEPA and NEST as environmental agencies should broaden their policy on the dissemination of information education and information by having a close cooperation with the ministry of education and information in order to improve on the quality of their existing and new environmental programme. This is necessary so that their programme are more simplified in such a manner that the "non educated" citizens of Nigeria will also benefit from their programmes. In other words outside the formal education system, museums and similar public institutions should be established incorporating environmental subjects and environmental activities. Non-literate Nigeria like the traders who cannot use the libraries will be helped if the environmental agencies

However, information scientists, libraries and educators in Nigeria should look seriously into how environmental agencies could be helped, e.g. by organizing workshops and seminars on effective communication. The availability of adequate information presented in the right manner will achieve better results with the information users.

In other words when adequate information is passed across to the people, they are then involved in general improvement schemes which will help them to be able to enhance the quality of the urban environment because of the information they possess.

Environmental information materials should also be acquired into libraries especially materials that would be most useful to the user. These materials may not necessarily be for scholarly purposes but should be interesting and educative that users can read leisurely e.g. Magazines.

Moreover, librarians must make efforts in the appropriate arrangement of catalogue cards, if the library is not yet automated, and location of materials on the shelf so as to make literature search on environmental education easier.

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