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# Awareness and Accessibility of Environmental Information in Nigeria: Evidence from Delta State

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## Introduction

There is no doubt that technological advances in agriculture, industry, and transportation greatly improved man's way of life. However, these activities, while providing the raw materials for production of goods and services have also resulted in pollution of land, atmosphere, vegetation and rivers (Okojie, 1991). As in most other countries of the world, the Nigerian environment today presents a grim litany of woes. Every state of the federation suffers from one form of environmental problem or the other in varying degrees. The northern part of the country is being literally "blown away" by wind erosion while the southern part is being washed away into the ocean. Between 1976 and 1988, a total of 2,000 reports of oil spillages were recorded with the discharge of two million barrels of oil into the environment (Ikporukpo, 1988). Urban cities and town in Nigeria are increasingly threatened by pollution of air and water and improper disposal of solid wastes while the rural areas are plagued by soil erosion, deforestation, and bush burning (NEST, 1991).

Over 2 million tonnes of soil are lost annually in south- central Nigeria, and this has cause great decline in agricultural yield (Dike, 1995). According to the NNPC (2010), a large proportion (about 63%) of the gas produced in Nigeria is beign flared. By 2002 and 2003, gas flared remained as high as 45.4% and 42.7% while gas used was 54.6% and 57.3%, respectively. The economic costs in terms of lost incomes and reduction in the standard of living can therefore, be expected to be staggering.

Poverty and illiteracy are causes as well as consequences of environmental degradation. The high level of poverty and illiteracy in Africa directly linked to the current level of environmental pollution and degradation in the continent. The poor and the illiterate are often more interested in issues related to their daily survival than environmental management; this lack of interest and awareness often lead to more reckless environmental behaviour which in turn breeds more environmental problems and leads to a vicious cycle of poverty (Ekpeyong, n.d.).

Health related environmental problems in Nigeria vary with the social and economic development achieved by different states. According to World Development Report (1992), anually, more than 2 million

deaths and billions of illnesses such as typhoid, cholera, river blindness and guinea worm are attributed to water pollution and poor household hygiene. Major public health problems associated with poor environmental sanitation and exposure to communicable diseases and poor personal hygiene predominate and are often compounded by malnutrition which reduces resistance to diseases especially among vulnerable groups i.e children, pregnant and lactating mothers and the aged.

Apparently, the need to protect our environment is pertinent. This certainly led to the 1992 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment "Stockholm Conference" and the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The conference came up with AGENDA 21 which spelt out the strategies for improving the quality of the environment. This document emphasized the need for environmental education as a weapon that could be used by all nations to arouse people's consciousness, positively change their attitudes and instill in them those values and skills that can promote effective environmental management (UNESCO, 1992).

The public has the right of access to environmental information held by public authority and making information about the environment publicly available essential for achieving sustainable development (EIR, 1992). With access to environmental information, the people have full knowledge of the implications of their activities on the environment and are able to participate more effectively in decision making processes that affect the environment (UNESCO, 1992).

## Public Education and Awareness

The Nigerian government, through the Federal Ministry of Environment (FMENV) formerly known as Federal Environment Protection Agency (FEPA) and other relevant agencies, has been making efforts to educate the public on environmental issues using both print and electronic media. One of the recommendations of FEPA is that Environmental Conservation Clubs be set up in secondary schools. The agency is in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education on the development of environmental Educational Masterplan and Curricula for both formal and informal educational system in Nigeria. In its efforts to provide the public with excellent and up-to-date reading materials on environmental issues, the Agency established an environmental reference Library at its Headquarters in Abuja in 1994 in addition to the existing Library in Lagos office (FEPA, 1989).

Although the main thrust of Nigeria's petroleum policy is to increase the hydrocarbon reserve base through vigorous exploration, spurred by flexible and competitive fiscal incentives, environmental issues were accorded considerable prominence in policy design. The Ministry of Petroleum Resources, through various petroleum acts and subsidiary legislation ensures that the petroleum industry carries out its activities safely and in an environmentally sound manner. Consequently, the ministry has, within the past two decades, established measures to address the environmental problems associated with oil exploration, production, processing, transportation, storage and marketing in the country. Among these measures include the promotion of environmental awareness and consciousness not only amongst the oil operators but in the general public through the organization of the 'Biennial Seminar on the Petroleum Industry and the Nigerian Environment'. The oil companies are also encouraged to organize annual Safety, Health and Environment Week in their operational areas to sensitize their work force.

In spite of the remarkable progress made in providing environmental information, there are still substantial constraints to the effective management and development of the environment. These include uncoordinated policies and legal instruments, weak data base, inadequate enforcement, institutional conflicts, inadequate and untimely funding, and lack of public awareness. It is against this backdrop that this paper analyzed the assessibility to environmental information in Warri central local government area of Delta state, Nigeria.

## Research Methodology

This study was carried out in Warri Central Local Government Area of Delta state. Warri is a major city in Delta State. The people of Warri are mainly the Itsekiri, Urhobos and Ijaws. Though, other ethnic groups also live within this city. Being one of the regions where crude oil prospecting is carried out in Nigeria, it is highly vulnerable to environmental degradation. Data for the study were collected with the aid of structured questionnaire from 140 respondents using the simple random sampling technique. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

## Results and Discussion

Results according to Table 1 showed that 60% of the respondents are single with most of them below 40 years old (85%). (51%) had secondary education and 24% had post secondary education. This results showed a reasonable level of literacy among the respondents. Nkonya et al (2004) observed that high literacy level is related to high level of environmental awareness therefore, it is expected that there will be a high level of awareness and use of environmental information among the respondents.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Characteristics.

Characteristics	Frequency (n= 140)	Percentage
Marital Status		
Married		
Single	56	40
Age (years)	84	60
≤20	32	23
21-30	30	21
31-40	58	41
41-50	14	10
>50	6	4
Education Level		
None	2	1
Primary	24	17
Secondary	72	51
Post secondary	34	24
Occupation		
Farming	11	7
Trading	36	26
Artisan	10	7
Transportation	18	13
Civil Servants	22	16
Unemployed	12	9
Students	31	22

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Many of the respondents are aware that oil spillage (92%), pipeline vandalization (84%), soil erosion (82%) and bush burning (79%) constitute sources of environmental pollution (Table 2). However, out of the 140 respondents, only 43 (31%) are aware that use of firewood and charcoal for domestic cooking are sources of environmental degradation. This suggests that most of the respondents are only aware of environmental problems that directly affect them and their immediate environment such as oil spillage and pipeline vandalization but are ignorant of global ecological problems and how their domestic practices might contribute to these problems.

Table 2: Respondents Awareness of Environmental Pollution sources

Source	Frequency (n = 140)	Percentage
Land /Agricultural		
Deforestation	85	61
Soil erosion	115	82
Bush burning	111	79
Improper fertilizer, pesticides/insecticide application	96	69
Human/ Household		
Use of firewood/charcoal for cooking	43	31
Indiscriminate use of chemical (household)	76	54
Improper sewage disposal	88	63
Improper refuse disposal (home & market)	93	66

Automobile & generator exhaust	71	51
Oil pollution		
Pipeline vandalization	118	84
Gas flaring	98	70
Oil spillage	129	92
Others		
Industrial waste emission	84	60

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Results from Table 3 showed that radio and television were the most available (93% and 96% respectively), the most easily accessed (70% and 73% respectively) and the most effective sources of environmental information (61% and 64% respectively). Several studies have reported the effectiveness of the mass media, particularly the radio and television in creating awareness about public health and environmental issues (Ugboma, 2002; McCarthy & Brennan, 2009). This is often associated with their wide geographical coverage and the relatively cheap cost of acquiring and using them in contrast to the print media. These media however do not provide for live interaction which is necessary for effective environmental policy implementation.

Table 3: Availability, Accessibility and Perception of Effectiveness of Sources of Environmental Information by respondents

Sources	Frequency (availability) (n= 140)		Accessibilty		Perception of Effectiveness		Total
	Easily accessible	accessible	Not accessible	Highly Effective	Effective	Not Effective	
Community leaders	78 (56)	53 (38)	25(18)	62 (44)	28 (20)	50 (36)	62 (44)
Government officials	84 (60)	28 (20)	54 (39)	58 (41)	32 (23)	29 (21)	79 (56)
Families & friends	100 (71)	78 (56)	22 (16)	40 (29)	42 (30)	58 (41)	40 (29)
Oil company officials	66 (47)	42 (30)	24 (17)	74 (53)	45 (32)	60 (43)	35 (25)
NGOs	60 (43)	28 (20)	32 (23)	80 (57)	28 (20)	58 (41)	54 (39)
Health workers	110 (79)	50 (36)	60 (43)	30 (21)	53 (38)	57 (41)	30 (21)
News paper/magazine	69 (49)	24 (17)	47 (34)	68 (49)	66 (47)	39 (28)	37 (26)
Posters/bill board	82 (59)	44 (31)	38 (27)	58 (41)	44 (31)	46 (33)	50 (36)
Religious centers i.e church	80 (57)	18 (13)	62 (44)	60 (43)	45 (32)	57 (51)	38 (27)
Radio	130 (93)	98 (70)	32(23)	10 (7)	85 (61)	45 (32)	10 (7)
Television	134 (96)	102 (73)	32 (23)	6 (4)	90 (64)	44 (31)	6 (4)
Internet	51 (36)	35 (25)	21(15)	84 (60)	30 (21)	43 (31)	67 (48)
Library	25 (18)	24 (17)	20 (14)	96 (69)	33 (24)	28 (20)	79 (56)

Source: Field survey, 2008 Percentage in parenthesis

On the other hand, government officials, internet and the library were the least effective sources of environmental information to the respondents (23%, 21% and 24% respectively). In her study of environmental information provision to oil producing communities in Nigeria, Ugboma (2002) also reported low usage of the library as the source of environment information. According to her, only 1.2% of the respondents have used the library in meeting their information needs.

The major environmental information required by the respondents are related to waste management

(93%) and health (81%) (Table 4). Language barrier (63%) and inadequate information provision (56%) constituted the major constraints to accessibility of environmental information by respondents in the study area (Table 5). This result is consistent with the findings of Ugboma (2002).

Table 4: Respondents Environmental Information Needs

Information Needs	Frequency (n= 140)	Percentage
House siting	88	63
Agricultural Practice	98	70
Accident prevention	98	70
Health	114	81
Compensation package	80	57
Personal safety	62	44
Waste management	130	93

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Table 5: Constraints to Accessibility of Environmental Information by Respondents

Constraints	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Lack of Time	54	39
Language Barrier	88	63
Lack of Fund	67	48
Illiteracy	31	22
Inadequate info. Provision	79	56

Source: Field Survey, 2008

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Environmental awareness is a pre-condition for pro-environmental behaviour and sustainable environmental management. This study shows that the residents of Warri Central Local Government Area of Delta state, Nigeria are very much aware of environmental implication of soil erosion, bush burning, pipeline vandalization and oil spillage. Most of them however do not regard burning of fuel wood for household cooking as sources of environmental pollution. This implies that most of the respondents are only aware of environmental problems that directly affect them and their immediate environment and are largely unaware of how their behaviour might contribute to global ecological changes such as global warming and ozone layer depletion. This study therefore recommends the following for policy action:

- The government should provide adequate funding for agencies concerned with environmental management and ensure that proper implementation of programs and policies.
- The media should intensify their efforts at public enlightenment by presenting environmental information in the local languages to remove the language barrier. Particular emphasis should be placed on the effect of domestic activities on global ecological climate.
- Environmental education should be incorporated into the school curriculum at all levels in order to build a generation of environmentally conscious citizens.
- Finally, government should prioritize provision and adequate funding of both public and school libraries because they are veritable sources of environmental information and vehicles of public enlightenment and personal development.

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