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INFORMATION CONTROL ELEMENTS IN WOMEN ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

When the world recently paid attention to the environment, it was the culmination of efforts which began at the United Nations 23 years ago. At a conference held in Sweden in June 1972 by UN member states on "Human Environment", it was agreed that our environment had become so endangered that urgent steps should be taken to protect it. The UN General Assembly subsequently passed a motion and quickly established an international secretariat for environmental problems in Nairobi, Kenya. Since then, other outfits have been put together with the aim of identifying factors that are inimical to healthy and sustainable environment. Nigeria has not been left out. The 1980s went down in history as the decades of environmental awakening - greater awareness, concern, involvement in environmental protection efforts by the government and people of Nigeria. The major events for environmental protection within that decade up till the 1990s include:

- a) The introduction of National Environmental Sanitation programme which emphasised general cleanliness and solid waste management.
- b) The establishment of the harmful waste Decree No. 42 of 1988 which made it a criminal act, punishable by life imprisonment, to carry, dump, transport, import, sell, buy or negotiate trade in harmful wastes within the Nigerian territory.
- c) The establishment of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) by Decree No 58 of 1988 which has evolved the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to monitor environmental development.

Since the establishment of FEPA, the Agency has made a lot of impact at international, regional and national levels.

Nigerian women have since 1985 tried to address the environmental problems that damage the health and productivity of women and children, through the Better Life and Family Support programmes respectively. Women in Nigeria form a vital group in the national economy. Out of a population of 88.5 million, 51 percent are women and a total of 70 percent of Nigerian women reside in rural areas, 40 percent of them being engaged in agricultural activities, so women produce the bulk of food crops (Ifene 1990). In the last 10 years, through the National Commission for Women, Better Life and Family Support Programmes, Nigerian women have participated in environmental development through Self Help Projects aimed at the attainment of the following objectives:

- a) The elimination of obstacles that negate women's contribution to development and improving their standards of living.
- b) The integration of women into the Primary Health Care programme.
- c) The encouragement of self-development, particularly in the areas of education, skills acquisition and small scale businesses.
- d) The encouragement of women to develop and/or utilize indigenous technologies, processing and designs.

All these objectives are aimed at the development of a better environment. The implementation of these objectives could only be attained if there is a good mechanism of information flow.

Basic Environmental Information Indices

Detwyler (1971) defines environment in its simplistic form as the surroundings, external conditions, influencing development or growth of people, animals and plants. He identifies six basic causes for the deterioration of man's environment as ignorance, attitude, population, technology, economics and synergism. These basic causes are closely related, but, incidentally are all man's impact or interaction on the environment. Arising out of these, basic environmental indices which could serve as environmental information indices are itemised as:

1. **Man's Impact on Atmosphere and Climate**
 - i) Air conservation and kinds of air
 - ii) Sources of air pollution
 - iii) Meteorology of air pollution
 - iv) Geographical Aspects of air pollution
 - v) Climate of cities.

2. **Man's Impact on the Waters**
 - i) water pollution
 - ii) Hydrologic effects of urban land use
 - iii) Thermal pollution
 - iv) Man made contamination hazards to the ground
 - v) Aquatic Weeds
 - vi) Man's role in estuarine processes
 - vii) Ocean oil pollution.

3. **Man's Impact on Land and Soils**
 - i) Land forms made by man
 - ii) Influences of man on coast lines
 - iii) Impact of surface mining on environment
 - iv) Physical, chemical and biochemical changes in the soil community
 - v) Environmental effects of roads.

4. **Man's Spread of Organisms**
 - i) Animal Invaders
 - ii) Plant Invaders
 - iii) Man's influence on floras and faunas.

5. **Man's Destruction of Vegetation**
 - i) Deforestation and effects
 - ii) Blueprint for national tree planting.

6. **Man's Extinction of Animals**
 - i) Effect of pesticides

- ii) Effects of indiscriminate animal killing
 - iii) Species succession and fisheries exploitation
 - iv) Domestication and Adaptation.
7. Excessive pressure on available resources infrastructure and space due to unabated rural - urban migration and the resultant urban decay.
 8. The immense challenge of providing basic services in the face of rapid urbanisation and industrialization as well as the unplanned squattes settlements that proliferate in and around major urban areas.
 9. The high rate of soil degradation gully and coastal erosion and flooding through non-judicious and land use practices.
 10. The depletion of natural forest resources through uncontrolled logging fuel wood demands, tree felling, overgrazing etc.
 11. Bush - burning and the risk of exterminating our indigenous wild life and fish species.
 12. Water scarcity, misuse and pollution of surface and underground water resources.
 13. Destruction of valuable agricultural land through bad mining practices that fail to address reclamation as provided in the mineral acts.
 14. The effects of industrial pollution, waste disposal and sewage problems.
 15. The permanent dangers posed by the encroachment of the desert and vast agricultural lands along Northern Nigeria.
 16. Natural conservation of resources (biological, mineral and fuel) as factors of sustainable development.

These basic environmental information indices are inputs for an information system on environmental development, which should be collated as grouped into fifteen headings in Table 2, processed, made available and disseminated to different user groups, for utilization. The environmental indices as grouped in Table 2, are envisaged to be the major key result areas in environmental development.

Environmental Information Control Elements

The deterioration of Nigeria's environment has been attributed partly, to people's ignorance, coupled with lack of an efficient environmental information system. kadem (1993) identified information control elements as those basic factors which influence the utilization of information. They are availability, processing, relevance and dissemination.

Etim (1992) also identified what she called information source characteristics which are basic to any good/efficient information system as optimum availability, optimum accessibility, high precision relevance, and effective dissemination.

Wolek (1986) defines information availability as readiness of information for use. The availability of environmental information refers to the frequency with which a user locates needed environmental information.

Information processing is defined by Lindsey (1979) as the analysis and treatment of information in a special way for a target audience. It involves the preparation of the bibliographic description of environmental information documents (author, title, publisher, date of publication, language etc.) and the description of documents contents (abstracting or indexing). These data (bibliographic descriptors, indexing keywords) are used when a search is being conducted for a user.

The relevance of an information item is defined by Etim, (1992), as information connected with an information need and is important to a user at that point of need. High precision relevance of environmental information thus refers to the extent to which a document provides useful solutions to specific problems.

information dissemination is defined as the spread of information to all users (Wilson and Streatfield, 1977). Environmental information dissemination therefore refers to the ease with which an information system communicates environmental information to potential users at the time and place needed.

This paper will attempt to provide answers to the question. To what extent do these environmental information control elements affect women's implementation of environmental development programmes?

Women's Implementation of Environmental Development Programme in Nigeria

To examine the extent of women's implementation of environmental development programmes in Nigeria, an index (a product of information processing) was prepared with the pioneer Newspaper editions (1988 - 1994). Thirty-eight indexing keywords were selected from a scanning of the newspapers editorial trends and a standard thesaurus from the British Times Index.

Table 1 shows a relative frequency of news headings/keywords. Women and women affairs ranked 10th out of 38. This is an indication of the extent of participation of women in Nigeria Development.

Table 2 shows an analyses of women news items per environmental index itemised. These indices represent the key result areas of environmental development. Women Cooperatives/project Management ranked 1st on the list followed by women environmental health. Women environmental education and Industrial/Economic management bracketed as 3rd.

Relative Frequency of News Reports per News Heading in the Pioneer Newspaper Index (1988 - 1994)

S/N	NEWS HEADING	TOTAL NUMBER	RANK ORDER
1.	Editorials	312	12
2.	Head Stories (Front)	332	8
3.	Head Stories (Back)	594	5
4.	Accidents	33	31
5.	Agriculture	137	16
6.	Assets	38	28
7.	Banks/Banking	96	19
8.	Better Life/Women Affairs)	359	10
9.	Budget	55	27
10.	Chieftaincy/Traditional Rulers	28	32
11.	Children/Young People	113	17
12.	Church/Christianity	220	13
13.	Drugs - Abuse	11	35
14.	Education	813	4
15.	Election/Electorial System	146	15
16.	Electricity	149	14
17.	Fire-Disaster	37	30
18.	Foreign news (Africa)	96	19
19.	Foreign News (Outside Africa)	96	24
20.	Fuel/Fuel Crises	12	34
21.	Government/Civic Service	620	6
22.	Health Services/Drugs	320	11
23.	Industries	376	9
24.	Insurance	5	37
25.	Judges/judiciary	27	33
26.	Letters	1209	1
27.	Local Government	1015	2
28.	Mass Media	105	18
29.	Mass Transit	78	22
30.	Oil/Petroleum	60	26
31.	Police	83	21
32.	Politics/Politicians	560	7
33.	Population	61	25
34.	Prisons/Prisoners	4	38
35.	Roads/Highways	73	23
36.	Rural Development	729	5
37.	Sports	910	3
38.	Water	38	20

An Analyses of Women News Items Per Environmental Index Itemized

S/N	INDEX OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT	NO. OF ARTICLES	RANK ORDER
1	Environmental Health	42	2
2	Erosion Control	21	8
3	Waste Management	10	10
4	Forest Management	31	5
5	Species preservation	2	15
6	Cooperatives/Project Management	60	1
7	Environmental Education	41	3
8	Environmental Agriculture	30	7
9	Environmental Disaster Management	3	14
10	Population Control	31	6
11	Water Resource Management	10	10
12	Mineral Resources Management	4	13
13	Human Resource Management	10	10
14	Industrial/Economic Management	41	3
15	Political Management	20	9
		359	

Women Co-operatives and Income Generation

Nigerian Women have in the last ten years tried to design strategies, organize workshops and discussions to analyse specialised financing facilities currently available in Nigeria. Due to limiting factors like restricted access to institutional credit, male-dominated banking system, the relatively small credit needs, lack of access to landed property and educational barriers women had before now not taken full advantage of existing credit facilities as reported by Phillips (1991). The high frequency report of women in cooperative activities points to a success of awareness and enlightenment geared towards encouraging women to avail themselves of opportunities open to them.

Women Integration into Primary Health Care

Nigerian women have also been sensitized and mobilised to appreciate the need for primary Health Care (PHC). The introduction of Expanded programme on immunization (EPI), oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT), Water and Sanitation Programme (WATSAN) in addition to non-health issues such as Household Food Security and Nutrition, Early Child Care Development and education based on local government areas have greatly boosted women participation in these environmental development programmes as reported by Abasiokong (1990). This accounts for the high frequency news report on women Environmental Health.

Women in Environmental Education

The Women Education Branch of the Federal Ministry of Education was created in 1986 out of the need to ensure increased participation of the female population in education. Ten years after this tremendous

success in this area has been recorded in the areas of provision of more educational opportunities for girls from primary to tertiary levels; provision of functional education for girls and women through skills such as sewing, cooking, baking, typing, knitting, making of tie and dye materials, bafiking etc.; and the promotion of girls and women in the fields of science, technology and mathematics.

Women in Industry and Economic Management

Women have helped to generate and promote the growth of indigenous technology. They have helped to challenge the design, fabrication and production of farm implements, proto type of garri fryers, drinks processings, fish dryers etc. Women have thus made a major contribution towards industrialization and the promotion of export channels.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can confidently say that women have contributed immensely to environmental development in Nigeria, but no development programme can succeed without an adequate and effective information system. This implies that the Environmental protection Agency (FEPA) must set up mechanisms for the provision of current, accurate environmental information which must be made available, accessible, relevant and disseminated to users at the right time for decision making.

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