

A CRITIQUE OF THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION TASK FORCE ON THE MONTHLY ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION PROGRAMME IN 14 LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In this paper, the environmental sanitation programme in 14 selected Local Government Councils in the western part of Nigeria is assessed. Methods adopted were content analysis and administration of questionnaire. Content analysis involved analysis of some randomly selected comments in the dailies and periodicals regarding the exercise. The questionnaire on the other hand was administered on health officials of some randomly selected Local Governments. The study showed that the acceptance of environmental sanitation exercise (monthly or fortnightly) was not in doubt, but the enforcement method which was characterized by military discipline was criticized as having a negative impact on the success of the programme. It is argued that combination of persuasive and judicial processes by the Local Government Councils, States and Federal Government officials is better than the coercive military approach.

Key words: Environmental sanitation, task force, Local Government, enforcement, approach.

Introduction

Environmental sanitation exercise is not strange to the local communities in Nigeria. It is as old as the concept of local government or administration itself. Throughout the colonial period and, indeed, independence era, it was known as sanitary inspection; but when the exercise was becoming antiquated, it was revived and renamed as well. Prior to 1981, Federal Government involvement in the programme was largely promotional, particularly in the area of sewerage, drainage and refuse disposal, (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN 1991). But in 1984, under a military dispensation, the programme acquired a new name and became known as environmental sanitation exercise. However, the duty coverage of environmental sanitation exercise got reduced from what used to be the case under sanitary inspection. Whereas environmental sanitation exercise as it is today covers limited areas such as sewerage, drainage and refuse disposal; sanitary inspection, particularly in the rural local government, extended beyond these and covered other areas like town planning activities and slaughter slab. In brief, environmental sanitation has been part of the functions of local government administration in Nigeria.

The environmental sanitation exercise was rejuvenated in 1984 not only by making it a monthly or fortnightly exercise throughout the country but also by making the participation of the three levels of government compulsory (FRN 1991). To this end, supports of voluntary agencies, non-governmental organizations as well as private individuals were enlisted. Task forces were also created to enforce compliance (Obasa 1995). Yet, many states were still silent about the need for monthly environmental sanitation exercise. But in the rural local governments throughout the

country and, more importantly, in the metropolis, environmental hazards continued to loom. Federal government, realizing that health is wealth and that it pays to concentrate on preventive rather than curative health care developed keen interest on how stem the tide (FRN 1991). The focus of this paper is to provide an assessment of the programme, particularly the role of the various task forces.

Methodology

Two methods adopted in this study were content analysis and administration of questionnaire. Content analysis involved analysis of some randomly selected comments in the dailies and periodicals regarding the exercise. The questionnaire on the other hand was administered on Health officials of some randomly selected local governments in the western part of the county. In this regard, thirty-eight (38) Environmental health officers across 14 local governments in five states of the Western part of the country were given questionnaires. The questionnaire included questions that asked them to comment briefly on the attitude of the people in their local government areas to the monthly environmental sanitation exercise and, also on the government's efforts towards the programme. Of the 38 people sampled, 35 affirmed that the programme was encouraging while in the remaining three, one respondent was ambivalent while the remaining two persons categorically responded in the negative. Equally, on the issue of government's efforts towards the programme, four respondents felt unsatisfied with it, while the remaining 34 respondents expressed satisfaction. (Table 1).

The Environment and Local Government Councils

While Hornby *et al.* (1974) sees the environment as surroundings, circumstances and influence, the Fourth National Development sees the following resources as constituting parts and parcel of our natural environment: land, air, water, plants and animals (FRN 1981). Maintaining clean and healthy environment of our individual homes, communities, local governments, States and by extension, the entire country was the conceptual focus of the national monthly environmental exercise. There were two approaches to this: (a) the sanitary inspection that had been in operation since the colonial days and often carried out by the supervisory staff of local government and (b) the national environmental sanitation exercise that is undertaken by members of the public. The two, though separate, complement each other on every environmental sanitation exercise day.

Before delving into what local government is, it is instructive to note that debate is going on as to whether local governments in Nigeria can actually be regarded as local governments in the strict sense of the term or, local administration. In theory, what we profess in Nigeria is local government, but in practice what we display is local government administration. A popular description of local government is that it is a system of territorial units with defined boundaries, a legal identity and institutional structure. It has powers and duties of financial and other autonomies. More explicitly, Gboyega, (1987) claims that local government enables services of local importance only to be locally administered. It provides education in citizenship and makes available to the central government, information about localities which is essential for adequately meeting their needs efficiently. Furthermore, it also minimizes concentration of political power by diffusing it aerially. Mabogunje (1995) has also reiterated the position of the Nigerian

Government that local government "does precisely what the word 'Government' implies" i.e., governing at the grassroots or local level, when Local Government Reforms were announced in 1976.

Table 1. The response of local government officials to questionnaire administered on them

Local Government	State	Status	Age	People's attitude to the monthly Environmental Sanitation Programme.		People's attitude to Government efforts.	
				POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	SATIS-FACTORY	NOT SATIS-FACTORY
(1) Akinyele Local Government	OYO	Environmental health officer Senior Env. Health Officer Senior Env. Health Officer.	Adult 36 30	3	-	2	-
(2) Iseyin	OYO	Asst. Env. Health Officer Senior Env. Health Tech. Chief Env. Health Tech.	45 35 50 48	3	1	3	1
(3) Ibadan North West	OYO	Senior Health Technical Asst.Chief Env. Health Officer	30 38	2	-	2	-
(4) Ibadan North	OYO	Senior Env. Health Officer Principal Envi. Health Officer Env. Health Technologist - do - Higher Env. Health Tech. Chief Env. Health Tech. Senior Env. Tech. Chief Env. Health Officer.	35 37 25 25 36 42 37 41	- - - 7 - - - -	- - - 1 - - - -	- - - 7 - - - -	- - - 1 - - - -
(5) Ibadan South East	OYO	Higher Comm. Health Tech. Pharmacy Technician.	40 36	- 1	- 1	- 2	- -
(6) Ibadan North East	OYO	Principal Env. Health Officer	38	1	-	1	-
(7) Oyo	OYO	Senior Env. Health Officer	41	1	-	1	-
(8) Ejigbo	OSUN	Senior Env. Health Officer Env. Health Officer	36 24	- 2	- -	- 1	- 1
(9) Iwo	OSUN	Senior Env. Health Officer.	40	1	-	1	-
(10) Ijebu East	OGUN	Chief Env. Health Officer Chief Env. Health Officer Senior Env. Health Officer	45 38 35	- 3 -	- - -	- 2 -	- - -
(11) Ose	ONDO	Health Suprintendent Higher Health superintendent Senior Health Officer.	42 37 38	3 - -	- - -	3 - -	- - -
(12) Eti-Osa	LAGOS	Chief Env. Health Officer Senior Health & Env. Officer.	49 44	2 -	- -	1	1
(13) Lagos Island	LAGOS	Chief Prosecutor Principal Env. Health Officer Chief Env. Health Officer.	50 38 46	- 3 -	- - -	- 3 -	- - -
(14) Ikeja	LAGOS	Higher Env. Health Officer Higher Env. Health Officer Higher Env. Health Officer	33 41 30	- 3 -	- - -	- 3 -	- - -
<u>SUMMARY</u>				35	3	32	4

Results and Discussion

People's comments

Among those whose comments were selected for analysis were, Efiog Essien, Yemi Ogunbiyi and Colonel A.K Adisa (a former Governor of one of the states in the western part of the country) and J.O Irukwu. According to Efiog Essien "those that lived in the not-too-distant past, in the years before THINGS FALL APART was written, would see nothing new in the environmental sanitation exercise. The encroachment on the liberty for the greater good of the larger society is therefore not in accord with our culture" (Oyediran, 1988). The concern of this commentator is the state's encroachment on individual's liberty due to the compulsory nature of the environmental sanitation exercise that was formerly once in a month throughout the country until some States decided to make it bi-monthly.

According to Yemi Ogunbiyi, "Governor Mudasiru Lawal of Lagos State and his team were bent on giving Lagos a completely new look and thereby reverting its image as the filthiest city capital on earth. But one cannot ignore the views of those who thought that Mudasiru is making too much out of environmental sanitation. They contend that while concern for environmental sanitation was good in itself, there was more to human survival than environmental sanitation. People would not eat flowers. Others said his achievements on environmental sanitation were over dramatized" (Olowu, 1988). What can be deduced from these comments is that government was making a headway with regards to environmental sanitation but too much emphasis was placed on it. Colonel A. K. Adisa's comment is as follows "So far, we have recorded success in the sanitation status of our highways and markets. I have to point out however, that, I am personally disappointed to observe total disregard for environmental cleanliness of our layouts where the majority of our well enlightened citizens live"(Ministry of Information, 1986). This statement exposes the nonchalant attitude of the elite to the monthly environmental exercise. Finally but not exhaustively, Irukwu J. O. said that "From all accounts, the WAI (War Against In-discipline) campaign was certainly conceived and apparently with the best of intentions. Its principal exponents certainly showed a high degree of enthusiasm and commitments especially during its early days (Ojewale, 1995). The message of this statement is that the zeal with which the programme was initiated by the founding fathers was diminishing.

In all the statements examined, none condemned the exercise as meaningless, although each pointed out one weakness or the other e.g. loss of individual's liberty, over- emphasisation of the exercise, non-challant attitude of the elites and diminishing enthusiasm on the part of the initiators, i.e., the military.

Reactions of some local government environmental officials

Examining the people's point of view on the monthly environmental sanitation exercise through sanitary officials required that questionnaires be administered on certain key officials of the local governments who were active participants in the programme. Satisfactory as this outcome may appear to be, the dissenting view of some of the respondents needs to be given proper attention especially as some of the respondents came from urban local governments while the others were from semi-rural local governments. A respondent from Eti-Osa Local Government passed this comment on people's reactions to government efforts on the monthly environmental sanitation programme: "Though it used to be a constraint on business activities, however, we have not been

getting enough co-operations from the upper echelon in the society". Another respondent, also from Eti-Osa Local Government, had this to say on the same question: "Positive reaction but people expect the government to do everything for them". Again, another comment from a respondent at the Lagos Island Local Government: "Many people supported the programme while some especially the youth react negatively by playing football on the streets" while the exercise was going on. A respondent from Iseyin Local Government in Oyo State summed it up all by saying that the "people are getting tired of it, and that they cannot do otherwise since it is a compulsory exercise"

Critique of the task forces in the exercise

The most important but negative issue in the exercise is the issue of how best to inculcate environmental sanitation culture in the citizenry. There were those who held the view that maximum use of force was the only meaningful approach to changing people's old habit. In this category fell the Oyo State Ministry of Information, Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture. Where it was clearly expressed that "To change people's old habit cannot be easily achieved except certain draconian measures are introduced". On the other hand were those who insisted that persuasion rather than coercion was the best and civilized approach.

The evidence on ground supports the fact that the tempo of environmental sanitation exercise was always very high under military than under civilian dispensation. This might make the argument for coercion attractive but the ultimate goal of the exercise was to ensure longevity of the people. Sometime in 1995, an editorial comment carried by *Nigerian Tribune* reported that soldiers attached to the Lagos State Task Force on Environmental sanitation, whipped and tore the dress of a journalist (*Nigerian Tribune*, 1995). Again, a woman was reported to have been beaten to death by men of the Environmental Sanitation and Revenue Task Force at Isokan market at Akure in Ondo State (Sam 1995). Similarly, a trader, Mrs. Florence Okoye, was killed by a member of Lagos State Task Force on Environmental Sanitation at Ogba in the outskirts of Lagos (David 1997). The beating to death of the defaulters with impunity by the environmental sanitation task force, defeated the objective of the exercise which was to protect peoples' lives.

Other allegations leveled against the task forces include bribery and corruption on one hand and indiscipline on the other. They are said to extort money from defaulters, particularly in urban areas like Lagos and Ibadan. Besides, they were said to invest themselves with powers not ascribed to them by the enabling environmental sanitation laws

Armed forces in Nigeria comprises of the army, police, airforce and navy. Of the four, the police is closest and nearest to the members of the public and should therefore lay good examples but they were the ones flouting environmental sanitation laws and ethics. They (the police) were said to have not considered it "expedient to employ police sanitarians who should take care of the barracks, offices, colleges and other places of abode of Nigerian police" (Ugochukwu 1986).

Attempts at eliminating the negative tendencies of the task forces had not made any significant impact. One of the reasons for changing the enforcement methods of the programme in 1986, under General Babangida's administration, was to ensure that some coercive approaches associated with the old WAI were expunged. In this direction, a new agency known as National Orientation Movement (NOM) was established and it aimed at ensuring that "some coercive

approaches associated with the old WAI were expunged, to make room for a people's movement that would be more easily inculcated in our people's minds" (Yikarrebogha 1986). It did not take long before NOM was re-oriented again when the incidence of coercion persisted. While launching WAI-C (War Against Indiscipline and Corruption) at states level on the 2nd of December, 1994, the former Chief of General Staff, Lt. General Oladipo Diya, said that the immediate task of the National Orientation Agency, as WAI-C awareness campaign was being launched in the States, would be to (a) crystallize the framework of its operation so that Nigerians could understand the roles of the agencies or committees at various levels charged with the prosecution of WAI-C; (b) it must sustain the momentum of this programme and the enthusiasm shown by the people in it; (c) it must constantly monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the programme with a view to fine-tuning its operational methods for maximum positive results (National Orientation Agency 1994).

But in spite of the modifications and re-modifications of the task forces to ensure reduction or total elimination of coercion in the enforcement of environmental sanitation rules, recurrence of coercion still pervaded the exercise and so was their lack of rectitude. What these implied was that Government was unable to eradicate coercion as a means of enforcing the programme. In the drive to enforce the environmental sanitation exercise, not less than 150,000 street traders had been dispossessed of their goods in major cities like Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta. These traders had been accused of being responsible for rubbish on the streets and more severe fine for littering was not sufficient (Margaret 1986). Hence, market boundaries were rigidly enforced and trading outside markets was severely curtailed but how many State governments, needless to mention Local Governments, could boast of markets with adequate stalls for up to 150,000 street traders? Where these could be provided, how many traders could afford them? Thus, by driving away women and children street traders, family finances which were vital to family survival were put in jeopardy thereby inflicting on them psychological violence, which is deadlier than physical violence.

Similar calamity befell artisans or auto-repair workers, such as roadside mechanics, vulcanizers and battery chargers to mention just a few, who had been operating on major roads and highways. Most of them were asked to relocate their activities, unless they were working on the grounds of the petrol stations. States that took this step included Oyo, Ogun, Enugu and Rivers States. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, there was no land available for their resettlement within 12 km of municipal areas (Margaret, 1986). So the movement of the artisans faced impossible situation. In crowded environments like Lagos, Ibadan and Ijebu-Ode, it was very difficult for these artisans to find spaces on minor roads that were never sufficiently motorable for their clients.

There is an alternative way of improving the environment without necessarily displacing small business owners. Margaret (1986) noted that Aba must be among the cleanest of Nigeria's cities, yet cars were repaired close to the town centre. According to her, other craftsmen had their shops where they had always had them and traders went about their businesses. At the outskirts of the town, there was a new huge market which catered for many activities and provides space for large numbers of stall holders, at lower standard and rent than that of Ijebu-Ode. Definitely, movement had not been forced in Aba. Aba's solution to maintaining a clean environment was efficient and cost-effective, drawing on large numbers of rubbish containers distributed around

the city and frequently collected. Even crowded pavement trading in Aba was aided to pose no threat to the environment, because the rubbish was kept under control and she seems to manage this (Margaret, 1986). Unlike in Aba, the method adopted in the Western part of the country not only decimated and demented the citizens; the economic health of that part of the country was also gradually assaulted by the monthly environmental sanitation exercise.

The most disturbing aspect of it all was the rate at which Local and State governments engaged themselves in squabbles that occasionally led to litigation over which level of government had right to refuse disposal. The 1979 constitution, fourth schedule, section 7, expressly stated that provision and maintenance of public convenience and refuse disposal formed parts of the functions of Local Governments (Margaret, 1986). But in absolute disregard of the provision, most states in the federation contend the provision with Local Governments by engaging in refuse disposal. Some Local governments had gone to court over this and judgements had been in their favour. A good example was the Calabar Local Government (Olasupo 1995).

Ironically the skirmishes between these levels of government over disposal were not borne out of desire to improve the monthly environmental sanitation exercise, but rather for selfish economic interest. Refuse disposal is said to be one of the revenue generating items and because it is so lucrative, the state governments were deeply interested in it. When misunderstanding of this nature developed into open conflict between these two levels of government, the court was looked up to for adjudication. In the process, when an injunction was placed on the evacuation of the refuse pending the determination of the case, the dump sites swell and thus defeat the essence of the monthly environmental sanitation exercise. When the dump sites swell, scavengers start to operate and this provides an enabling environment for some categories of Local Government officials particularly the drivers of the trucks who extort money in form of registration fee and monthly review fee from the scavengers. The breeding of scavengers which unevacuated dump sites encouraged not only result in contact and spread of disease but most importantly led to training in crime. As Flakpa and Echebiri (1989) reported, "where scavengers have difficulty in securing sufficient wares (from the dust bins or sites), they resort to the looting of public properties". The scavengers are said to be responsible for the missing rails on bridges. Thus improper handling of the exercise has provided an avenue for crime.

These consequences of institutional disagreement over which party had the right to refuse disposal, arising from the insistence of state governments actions and deeds to perpetuate dominion hold on Local Governments, in utter disregard to constitutional provision, was the bane of not only the monthly environmental sanitation exercise but also that of the Local Governments that were supposed to be the managers of this programme in their various areas.

In summary, the environmental sanitation exercise was generally accepted by the people. And this was evidenced by the regular compliance of the majority of the people with the programme. Some states had even moved a step further by introducing an environmental sanitation programme that was fixed for the second Saturday of every month. All that the people needed then was sustaining their zeal by making adequate funds available and desisting from using any form of corporal punishment on defaulters.

It was also noted that the total exclusion of force from the enforcement method of environmental exercise turned out to be counter productive. For instance, under civilian administration, where civilian task force replaced military task force people tended to relax (Obasi 1986). A good example of this was when democratic government was instituted in all the states of the federation in January, 1992 (Obasa, 1995). The situation, according to him, came back to square one as mountains of refuse re-appeared on major streets. Again, the total abolition of the exercise under the fourth republic has shown an upsurge of refuse dumps in most cities and the strategy to be adopted by the Federal Government that abolished the exercise is being awaited.

CONCLUSION

The acceptance of the environmental sanitation exercise (monthly or fortnightly) was not in doubt save for the enforcement method which was characterized by military discipline. It is therefore suggested here that State and Local Government environmental officials or Task Forces should henceforth adopt persuasive means of getting the people, particularly the elites and the carefree youths to respond to the call for environmental sanitation exercise regardless of number of times within a month. So also where there is need to apply force, it should be through judicial process, particularly under a civilian administration.

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