



Gender involvement in Community Waste Management in Urban Nigeria

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ALTHOUGH WOMEN CONSTITUTE a very important proportion of the world's population, the link between women and the state of the environment has only recently begun to be recognized. Women are universally known to be closer to nature than men and this may underscore their assiduous relationship with their physical environment. Nigerian women are not homogenous because of the enormous variety of socio-economic and cultural situations which individual women may find themselves in. There are different classes of women in Nigeria, hence it is this class position that determines how a woman relates to her environment. The relationship between poorer women and the environment differs from those of the more privileged women. In the traditional Nigerian societies, domestic activities such as provision of water for general household use, maintaining a clean environment in the house by disposing household wastes and maintaining sanitation facilities, have been delegated to the women of the community. Thus the women's influence concerning solid waste management is immensely felt in the home.

The primary aim of this study was the assessment of the level of involvement of women in solid waste management in two medium income areas in Ibadan and Lagos- both highly urbanized cities in Nigeria. The secondary objectives were to:

- (i) Identify the specific roles, perceptions, values, attitudes and practices of women in relation to solid waste management.
- (ii) Examine the issues and constraints that hamper active participation of women at household, community and national levels in the planning, designing and implementation of solid waste management schemes.
- (iii) Evaluate women's awareness level of waste reduction as an alternative to solving the solid waste management problems, currently plaguing the society.

Gender Issues

A survey by the United Nation's Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 1977) has revealed that developmental projects which did not involve women failed to realise their full objectives. Lack of gender focus in programmes and projects can also lead to vulnerable groups such as women and the poor having more work, less benefits and less control over their situations (Canadian Council for International Cooperation, 1991). This will also ultimately lead to the failure of such projects or programmes. It is therefore

necessary that women's role in developmental programmes in general be emphasized.

The significant role of women in solid waste management in Nigeria is only often realised at the household level because of gender bias. In community meetings, managerial levels in solid waste organizations or governmental levels where decisions are made, women are relegated to the background. This usually leads to the abortion of expected results in respects of long term sustainability and dependability of most of the solid waste management schemes put in place. According to Legum (1995), projects should address women's strategic needs as well as their practical needs to challenge traditional gender roles and achieve greater equality with men, raise women's status, power, choice, ownership and control over resources.

Increasingly, some organizations and societies are being formed in Nigeria to protect women's interest. The members have exhibited eagerness to support development projects that have to do with improving the lot of women. This they do by self-participation in or through financial contributions towards the construction of such projects. Moreover such organizations and societies - mainly NGOs and Co-operative Societies - succeed in attracting funding from both local and international donors. Gender issues in waste management practices in Nigerian communities certainly deserve eminent consideration, given the fact that the most recent national census puts the female gender at about 52% of the entire population of the country.

Methodology and the Study Areas

The research was carried out via the following steps:

- (i) Literature review of related works carried out in the past.
- (ii) Survey of the study areas.
- (iii) Administration of questionnaires coupled with oral and personalised interviews with various stakeholders of the subject matter.

The study areas, Omole (in Ikeja Local Government Area) and Bashorun (in Ibadan North East Local Government Area) are located in the metropolitan cities of Lagos and Ibadan respectively. Lagos was Nigeria's erstwhile capital city and is still her economic nerve-centre, while Ibadan, about 150km from Lagos, is the largest city in the country. The study areas were selected based on their following characteristics:

- Relatively well-planned areas for ease of administration of questionnaires.
- Homes of people with different ethnic backgrounds.
- Residents are on the average educated.
- Solid waste management was a basic problem.

Results and Discussion

From the analysis of the data collected, the following results were obtained:

- In both areas, a higher percentage of the younger age group knew about waste reduction than the older age group. In both areas, the women are poorly informed about correct solid waste management practices (Table 1). In the case where they have a general perception on this issue, they have limited knowledge about improving the situation using resources which abound around them. It is only in recent times that sanitation education, with resource recovery as a keynote, is being included into the curriculum of secondary schools and higher institutions of learning. It can be inferred that the younger age group who are still in these institutions of learning are the ones really benefiting from these education programmes, while the older group (40 years and above) who are not in schools are being left out of the awareness drive.
- There was little variation in the attitude of the women in Omole and Bashorun to solid waste management (Table 2). A high percentage of the women in both areas indicated their willingness to adopt the practice of sorting at source. A great percentage of women agreed that solid waste constituted a health problem in Nigeria, while the majority felt that waste collection and disposal was the responsibility of the government. This

can probably explain the general nonchalant attitude towards hygienic waste disposal practice.

- It was discovered that the occupation of these women had a direct bearing on the practice of waste reduction i.e. by composting. From Table 3, one can see that more housewives practised a form of waste reduction than all others. This could be because housewives have more time to compost from their biodegradable wastes, for use in gardens, or for sale, or to gather old plastic containers and newspapers to take to recycling depots.
- It was found out that all (100%) of the waste collection agencies surveyed recorded a low percentage of female staff. This was common to both study areas. The reasons given for this low percentage include:
 - Sheer physical strength is needed most of the time, and in such cases men have the upper hand being generally taller and more muscular.
 - Women complain about the nature of work. The work is viewed as a dirty one by these women and exposure to disease is feared.

Through the interviews conducted with women in key managerial positions in organizations concerned with sanitation issues, the following reasons were given for the poorer representation of women at managerial levels in community solid waste management:

- Roles of women as wife, mother, and home maker which are biased against women taking on anything other than relatively low-level or part time employment.
- Typical myths or prejudices such as:
 - Women lack leadership qualities.
 - Women are generally ruthless in work places.

Table 1. Relationship between women's age group and knowledge of waste reduction

| Age of respondents / statements | Omole (Lagos) | | Bashorun (Ibadan) | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| I know about waste reduction | | | | |
| Category A (18 - 40 years) | 39 | 26 | 26 | 17.3 |
| Category B (over 40 years) | 23 | 15.3 | 15 | 10.0 |
| I do not know about waste reduction | | | | |
| Category A (18 - 40 years) | 11 | 7.3 | 39 | 26 |
| Category B (over 40 years) | 36 | 24.1 | 10 | 6.7 |
| No Response | 41 | 27.3 | 60 | 40 |
| Grand Total | 150 | 100 | 150 | 100 |

Table 2. Respondents' attitude to solid waste management

| Statements / Responses | Omole (Lagos) | | Bashorun (Ibadan) | |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| 1) Solid waste constitutes a serious health problem in Nigeria. (Agree) (Disagree) (Not Sure) (No Response) | 109 10 6 25 | 72.7 6.7 4 16.6 | 79 12 5 54 | 52.7 8 3.3 36 |
| Grand Total | 150 | 100 | 150 | 100 |
| 2) Waste collection and disposal is the sole responsibility of the government (Agree) (Disagree) (Not Sure) (No Response) | 74 40 11 25 | 49.4 26.7 7.3 16.6 | 59 30 7 54 | 39.3 20 4.7 36 |
| Grand Total | 150 | 100 | 150 | 100 |
| 3) I am willing to participate in sorting, collection and proper disposal of wastes generated in my home. (Agree) (Disagree) (Not Sure) (No Response) | 86 25 14 25 | 57.3 16.7 9.3 16.7 | 57 34 5 54 | 38 22.7 3.3 36 |
| Grand Total | 150 | 100 | 150 | 100 |
| 4) It is not necessary to have a waste bin in the home (Agree) (Disagree) (Not Sure) (No Response) | 20 92 13 5 | 13.3 61.3 8.7 16.7 | 15 72 9 54 | 10 48 6 36 |
| Grand Total | 150 | 100 | 150 | 100 |

Table 3. Relationship between occupation and practice of waste reduction strategies

| Statements / Responses | Omole (Lagos) | | Bashorun (Ibadan) | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| I practice waste reduction | | | | |
| - Self employed | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1.3 |
| - Civil servant | 10 | 6.7 | 7 | 4.7 |
| - House wife | 43 | 28.7 | 48 | 32 |
| - Out of work | 15 | 10 | 3 | 2 |
| I do not practice waste reduction | | | | |
| - Self employed | 15 | 10 | 20 | 13.3 |
| - Civil servant | 9 | 6 | 4 | 2.7 |
| - House wife | 24 | 16 | 8 | 5.3 |
| - Out of work | 6 | 4 | 4 | 2.7 |
| - No response | 25 | 16.6 | 54 | 36 |
| Grand Total | 150 | 100 | 150 | 100 |

- (c) Most women juggle work with their domestic responsibilities for children when they are younger, and for elderly relatives when they are older.
- (v) Improving the working conditions of both male and female workers. For example, adequate protective wear should be provided even for scavengers at different dumpsites.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the study, it could be concluded that women's active involvement in solid waste management in urban Nigeria is limited to a great extent to household storage, because of factors such as: culture, religion, political systems and economics. All these factors are interwoven and together they form a strong barrier to women's active participation in solid waste management.

The following recommendations are hereby proffered:

- (i) Training opportunities for potential women managers, especially in such aspects as leadership skills and time management, should be enhanced.
- (ii) Awareness training for senior management as per the benefits of women managers should be developed.
- (iii) Crèche facilities for employees with family responsibilities should be provided.
- (iv) Creation of awareness and sensitizing of the people about the important roles of women in water, sanitation and health issues which can be achieved through workshops, seminars, posters, pamphlets, television programmes, radio messages etc.

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