

Achieving State Wide Open Defecation Free (ODF) Status in Cross River State: The Role of Transitory Truckers in Calabar and Environs.

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Abstract – The Purpose of this paper was to survey the role of transitory truckers in the Cross River State government plan to achieve open defecation free (ODF) status by 2023. The survey research design was adopted for the study while one hundred and twenty long haul truckers were purposely sampled from the four main trailer parks in Calabar metropolis. A simple “yes” and “no” checklist was developed and used to obtain data from the truckers, data obtained were subjected to descriptive statistics of simple percentages. It was found out that majority of the truckers engage in open defecation, almost all the trailer parks did not have public toilets, public water supply nor sanitation facilities and that all the truckers were not aware of the state policy to become ODF in 2023. It was recommended among others that public enlightenment should be targeted at these truckers on the dangers of open defecation and the state ODF policy; public toilets should be built at trailer parks, public water supply and low cost lodgings should be provided around these trailer parks to avoid these truckers spending nights in their trucks and subsequent engagement in unsanitary practices.

Key words – Open Defecation Free, Long Haul Transitory Truckers, Sanitation, Hygiene.

INTRODUCTION

IN 2013, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Water Resources in partnership with the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), Geneva, Switzerland launched in Abuja the Rural Sanitation and Health Promotion in Nigeria (RUSHPIN) funded by Global Sanitation Fund (GSF) and Chaired by the then Governors of Benue and Cross River States, the launch held at Sheraton Hotels and Towers, Abuja, Nigeria. Which culminated in the drafting and signing of MOU in 2014 by the Cross River State Government and UNOPS/WSSC). Two Local Government Councils were selected from Cross River State to participate in a competitive bidding process to access within 7-years the sum of 5 million US Dollars as grant to attain Open Defecation Free (ODF) Status. These local government Councils were Obanliku and Bekwarra. Akamkpa, Obudu and Ogoja were chosen to be on stand-by, under study the system so they can upgrade in the next phase of the programme. Cross River and Benue States were selected as the National pilot states.

Using the Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) Approach, empowering entire communities to change their attitudes towards hygiene and sanitation, ensuring that every community member uses a toilet and practices good hygiene. All the Local Councils were required to do was to revitalize their Water Sanitation and Health Committees (WASHCOM) to mobilize community members/households to construct and consistently use basic improved sanitation facilities for each household in communities

across the Local Government Area while water facilities and financial support for construction of the toilets were to come from the GSF grant. The Federal Ministry of Water Resources engaged the services of United Purpose formerly known as Concern Universal to serve as facilitator and monitor for the programme.

By 2014 Obanliku was declared ODF while Bekwarra followed on 23rd April 2018 and Yakurr Local council was certified open defecation free (ODF) in May 2018. This process of certification follows a rigorous three stage process of verification, certification and a final validation by the Federal Ministry of Water Resources Task Group on Sanitation (NTGS). And by December, 2018, Ikom and Yala Local Councils were also declared ODF after satisfying the National ODF protocol. Boki Local Government Area was also declared ODF in May 2019. Making a total of 6 local councils ODF so far out of eleven in Nigeria. UNICEF, UK aid at this time had joined the Federal Government in developing the strategic plan document titled- “Making Nigeria Open Defecation Free.” This was after the Presidency had declared a state of emergency in water, sanitation and hygiene sector on November 8, 2018 and launched the National Action Plan for revitalization of the WASH sector. All these policies are to assist the country meet the national target of making the country open defecation free by 2025.

It is pertinent to note at this point that Nigeria was reported to have the highest number of people practicing open defecation in Africa with over 46 million people involved in the unhygienic practice with a total sanitation coverage of 33% (the Punch, December 14, 2018). It was also reported that Nigeria has made some progress in the area of provision of safe water but the same cannot be said of sanitation and hygiene. While the Cross River State was savouring in the euphoria of being the leading state in Nigeria in terms of ODF status, WASH actors declared to the news agency of Nigeria (NAN) on 25th march 2019 that by 2023, the state will be completely ODF in all her 18 Local Councils (The Guardian, March 25, 2019).

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In December 2018, the Cross River State Government responding to a global call made a USD3 million commitment to be paid annually towards improving sanitation and hygiene in the state for 5 years (www.wsscc.org, 2019). This was seen in the 2018 Calabar Carnival where sanitation activities took center stage in the 4 days carnival events by sharing posters and airing jingles on televisions and radio stations.

As a state-wide policy, local task force have been inaugurated in all the Local Councils of the state known as Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Committee (WASHCOM). These committees are said to have their own bye-laws and enforcement teams in each of the 196 wards of the state. Anyone caught defecating in the open is arrested and sanctioned/ prosecuted. This is also supported by Community Led Health Improvement through Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion in Nigeria (CHISHPIN) Programme which is a 1.6 million Pounds project covering Biase, Ikom and Yala LGAs in a three year sanitation and hygiene intervention, with the aim of facilitating everyone to have access to sanitation and open defecation thereby reducing diarrhoea prevalence especially among under five children. The project according the Nation newspaper of 5th April, 2019 (<http://thenationonline.ng.net>) has United Purpose as the executing agency and funded by the UK aid direct impact project.

With all these lofty ideas, the researcher is worried about the role transitory trailers, tankers and other heavy duty truckers who shuttle between Calabar and environs; this worry is predicated on the suspicion that these truckers may be spending their nights inside their trucks and one wonders where and how they defecate and perform other hygiene practices.

The presence of the Calabar NNPC Depot, the Lafarge/UNICEM Company and the Calabar Port Authority draws into Calabar hundreds of Transitory Truckers daily to transport products in and out of Calabar especially cement and Petroleum products. A single cement truck carries the driver, a conductor and at least four loaders. Same thing goes for a petroleum tanker. In some cases there is a mechanic travelling with them to help sort out minor faults on the road.

The question the researcher intends to answer is: what is the role of transitory truckers in achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status in Cross River State? Are there public toilets/sanitation facilities in the city of Calabar to cater for the migrant truckers?

What is open defecation?

Open defecation is the human practice of defecating outside—in the open. In lieu of toilets, people use fields, bushes, forests, open bodies of water or other open space. The practice is common where sanitation infrastructure is not available. About 892 million people, or 12 percent of the global population, practice open defecation.

The reasons that have been given for people who don't use toilets have either been poverty that makes it a challenge to build latrines or lack of government support in providing such facilities. In cases where the toilets are available but people still end up preferring opened defecation, the reasons can extend to cultural issues related with sharing toilets among family members.

Saleem, Burdett, and Heaslip, (2019) noted that Open defecation is defined as the practice of defecating in open fields, waterways and open trenches without any proper disposal of human excreta. The term "open defecation" is credited to the publications of Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) in 2008, a joint collaboration of World

Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to evaluate the global progress on water and sanitation goals. Open defecation is classified as unimproved sanitation and it smacks of ignorance on the part of the culprits while it tells of citizens neglect on the part of the government.

Benefits of Open defecation Free (ODF) communities

ODF status in any community guarantees improved health and wellbeing of the people, increased socio-economic activities by the people, reduced school and work absenteeism and living a more dignified life.

Another subtle benefits to the community is the provision of amenities in the form of water, toilets in both public places and residential areas for households. There is also the advantage of increase popularity of the LGA and opportunities for further interventions from the donor agencies.

Through the interventions of WASHCOMS from the various Councils, community members are energized to cooperate amongst themselves and active participation is encouraged for all.

The environment and human health are intricately linked together through the quality of air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the aesthetic ambience we enjoy amongst others. But with the increase in human numbers and the rise in the use of technology worldwide, the environment is threatened by human activities such as transport, industrial processes, and agricultural and waste management practices and most important to this discourse the disposal of human and domestic wastes. Environmental pollutants and potentially pathogenic organisms can harm peoples' health in several ways. This is more so because, for developing countries, the major environmental hazards to health are associated with widespread poverty and severe lack of public infrastructure such as access to drinking water, sanitation/hygiene, and lack of health care facilities. This lack has resulted in the spread of communicable diseases such as cholera, typhoid, dysentery, diarrhoea, malaria, gastro enteritis, intestinal enterococci and so many other vector-borne and water-borne diseases. In all, contact with unsafe drinking water can impose serious risks (both acute and delayed) to human health.

Sanitation is important for all, helping to maintain health and increase life-spans. However, it is especially important for children. Around the world, over 800 children under age five die every day from preventable diarrhoea-related diseases caused by lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene.

Improved sanitation can help maintain school attendance through proper latrine use especially for the girl child.

Sanitation and Hygiene

UN-Water GLAAS (2017) defines Sanitation as the effective use of tools and actions that keep the human environment clean and healthy. Sanitation activities include provision of latrines or toilets to manage waste, food preparation, washing stations, effective drainage and other such mechanisms. Hygiene on the other hand is a set of personal practices that contribute to good health. Hygiene includes actions like hand-washing, bathing and cutting hair/nails. Hand-washing is the single most important activity we can all do to encourage the stop of disease. The difference between sanitation and hygiene according to UN-Water GLAAS (2017) is subtle but important. While both sanitation and hygiene are related, we must

be taught both effective tools and effective behaviours to protect our health.

The overall purposes of sanitation are to provide a healthy living environment for everyone, to protect the natural resources (such as surface water, groundwater, soil), and to provide safety, security and dignity for people when they defecate or urinate.

Improved sanitation helps the environment. Clean drinking water and good sanitation would not prevent infections without practicing good hygiene. A simple habit of washing hands goes a long way towards preventing diseases.

Water in sanitation and hygiene

The importance of water cannot be over stressed, water is the most important and essential chemical compound in human lives. Humans and other living things such as plants, lower animals and other organisms need water to survive. Water as a necessity for life is based on its characteristic nature of existing in more than two different states each necessary for a specific purpose. The importance of water can be summarized in five sub-headings; these headings are: water in synthesis, water in reproduction, water as a Coolant, water in transportation, and water as a Lubricant. Agbazue and Akpanisi (2012) stressed that, water is a universal solvent, transparent medium, participant and catalyst in nearly all chemical reactions occurring in our environment.

Pollution in water is caused by indiscriminate dumping of refuse materials, sewage and industrial wastes such as pesticides, herbicides etc in water. The sources of water pollution are:

Sewage and garbage: many towns and cities are built on the shores of rivers for easy waste disposal. These wastes contaminate the water and cause diseases such as cholera, dysentery etc. Imevbore (1980), Ogedemgbe (1981), saw that as in several other developing countries, and in Nigerian cities alike, sewage is carried in three major ways: through Septic tank and soak-away system in which individual houses are treated separately, the manual collection by night soil men, and the pit latrine system. But the crux of this write-up lies in the unconventional system of excreta or faeces disposal by humans – open defecation.

Defecation and faecal waste

Excretion of human waste is an essential metabolic process for every living being who ingests any kind of food. Pooh, excreta or shit any how the process is called means the same thing. The content of excrement depends essentially on the content of the meal consumed by the person involved. Defecation is the last action in the complex process of digestion which begins from the mouth, it is the action by which organisms expel solid, semisolid, or liquid waste food substances from the digestive tract which terminates at the anus or anal canal connected directly to the rectum. Humans expel faeces depending on the quantity and type of food consumed and the health of their digestive organs.

Approaches to disposal of faecal wastes

The technical feasibility and acceptability of a particular sanitation system depends on several factors including cost and affordability as well as communal or household characteristics. There is a relationship between household wealth/social status and latrine ownership/open defecation. Improved latrine owners are wealthier than unimproved latrine owners or open defecators; are

more educated; and have higher literacy rates (Osumanu, Kosoe, and Ategeeng, 2019). Among the approaches to disposal of faecal wastes in Cross River State are through:

1. Use of pit latrines
2. Use of water systems and soak away pits
3. Use of Cross bar
4. Defecating in flowing rivers and streams
5. Open defecation in nearby bushes and road sides and uncompleted buildings
6. Use of pour flush systems.

In all these approaches, open defecation and the defecation in flowing streams and rivers are the most unhygienic faecal disposal practices. Contaminated faeces in water bodies could affect the entire community that makes use of such water bodies. In the same vein, open defecation around where shallow wells are used will mean general epidemic for the well users.

Impacts of open defecation

Water borne diseases/Vector borne diseases: Apart from water borne diseases, when the human waste collects into heaps, it attracts flies and other insects. These flies then travel around the surrounding areas, carrying defecate matter and disease causing microbes, where they then land on food and drink that people go ahead and ingest unknowingly. In such cases, the flies act as direct transmitters of diseases such as cholera.

Compounding the problem of disease exposure: The saddest fact about disease transmission caused by open defecation is the cyclic nature of problems that then begin to manifest. The most common diseases caused by this unsanitary act are increased cases of diarrhoea, regular stomach upsets and poor overall health. With diarrhoea, for instance, it means that people cannot make their way to distant places due to the urgency of their calls of nature, so they pass waste close to where they have their bowel attacks.

Malnutrition in children: Malnutrition in children is another health problem associated with open defecation. Once a child is a victim of one of the diseases passed on due to the lack of proper sanitation and hygiene, they begin to lose a lot of fluids and lack of appetite for food. As a result, it gives rise to many cases of malnutrition in children.

Contamination via microbes: The environment also suffers as a result of open defecation because it introduces toxins and bacteria into the ecosystem in amounts that it cannot handle or break down at a time. This leads to build up of filth. Also, the load of microbes can become so great that in the end, they end up in aquatic systems thereby causing harm to aquatic life.

At the same time, it can contribute to eutrophication or the formation of algal blooms that form disgusting scum on the surface of the water ways which disturb aquatic life underneath the water by preventing oxygen and light diffusion into the water.

Visual and olfactory pollution: Heaps of human or just the sight of it cause eyesore and nauseate anyone who is close. The stench emanating from the refuse is also highly unappealing and pollutes the surrounding air. Such places also attract large swarms that make the area completely unattractive for the eye.

For all those unfortunate to see the regions affected, it creates a sorry sight and reduces the dignity of all those living in the squalor of those regions. The smells augment the problem by disgusting those who live within the affected regions making life awful.

Saleem, Burdett, and Heaslip, (2019) observed that the health risks most researched in context of open defecation are those associated with human excrement linked infectious diseases. Infected human excreta contain several harmful organisms that are associated with a number of health problems. Virtually, one gram of infected human excreta can contain a variety of microbes which includes 106 pathogenic viruses and infectious viruses, 106–108 bacterial pathogens, 103 protozoan cysts and 10–104 helminthic eggs. Inappropriate human waste disposal also increases the risk of exposure to these pathogens which can pose significant health risks such as transferable infectious diseases, diarrhoea, typhoid and cholera, and viral infections.

The United Nations (UN) have challenged that sanitation has a major impact upon individual Human Rights, arguing that health implications linked to access to clean water, poor sanitation and open defecation are clear breaches of human rights. It is at this point that the government of Cross River State and Nigeria have to step up their game in provision of basic amenities to the populace especially, water, public toilets and other sanitation facilities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Is there a significantly high rate of open defecation by migrant truckers in Calabar?

Are there available sanitation facilities around the 3 major trailer Parks in Calabar?

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was adopted for this research so as to allow the researchers obtain data from a small representative sample and draw inferences for generalization to a wider population. The area of study is Calabar Metropolis covering the Metropolitan Local Government Areas of Calabar South and Calabar Municipal Councils. One hundred and twenty truckers were purposively sampled from four major trailer parks in Calabar. These parks are NNPC Depot Park, Lenma Trailer Park, Dangote Trailer Park and RVL trailer Park. A simple “Yes” and “No” checklist titled “Toileting Approach/Sanitation facilities availability Checklist” was developed by the researchers and administered to the sampled truckers accidentally. This means the researchers administered the checklist on the first 30 willing truckers they encountered in each of the three Parks. The researchers did the checks themselves while the respondents answered to the questions verbally. Where necessary, the researchers explained the questions to the respondents understanding before they gave their responses. Data obtained were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis using simple percentages. Results of the analysis are presented in table 1.

TABLE 1

CHECKLIST OF LONG HAUL TRUCKERS ON OPEN DEFECATION/AVAILABILITY OF SANITATION FACILITIES IN TRAILER PARKS IN CALABAR. N=120

S/n	Statement	Yes	No	Remark
1	Have you defecated	120 (100%)	0 (0%)	Normal Physiological

2	Did you defecate in the open today?	112 (93.3%)	8 (6.7%)	process High open defecation rate
3	Is there a public toilet in this trailer park?	20 (16.7%)	100 (83.3%)	Non-availability of Public toilets almost all the parks
4	Is there public water supply in this park?	0 (0%)	120 (100%)	Absolute lack of public water supply in all the parks
5	Did you spend last night in your truck?	114 (95%)	6 (5%)	Lack of lodging facilities
6	Did you take your bath in the bathroom today?	89 (74.17%)	31 (25.83%)	High rate of bathing in the open before dawn
7	Is there a dump stand in this park?	3 (2.5%)	117 (97.5%)	Non-availability of designated refuse dump stand
8	Is it bad to defecate in the open?	98 (81.7%)	22 (18.3%)	High agreement that open defecation is a poor sanitation habit
9	Do you know Cross River State wants to be ODF in 2023?	0 (0%)	120 (100%)	No awareness about the state government plan to be ODF free in 2023
10	Can somebody contact disease from open defecation?	112 (93.3%)	8 (6.7%)	High awareness about the dangers of open defecation
11	Have sanitation officers come to inspect this park before?	15 (12.5%)	105 (87.5%)	No inspection visits from sanitation officers.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

From Table one above, it is clear that all the respondents undergo the natural physiological process of passing out faeces with all 120 that is 100 percent of them agreeing that they have passed out faeces on the day of the field work. On whether they defecated in the open on the field work day, 112 that is 93.3% of the respondents agreed that they defecated in the open this result was expected because a greater majority of the trailer parks in Calabar do not have sanitation facilities, while 8 that 6.7% did not agree.

On whether there was a public toilet in their park, 20 respondents amounting to 16.7 percent said public toilets were available in their park whereas 100 that is 83.3% of the respondents said they had no public toilets in their park. All the respondents reported the absolute lack of public water supply in all the parks sampled for the study. This explains why there is poor sanitation/

hygiene practices among the long haul Truckers.

On where they spent the last night before the field work day, 114 that is 95% of the respondents said they spent it in their trucks parked outside while 6 amounting to 5% did not sleep in their trucks all night. On whether they had their bath on the field work day in the bathroom, 89 respondents that is 74.17 % said they took their bath in the open before dawn while 31 that is 25.83% of the truckers had their bath in a bathroom most probably away from the parks. 3 truckers that is 2.5% of the respondents agreed that they was a dump stand in their park while a greater majority of the respondents that is 117 accounting for 97.5% said they was no dump stand in their park.

Ninety eight (98) respondents that is 81.7% agreed that open defecation was bad while 22(18.3%) responded that open defecation was not a poor hygiene practice. None of the respondents knew that Cross River State wants to be ODF in 2023. This calls for conscious public enlightenment campaigns targeted especially at these truckers because they play an important role in open defecation. 112 of them that is 93.3% agreed that open defecation was a poor sanitation habit and can lead to spread of diseases while, 8 that is 6.7% said open defecation cannot lead to spread of disease.

Only 15 that 12.5% of the respondents agreed that sanitation officers have come to inspect their park while, 105(87.5%) have not seen any sanitary inspectors monitoring their park for safe hygiene practices.

CONCLUSION:

It is concluded that transitory, migrant, long haul truckers play an important role in open defecation, it was also concluded from the findings of the study that majority of the trailer parks in Calabar do not have public toilets nor public water supply hence they engage in open defecation and other unsanitary practices. It was also concluded that government has not sensitized these long haul truckers on the dangers of open defecation and her drive towards making the State ODF by 2023.

Solutions to Open Defecation/way forward to achieving State wide ODF status in Cross River State

To solve this issue, it takes the action of individuals and even the intervention of the government to address the cultural, economic and social challenges in tandem. The following actions can be taken as a matter of urgency:

1. Provision of toilets

First, there is a need to ensure that there are enough toilets. Since these regions are usually very poor, it will take the efforts of the government as well as the good will of local organisations such as CBOs and NGOs to help fix the problem. Construction of pit latrines and other toilet options such as compost toilets is necessary to help deal with the problem of lacking sewer systems. Governments should also try to establish incentives for people to build their own toilets by providing subsidies and putting up public toilets in strategic locations.

2. Corrective civil education

Another platform that needs to be addressed is the negative cultural association that people have with toilets. The people should be informed and given civic education to enable them break away from their cultural

beliefs on issues such as the fact that toilets are not supposed to be shared.

In other words, cultural norms and beliefs must be changed over time through education and awareness creation. With time, people can become informed and drop the beliefs or at least adjust and make concessions about the ones that are most destructive.

3. Incentivise public hygiene participation

By creating government programs that encourage sanitation and personal hygiene, individuals must be involved and forced to take up the responsibility of enhancing their hygiene as well as overall health.

Through such programs, people can get to learn the importance of their environments and work towards ensuring that they do not harm themselves by partaking in open defecation. It eventually reduces healthcare burdens on the government and lessens the number of those who practice open defecation as it will be seen as a terrible activity

4. Special toilets in trailers parks: while it is necessary to create specialized parks for trailers within the metropolis, such parks should be equipped with toilets and sanitation facilities to serve teaming migrant truckers who troop in and out of the state daily. This sanitation facilities when built should take in consideration the cultural and religious diversities of Nigerians. Male and female sections should be clearly marked and demarcated, places of ablution should be earmarked for Muslims faithful while water supply should be constant.

5. Market based hygiene practices could be introduced: in situations where the provision, running and maintenance of the sanitation facilities are too expensive for government, users of such facilities could be made to pay a token before use so as to support the upkeep of the systems.

6. Development of guest houses/travellers lodges: rather than allow these truckers sleep over in their trucks most times for days, government or private individuals could build low cost travellers lodges for these truckers to hire and low rates. This will not only bring in income to the proprietors but will at the long run curtail open defecation by these truckers.

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