URBAN SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

In *Nigeria, the challenges of urban solid waste management are palpable. The volume of solid waste that is visible at the urban centres is a measure of the failure of the current practices. The declaration of one of the Saturdays of every month by various state governments as environmental sanitation day and the use of radio jungles has not yielded the expected results. It is on this basis that this paper proposed a methodological shift from conventional approaches of mere radio/ television announcement to strategic communications planning. The study pointed out the role of strategic communication in addressing the challenges posed by urban solid waste management. The six-step pyramid of strategic communication plan (communication infrastructure, establishment of goals, target audience, frame the issue, crafting of message and media tactics) was proposed.*

INTRODUCTION

Urban solid waste refers to wastes arising from domestic, commercial, industrial, and institutional activities in an urban area. Urban solid wastes encompass all those wastes that are neither wastewater discharge nor atmospheric emissions. A solid waste may be semi-solid, or even a liquid, and is generally perceived by society as lying within the responsibility of the local government to collect and dispose of it. Categories of urban solid waste include: household garbage and rubbish, yard waste, commercial refuse, institutional refuse, construction and demolition debris, street cleaning and maintenance refuse, dead animals, bulky wastes, abandoned vehicles, and sanitation residues. Urban solid waste management refers to the collection, transfer, treatment, recycling, resource recovery, and disposal of solid waste generated in urban areas. Urban solid waste management encompasses: refuse storage and collection, street and drain cleaning, solid waste transfer and transport, solid waste disposal, and resource recovery. Urban solid waste management also involves vehicle maintenance repair, financial management, administrative activities such as routing, scheduling and record keeping; staff management and development and strategic urban solid waste management planning (APWA, 1975). Urban solid waste management is a

major responsibility of local government and a complex service involving appropriate organizational, technical, and managerial capacity and cooperation between numerous stakeholders in both the private and public sectors (Omuta, 1988).

Although it has been argued that solid waste is an unofficial measure of prosperity (Rosenbaum, 1974), allowance must be made for individual societal differences. A distinction must be made between the volume of solid waste that is actually generated, and the rate at which it is evacuated (or left to accumulate). The difference is a measure of the degree of effectiveness of solid waste management. In Nigeria, the challenges of urban solid waste management are palpable. The volume of solid waste that is visible at the city junctions emitting nauseating smell and causing aesthetic nuisance is a measure of the extent of failure of the current practices. Solid waste is highly visible and affects residents' perception of government functionality and its political representatives. Various state governments have made spirited efforts towards addressing the problems of urban solid waste management. For example, some state governments have declared one of the Saturdays of every month as Environmental Sanitation Day where movement is restricted between the hours of 7am to 10am. Within these hours, residents are expected to clear surrounding bushes and weeds, fill potholes, clear blocked drainages. Numerous environmental jingles in electronic media have also been employed by government raise awareness amongst her citizens. This paper presents the role of strategic communication as a tool for urban solid waste management. Specifically the communication needs of the people at multi-level objectives using strategic communication were discussed.

The Role of Communication in Urban Solid Waste Management.

The role of communication in the environmental field and its relevance in environmental management has been discussed in many fora (Beltran, 1993; Rim-Rukeh and Ogbemi, 2006). Role of communication in environmental management amongst others includes:

Raising awareness in environmental issues

Communication which is defined as the exchange process among the individual and group members of a given society using codes, rules and techniques (Lacroix and Tremblay, 1997) can be used to raise awareness amongst citizens on environmental issues. It has been reported that, a successfull policy on environmental protection must hinge on the people's support and the degree of support depends on the extent of individual and group awareness (Chokor, 1988). Communication which goes beyond the mere provision of information by technical means (telephone, print and electronic media) has been used to explain process of change in societies (Emmons, 1997). Communication approach to effective participation in the management of environmental issues range from information provision to consultation to joint planning and empowering decision-making.

Promotion of positive environmental behaviour

Communication through the use of newsletters and posters can be used to demonstrate practically the benefits of good house keeping and positive environmental behaviour.

Responsible environmental behaviour

Communication can be used to promote responsible environmental behaviour (REB). Cottrell and Graefe, (1997) defined responsible environmental behaiovur as actions taken by individuals or a group of individuals to do what is right to protect the environment. REB is concerned with doing what is right. But to do what is right is not easy if one does not know the value scale of what is right and what is wrong.

Understanding of interactions between natural resources and the environment

Communication can also help individuals to understand the interactions between resources (natural) and the environment. For example communication model was used in Mexico to manage the problems of water shortage (Kurtycz, 2005).

Creation of motivation

Communication helps in the creation of a platform for generating information motivation and the creation of an enabling environment for decision making of individual, group and institution levels. Communication can be used to move from a top-down (non-participatory) approach to a participatory and constructive approach.

Challenges of Urban Solid Waste Management.

Three major challenges faced urban solid waste management:

Non-involvement of stakeholders (the citizens)

The non-involvement of stakeholders (the citizens) in urban solid waste management plan is a major challenge facing urban solid waste management in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the establishments of collection centers in the cities are carried out without any consultation or involvement of the people. The people are never part of the urban solid waste management programme and hence such arrangement is alien to them (the people). The involvement of the people in government environmental policy will give the people a sense of belonging and ownership and would guarantee sustainability.   Participation in concept development by people has been described as a great tool for empowerment (Singh and Titi, 1992).

A survey conducted in Lagos in 2005 to assess the success of Lagos Environmental Sanitation Authority and Malaria Control Project in six communities of Suru lere, Ajeromi, and Mushin Local Government Area, about 70 percent of the sampled 1403 respondents confirmed that they are not aware of any refuse collection centres within their area and hence dumped their refuse inside the gutters (CPH, 2005). Also, about 67 percent of the sampled population could not explain the environmental health effects of poor environmental sanitation (CPH, 2005). The challenge of urban solid

waste management is one of the basic communication needs, because social participation begins with awareness (Chokor, 1988), which requires the articulation of existing communication infrastructure that recognizes that the people are at the heart of environmental problems.

Unsustainable Environmental Practices

The second challenge faced by urban solid waste managers is the unsustainable environmental practices exhibited by the people. An example is the indiscriminate and improper trashing of waste materials. Evidence abound where citizens commonly throw away corncob, plastic bottles, sachet water etc indiscriminately without due regard to the environment. In a study carried out in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in 2007, where at least 450 people were randomly selected as participants. The outcome of the study shows that, none of the participants uses their own bag / basket when going shopping / market. Also 41.58 percent of the participants accept cellophane bag to carry small size products purchased at a store and only 3.10 percent dispose their refuse at designated collection points / centers (Rim-Rukeh and Ogbemi, 2007).

Other unsustainable environmental practices include the indiscriminate felling of tress (deforestation), bush burning, the use of undersize mesh in fishing, and the use of hazardous chemicals in fishing. It is therefore necessary to incorporate the use of strategic communication to reach to the people and even policy formulators.

The Factor of Literacy Levels

The challenge of urban solid waste management also depnds on the literacy levels of the citizens. For example, of the 1062 people arrested for various sanitation offences between August 2005 and March 2006 in Sapele, in Sapele local Government Area of Delta State, 40 percent were illiterate (do not have primary school leaving Certificate) (Rim-Rukeh and Ogbemi 2006).

The claimed that they are not aware of any government policy and legislation on environmental issues and blamed government for failing to reach out to everyone. Communication has a major role to play.

4.   Meaning of Strategic Communications

Strategic communications is defined as the use of corporate, or institutional communications to create, strengthen or preserve among key audiences, opinion favourbale to the attainment of institutional / corporate goals (O'Malley, 2003). Generally, the goal of strategic communication is to (i) promote favourable pubic policy outcome   (ii) reduce cost of doing business and (iii) support operational activities effectively.

The purpose of a strategic communications plan is to integrate all the organization's programs, public education and advocacy efforts. Strategic communication planning promotes proactiveness rather than consistently reacting to the existing environment. Strategic communications helps to deploy resources more effectively and strategically

and shared opportunities in various programs and work areas. The creation and adoption of a strategic communication plan represents a significant step for any organization. The core of strategic communications include, public education, grassroots organizing, research, public advocacy, direct service and even fund raising.

Strategic communications plan involves the implementation of a 6- step pyramid as illustrated in Figure 1:

Fig. 1: The pyramid of strategic communication (Vidal and Grenna, 2004)

4.1 Developing Strategic Communications Plan for Urban solid waste Management.

It is evident that, the non-involvement of the people, unsustainable environmental practices and literacy levels of the people are major challenges facing urban solid waste management. We therefore developed a strategic communication plan from the standpoint of the challenges. Adopting Vidal and Grenna, 2004 pyramid of strategic communication; we developed a strategic communication plan that is specifically targeted at urban solid waste management.

Assessment of your communications infrastructures:

This involves the assessment of your communications capacity. The answers to the following questions will form the foundation from which your communications work will thrive or fail.

•Who will do the work? Are they knowledgeable about environmental issues and communication?

•Are there communications funding for the project. What is your project budget?

•How powerful is your brand? Is it well known?

Establishment of goals.

This involves the definition of actionable goals. Questions such as; what. specifically do you want to achieve? What is your positive vision for the future?

In the establishment of goals answers to such questions should be provided.

In this case answers such as, "to have a clean society / environment where everyone is aware of the effects of poor environmental sanitation should be a goal.

Target Audience

This involves the identification of those you want to reach. Those you want to persuade to do what you want. In this case, every citizens, but most especially; market women and those dwelling in slums / squatter settlement.

Frame the issue

This involves the way the issue (environmental issue) will meet the values and needs of your audience. Answer should be provided for questions such as: what is this issue really about? Who is affected? Who are the players? What pictures and images communicate this frame?.

Discipline your message

This involves the crafting of the message, which is the most important step in the pyramid of strategic communication planning. It is recommended that a message

should not be longer than 35 words and should be made up of three part farm work. (Vidal and Grenna, 2004). For example;

Problem: Introduce your issue. Describe the effects of the issue.
Solution: Speak to people's heart with values rich in language and images.
Action: Call on you audience to do something specific.

Specifically, messages targeting local or urban inhabitants in respect to urban solid waste management should be crafted to:
•respond to the social and cultural backgrounds of the communities and local institutions;
•take into consideration issues such as languages and dialects, nature-related traditional beliefs, literacy levels and conceptual barriers;
•include a clear perspective of a clean environment;
•include images of people in action showing the people as protagonist of a clean environment;
•seek the participation of local inhabitants in the production of communication materials and in the planning activities.
•Use local inhabitants in radio networks, theatre, arts workshop, advocacy activities and music production, providing human resources, insight and creativity to increase the impact of communication efforts.

Messages for policy makers should be crafted to:
•include issues related to the political, economic and health values of a clean environment.

•demonstrate the benefits of institutional coordination and concrete examples of sustainable practices and their cost-effectiveness;
•Use technical content that is well distributed in the materials.
•Provide information on the status at the law and regulations related to the environmental issue.

Media Tactics
This involves the actual presentation of the crafted message to the people. The following should be considered:
•Who are the best messengers to reach your target audience?
•Choose someone with an effective speaking style and a look that appeals to your audience.
•Have spoke people practice delivering message on camera. Review and critique the tape. Adjust the message if needed at this state: something that works on paper may fail when you actually say it.

Conclusion
The study pointed out the role of strategic communication in addressing the challenges posed by urban solid waste management (i.e. using strategic communication to increase stakeholders participation, address unsustainable environment practice and increase awareness). The six-step pyramid of strategic communication plan, if religiously implemented will be a starting point in raising awareness and stimulating the citizen's involvement on environmental issues.

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