

## The Role of Universities in Awareness Creation Towards Plastic Pollution Mitigation in Nigeria

Orji, Evelyn. I.<sup>1</sup>, Agnes, I. Ulayi<sup>2</sup>, Oke, Tope.O.<sup>3</sup>, Attah Frank M. <sup>4</sup>, Anabaraonye, Benjamin<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Environmental Adult Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Curriculum and Teaching, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

<sup>4</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

<sup>5</sup>Benjy Poetry and Music Global Concepts, Awka, Nigeria.

### Abstract

The continent of Africa just like other continents is experiencing the negative impact of plastic pollution as well as other environmental pollution related issues. Plastic pollution is therefore an issue of great concern to communities, cities and campuses across Nigeria. Federal and State Ministries of Environment and other environmental related NGOs in collaboration with Universities in Nigeria need to join hands in fighting this menace. This study vividly identifies the role of universities in awareness creation towards plastic pollution mitigation in Nigeria.

*Keywords:* Climate Change, Education, Nigeria, Plastics, Pollution, Universities

### Introduction

The negative effects of plastic pollution on sustainable economic growth in Nigeria have been highlighted by researchers in recent times (Anabaraonye, Olowoyeye, Anukwonke,2023). The continent of Africa like other continents is equally experiencing the negative impact of plastic pollution in addition to other environmental pollution

related menace. It becomes a great concern for all stakeholders; Universities in Nigeria in particular, Ministry of Environment and other environmental related NGOs to join hands in fighting this menace. A holistic view of our lifestyle reveals that individuals at home, in the neighborhoods, offices, market places and the manufacturers of plastic products are all contributors to this menace

called ' Plastic Pollution ". This study aims to highlight how communities, cities and campuses in Nigeria can join hands together to beat this global menace in Nigeria. Through human daily consumptions, industrial and commercial activities plastic waste is generated daily and disposed of without much ado in the environment. This undesirable and unsustainable behavior exacerbates plastic wastes accumulation in our immediate vicinity, in addition to an increase in plastic waste all over the world (Chow, So, Cheung & Yeung, 2017). Plastic pollution is the introduction of harmful materials. non-degradable plastic waste into our environment which if not removed may cause harm to human health, destruction of biomes and aquatic habitats. Non-degradable plastic wastes are toxic and can destroy water ways and soil (land), which is inimical to human's livelihood, animals and plant lives (Dibia, Wala, Onwuzurike, Anabaraonye, and Arinze,2023). Plastic products especially one-time use material for packaging all kinds of products have become essential commodity making it difficult to do without. There is need to discourage over dependency on plastic products or better still, encourage proper plastic waste management to mitigate

plastic pollution in Nigeria (Anabaraonye, Olowoyeye, Anukwonke,2023). Plastic waste dumped in different sites around our environment are a visual menace at the first instance. Visual pollution caused by plastic waste affects aesthetics which is discomfoting. It has posed serious threat to local and global habitats and indirectly affecting human health, and livelihood (Okolo, Amaechi, Olisah, Onwuzurike & Anabaraonye,2023) It is saddening, to behold our environment being defaced and impacted negatively by humans. This is to the extent, that the United Nations has called on all nations to “beat plastic pollution” in their countries to commemorate World Environment Day 2023 Environment Celebration(UNEP,2023).It is therefore very beautiful to see the Benjy Poetry And Music Global Concepts in collaboration with the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany organize the World Environment Day 2023 Virtual Summit with the theme “Mitigating Plastic Pollution For Sustainable Environment in Nigeria”(Anabaraonye,2023).This event which gave a clarion call to lecturers and researchers from various Universities across Nigeria and around the World to join hands

in mitigating plastic pollution for sustainable environment in Nigeria was highly impactful, refreshing and motivational. Awareness creation about plastic pollution and the potential threat to life and the environment is crucial now. It would certainly improve the level of awareness of people on this particular environmental concern. With improved knowledge, there is the tendency to record improved attitude towards adoption of mitigation measures towards reducing, recycling and reusing plastic waste for sustainable environment in Nigeria. To achieve this, awareness creation on mitigation of plastic pollution, education is key (Anabaraonye, Olowoyeye, Anukwonke, 2023). Moreover, deducing from the UN Environment Day 2023 slogan, if no intervention is put in place to “Beat plastic pollution”, now, the environment may become choked up, unsuitable and unsustainable for our present and future generations (UNEP, 2023).

## METHODOLOGY

Materials used for this study were derived from online academic journals, magazines, articles, conference papers, textbooks, and educational materials from libraries. The

researchers gathered a lot of materials for the research but summarized the characteristics of the papers that centered more on “The Role of Universities in awareness creation towards plastic pollution mitigation in Nigeria”. This enabled the researchers to generate the synthesis of various views of other researchers on the subject matter.

## UNIVERSITY AS A VEHICLE FOR PLASTIC POLLUTION AWARENESS CREATION

Education is a powerful tool in impartation of desirable knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors. It is a tool for awareness creation and particularly in educating people about the environment. Through dissemination of strategic information, educational and awareness creation summits on plastic pollution mitigation, individuals in the society will come to understand their role in building a sustainable environment. As stakeholders, universities are looked upon to play active role towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Tekman, Walter, Petr, and Bergmann, 2021). In this study, SDG 13 is our focus for climate change mitigation and environmental sustainability. The vehicles for awareness

creation on plastic pollution mitigation in Nigeria is quite a large one and if pursued with urgency, can make substantial impactful change on people's attitudes and behaviors. This awareness creation is to persuade and appeal to the conscience of individuals, communities, government, non-governmental agencies and the elites. Hopefully based on the persuasion and appeal to protect our environment for us and for the future, many people could be encouraged and helped to contribute to sustainable environment.

### **WHAT IS THE PRESENT PLASTIC POLLUTION MITIGATION EFFORT MADE BY NIGERIA?**

According to Walker, Tony and Xauthos (2018), the direction of efforts to lessen plastic pollution has been by:

- Promoting plastic recycling
- Promoting reduction in consumption of one-use plastic products
- Directing sustainable reuse

#### **Government efforts in Nigeria include:**

- Setting up Plastic Pollution Mitigation/Environmental Sustainability Agency

- Agreement as a party to UN environment protection deal
- Environmental Sustainability Policies

### **UNIVERSITY AWARENESS CREATION STRATEGIES FOR MITIGATION OF PLASTIC POLLUTION IN NIGERIA**

1. **Local Environmental Agency on Campus:** Creating environmental agency within the green offices across various universities in Nigeria is very vital for awareness creation on plastic pollution mitigation in Nigeria. This agency will help monitor littering habits among students and lecturers in the Universities. It will also encourage, enable and enhance effective disposal and management of plastic waste on campus.
2. **Campus as a model for sustainable environment:** The adoption of some climate change mitigation measures such as, management of plastic waste should be verifiable and visible in the Nigerian Universities. The adoption of the 3-R and 5-R plastic pollution mitigation measures should be engendered in the school as a culture and values system. The university campus should be a model for society, a

model for sustainable environment. Students, lecturers and other staff can be actively engaged in the plastic pollution mitigation processes from beginning to the end. Proper plastic waste management that is functional on campus can serve as avenue for student's entrepreneurship training and empowerment. From this exposure, graduates can decide to venture in the future into the plastic recycling industry on full scale. The economic, social and psychological benefits for the individual and entire society are numerous. For example, knowledge in turning waste to wealth is a security against poverty and unemployment and a contribution to efforts to achieve SDGs 1, 2 and 13 particularly critical for developing countries like Nigeria.

**3. Visuals on Environment concerns:** Mounting Street billboards, campus billboards, as powerful visual expo of environmental concerns and appeal to live sustainably.

**4. Advocacy, awareness and sensitization:** The awareness of climate change including waste disposal attitudes are very low in Nigeria. This has many reasons. But one distinct reason is because, concern for environment is considered of very low priority because other more pressing and

immediate needs has to be attended to. Secondly, environment concern is viewed as government's business. Individuals care much less. Through village square outreaches, University host communities can be sensitized on the environment issues around them including other climate-related and plastic pollution menaces. Through this same medium, community members; young and old can join in the efforts to salvage our environment from plastic waste and make it sustainable for everyone's happiness.

**5. University Conferences and Seminars:** Conferences and seminars focused on plastic pollution and dangers of single use plastic products should be organized regularly. A good example is the World Environment Day 2022 Virtual Summit which was organized by the Institute of Climate Change Studies, Energy and Environment both at University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 2022 in collaboration with the Benji Poetry and Music Global Concepts (Anabaraonye,2022). The testimonials received after the summit of those who benefited immensely from the seminars and networking opportunities attested to the high impact of the summit among the participants (Anabaraonye,2022).

## **6. University Street Walks and Press**

**Conference:** Universities in Nigeria through their green offices can organize street walks and grassroots press conferences. Stakeholders in information like the press, officers of national orientation agencies, among others should be equipped with the latest updates on plastic pollution and other environmental matters around the country and the world at large. For example, the world environment day theme for year 2023 is to "Beat plastic pollution". It should make headlines in all available University news media to create impactful awareness. Through calling for press interviews for example, the role of the university in environmental protection should grow to the extent that, any information emanating from them should be taken more seriously and complied with.

## **7. Collaboration with Artists, Musicians and Entertainment industry:**

University Green offices in Nigeria can utilize their faculties in Arts, Environment Geography and related disciplines as well as Education to produce music, drama, songs, poems, stories and literary works that can be used to influence perception and attitudinal change of Nigerians. The essence is to put

environmental awareness in the minds of the people. Hearing this information and seeing the issues and future projection of impending damage to lives and livelihoods could motivate them, and ignite them for empathic responsibility actions for climate. Poetry and music have been identified as valuable tools which can be used to educate communities, cities and campuses across Nigeria on climate change mitigation and plastic pollution mitigation for sustainable environment in Nigeria (Anabaraonye, Nji & Hope,201; Okon, Orji, Okolo & Anabaraonye,2023).

## **8. Collaboration with policy makers and non-government agencies with interest on climate change:**

Through collaboration with these groups, relevant laws and actions for plastic pollution mitigation can be passed into law and implementation mechanism set for action if enforcement is pursued vigorously, given the dire need to project the direct and indirect effect on human health and livelihoods.

## **9. Research by academics and students:**

In this 21st Century economy, issues of global concern in the SDGS like environment protection should be communicated to the students; the future

leaders. Today, the issue of plastic pollution has attracted global attention whose focus is to beat it no matter the cost, before the environment is overwhelmed by its menace. The innovative strategies on how to beat plastic pollution should generate queries and questions on the minds of scholars and researchers. Investigation by faculties and students should be, to carry out research, in order to learn more about the situation in our country and devise more indigenous strategies to combat plastic pollution.

## CONCLUSION

The urgent task for awareness creation and plastic pollution mitigation needs to be undertaken by passionate individuals, educationists and professionals across various communities, cities and institutions in Nigeria (Dibia, Wala, Onwuzurike, Anabaraonye & Arinze, 2023). There is need for all hands to be on deck if the menace of plastic pollution is to be tackled as it should. Universities in Nigeria need to take the lead and also collaborate more with government agencies and other multilateral organizations to find a sustainable solution. The World Bank Group through green financing can also support Universities in this task of mitigating

plastic pollution in Nigeria (Anabaraonye, Ezuma, Emone, Olisah & Ewa, 2023). Awareness creation as a plastic pollution mitigation strategy would help equip individuals, staff and students of universities and the general public with knowledge on how to reduce their contribution to plastic pollution to engender a sustainable environment.

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