

APPRAISAL OF THE EFFECTS OF OPEN DEFECATION ON THE HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN EDO STATE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Open defecation has obvious negative consequences for public health and the environment, as faecal contamination of the environment and poor general hygiene practices are unquestionably a leading contributor to child morbidity, mortality, undernutrition, and stunting, all of which can negatively impact cognitive development. Sanitation issues are also a barrier to education and economic prospects, with women and girls bearing the brunt of the repercussions. Nigeria is one of the countries in the world with the biggest number of people who practice open defecation, which is believed to be around 47 million people (24 percent). This has a detrimental influence on the general population, particularly children, in terms of health and education, and has undoubtedly contributed to Nigeria's failure to reach the Millennium Development Goals. The National Council on Water Resources was formed as a result of this. To enhance environmental sanitation and put a stop to open defecation, the "Clean Nigeria-Use the Toilet" campaign was launched by the National Council on Water Resources

Keywords: *Open Defecation, Open Defecation Free, Sanitation, Hygiene.*

Introduction

Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa, and its foreign financial profits are primarily derived from crude oil production and exports. Many low-income Nigerians, on the other hand, do not get the full benefits of the country's riches. Some Nigerians lack access to sanitary facilities and clean portable water. This frequently leads to life-threatening infections, starvation, poverty, poor school attendance, missed workdays, and low productivity.

Throughout the world, open defecation has remained a major issue, and Nigeria is no different. Following a bowel movement, defecation is defined as the free release of feces from the body to remove undesired impurities (toxins). The practice of defecating in the open environment, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is known as open defecation. The word "open defecation" sprang to prominence in 2008, when it was frequently used as a reference in the United Nations International Year of Sanitation's Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) program. People who practice open defecation do not have access to improved sanitation, hence it falls under the category of

unimproved sanitation. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 673 million people use open defecation, and eradicating open defecation is a key indicator for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6, which is a major endeavor to eradicate poverty. Open defecation is an ancient tradition, but as a result of technological advancements and urbanization, it has become a challenge, a major public health issue, and a matter of human dignity, resulting in an increase in global attention to eliminate it.

Despite all of the programs and implementation efforts undertaken by all three levels of government to eliminate the plague of open defecation, it remains an environmental issue in Nigeria, particularly in Edo State, as contamination of the environment and an increase in health challenges. Poor nutrition, poverty, child mortality, and vast gaps between the rich and the poor are all linked to high prevalence of open defecation. The goal of this assessment is to raise awareness and support among all stakeholders about the importance of a defecation-free environment in order to promote societal hygiene and sanitation. Obviously, all stakeholders, including the government and the general public, would gain, as an environment free of open defecation is a healthy and safe environment.

According to Rimal and Lapinski (2009), communication is critical in raising awareness, promoting, and proposing solutions to the developmental and health concerns that the world faces today. Apart from creating infrastructures and providing services, Ngwu (2016) emphasized the importance of involving communication efforts in changing individual and social behavior that may obstruct the effective utilization of these infrastructures in order to ensure demand for public health care. According to Ngwu (2016), social and behavior change communication (SBCC) is a modern endeavor that proposes answers to a wide range of development and health challenges that have behavioural and attitudinal roots. Ngwu goes on to say that communication can help the world eliminate open defecation by changing social norms in particular places and advocating for change.

Open Defecation in Nigeria

The World Health Organization and United Nations Children Fund Joint Monitoring Report (2019) stated that one in every four Nigerians practice open defecation and that a total of 47million people practice open defecation especially in the Northern part where there is less access to good toilet. Just less than half of households in Nigeria have their own toilet facilities. There exist significant health risks associated with the practice of open defecation such as typhoid, diarrhea, and cholera to mention a few.

Changes in social behavior and the construction of basic and well-structured sanitation infrastructure in poverty-stricken nations such as Nigeria, which ranks second in the world with 47 million open defecators, are two of the most effective approaches to reduce open defecation. In addition, there appear to be inequities in terms of location and wealth, with nearly 85 percent of open defecators living in rural areas, and people in the poorest region being nine times more likely to defecate in the open than those in the richest region (United Nations Children Fund, 2017). Open defecation, according to UNICEF, pollutes the environment and transmits diseases such as cholera, typhoid, diarrhea, and even dysentery, all of which are preventable, and that these preventable killers of children are exacerbated by inadequate sanitary and hygiene conditions.

Open defecation has also been related to violence against women and girls who may seek to leave their houses during the dark hours of the night to defecate someplace in the open. Nigeria launched an action plan in 2016 with the express purpose of eliminating open defecation by 2025. The plan entails providing equitable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, as well as strengthening community-based total sanitation initiatives (Adepoju, 2019). The failure of the Nigerian government to deliver funds for the effort, according to Adepoju, has slowed progress. In order to combat the spread of water-borne diseases, the government proclaimed a state of emergency in the areas of water, sanitation, and hygiene in 2018.

It was also noted that an NGO called "Clean Nigeria," which is backed by UNICEF, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank, among others, is collaborating with several states, local governments, and other interest groups to make progress. Only 14 of Nigeria's 774 local government areas (LGAs) have been certified as defecation-free. In 2014, the National Council on Water Resources made developing a road map for ending open defecation in Nigeria a top priority, in line with the UN's global campaign to stop it. It was titled "Making Nigeria Open Defecation Free by 2025: A National Roadmap," and it lays forth a plan for the country to become open defecation-free by 2025.

Unfortunately, this behaviour is not unique to rural residents; it is widespread. This practice may account for the failure of some institutions management and the government for not providing basic human needs which include the use of toilet facilities (Babalola, 2019). Babalola further stated that the provisions of standard toilet facilities should not be regarded as luxury, and the contributing factors to open defecation in Nigeria include:

- Lack of water supply
- Ignorance and primitive lifestyle
- Poor maintenance of facilities
- Lack of necessary technology (especially in rural areas) for appropriate toilet models
- The huge financial burden in tackling the menace.

Olukolu, 2021 recalled that "nature cannot be cheated; when it calls, humans must respond and that it gives no notice, it can happen at anytime and anywhere and may even happen in the most unexpected places which may lead to open defecation. The most striking aspect is that Nigeria losses about N455billion (US, \$1.3billion) annually due to poor sanitation. It was observed that people choose open defecation as a mode of socialization, an activity that may give a sense of autonomy, a habit and a convenient choice. It is also seen as a voluntary choice or a compulsion.

There appear to be significant gender implications, as a lack of safe, private bathrooms exposes women and girls to violence and other infectious diseases, which could obstruct girls' schooling. Hundreds of millions of girls and women around the world lack privacy when they are menstruating, making open defecation a threat to their dignity, wellbeing, and health (WHO/UNICEF, 2019). These institutions stated that Nigeria has risen to the top of the world in terms of the number of people who defecate in the open, that the statistics are alarming, and that everyone should work together to co-create solutions to address the threat that is threatening Nigerians' health and well-being These institutions declared that Nigeria has emerged the number one country in the world with the highest number of people who defecate in the open and that the statistics are so

alarming and therefore, everyone should come together in an effort to co-create solutions to tackle the menace affecting the health and wellbeing of Nigerians and impeding economic growth. Ekiti State in the South West of Nigeria

Efforts to Curtail the Noxious Practice of Open Defecation

To combat the threat of open defecation in Nigeria, the government has collaborated at both the state and federal levels. Despite the fact that certain states have made significant efforts, there is still a gap in guaranteeing a healthy living environment for their citizens. According to the Ekiti State administration, it is working feverishly to provide safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, particularly bathroom facilities, in order to meet the objective by 2022. In a similar vein, the Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in charge of Water Resources stated that the federal government was taking steps to engage the private sector in addressing the issue of inadequate WASH services, and that the group Organized Private Sector in Water Sanitation and Hygiene (OPSWASH) would be established.

Open Defecation-Free

Communities that have switched to utilizing toilets instead of open defecation are referred to as open defecation-free. When community-led sanitation programs are fully implemented, this will undoubtedly occur (UNICEF, 2019). By 2030, one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to ensure that all people have access to sufficient and equitable sanitation and hygiene, as well as to eliminate open defecation. The Federal Government of Nigeria's Executive Order 009, titled "The Open Defecation-Free Nigeria by 2025 and Other Related Matters Order," aims to eliminate open defecation in Nigeria within five years. The Executive Order is a legal mechanism that can be used for both administrative and legislative purposes. It puts the National Open Defecation Policy into action.

Addressing Open Defecation in Edo State

Edo State is rated as one of the States in Nigeria that engage in open defecation and that about 1.3 million Edo people still practice open defecation (UNICEF, 2018). UNICEF attributed it to low level of awareness on healthy living and sanitation among the populace and that six of ten households either had their drinking water from contaminated sources or during handling of water. In addition, 495 rural communities in selected five local government areas would benefit from EU-UNICEF; Niger-Delta Support Programme (NDSP). It was observed that Edo State Government had so far invested ₦600 million in the WASH project and urged stakeholders to build toilets through collective efforts to stop open defecation. The essence of sanitation to protect human health is unarguable since it is crucial for human dignity, health and wellbeing. Open defecation is declared a daily occurrence in most parts of the state though a practice but also has severe consequences on the health of the populace and the environment.

Pressed by the urge to answer the call of nature, many individuals in Nigeria throw caution to the wind and resort to depositing faeces in roadside, bushes and street corners (UNICEF, 2019). Houses where there are no defined toilet systems, the occupants defecate inside polythene bags and throw them into open places. It was observed in Edo State that hoodlums and miscreants that are homeless defecate in the open places such

as markets, public school premises, open gutters and street corners without showing any cause for remorse. It was further stated that despite the existence of environmental laws and efforts by government to improve sanitation and reduce the high rate of open defecation, Edo State should redouble efforts to end open defecation.

The Federal Government of Nigeria, in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), praised the Edo State Government for its dedication to ending open defecation and its related problems in the state (UNICEF, 2019). During the launch of the Open Defecation-Free Roadmap, the Minister of Water Resources and UNICEF representative stated that the state governor's efforts were applauding, particularly in the commitment to Water Sanitation and Health (WASH), because access to safe water and sanitation is a fundamental human right, as stated by the United Nations General Assembly. The European Commission also built and sponsored 2,689 toilets in 39 settlements in Edo State's Ovia South-West and Etsako West Local Government Areas, offering access to 31,803 males and 18,445 females.

Benefits of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

The health benefits of better drinking water sources can only be fully realized if improved sanitation and adherence to basic hygiene practices are also available. Aside from the health and hydration benefits, access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) has important socioeconomic implications, particularly for women and girls. The fact that WASH is an approved program under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demonstrates its importance in public health. The United Nations General Assembly has declared that access to safe water and sanitation are human rights (2010). To make these rights a reality for everyone, the necessary structures, such as well-resourced, capable organizations that offer services and altering behaviors, are required.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were reached based on the above reviews and conceptual details:

- i) Open defecation is the intentional or inadvertent practice of defecating in an open area.
- ii) Where sanitation infrastructure and services are poor, open defecation is prevalent.
- iii) Open defecation can contaminate the environment, resulting in health issues as well as wealth inequities and, as a result, poverty.
- iv) For Sustainable Development Goal No. 6, ending open defecation is a sign of progress.
- v) Open defecation is a public health issue entwined with human dignity that requires global attention in order to reduce the habit.
- vi.) The most certain way to eliminate open defecation is by changing social behavior of people.

Recommendations

- Subsequent upon the foregoing review, the following recommendations are made:
- That sanitation and hygiene should be improved as it is fundamental to human rights and very crucial to child survival, socio-economic development and wellbeing of the populace.
 - Open defecation should be discouraged to avert violence against young girls and woman.
 - More NGOs should be motivated to help propagate the initiative of open defecation-free Nigeria.
 - More funds should be provided to eradicate the challenges of open defecation by giving loans to communities to build toilets as it is an effort to reduce poverty and improve sanitation and hygiene.
 - There should be behaviour change toward open defecation practice to the use of toilets with increased media support.
 - Toilets should be made a status symbol i.e. toilets should be attractive, clean, colourful and not smelling.
 - Open defecation should be seen as a case of government as society demands it.
 - Hand washing with soap and water should be encouraged after defecation.

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