

Government Policies and its Implementation Deficiencies in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (Wash) Programs in Secondary Schools in Riparian Communities of Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Government policies are those principles, guidelines and laws adopted by any government to address issues of concern in a bid to achieve specific goals in areas of health, economy, education, etc. It commences with problem identification, formulation of plan, and thereafter, taking firm steps of action via an appropriate process or official statements to influencing decisions and actions within the jurisdictional power. However, in the implementation of water, sanitation and hygiene in secondary schools in the Riverine Areas of River State, a wide gap appears to exist between government policies implementation, and the actual implementation practices necessitated by the need assessment. This paper is a narrative policy review that x-rayed some of the implementation deficiencies in WASH as it affects the riverine communities to include lack of awareness, inadequate funding, paucity of governmental intervention, poor maintenance culture, lack of community engagement, deviant management culture, among several others. The paper suggests ways of bridging the gaps to include encouraging community participation; increase funding; establishing of monitoring and evaluation unit(s) at the local government areas (councils) to interface with the schools and make same report to the concern agencies at the state and national levels, and to encourage management accountability and responsiveness.

Keywords:

Government Policy, Implementation Deficiencies, Secondary School, Riverine Areas, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.

Introduction

Government policies are written document or statement of the intent that serves as road maps, defining government goals and the action it will take to address specific issues, problems, and or sectors(s). Systematically, it is a standard law, and regulation engineered to achieve specific results, expressing what the government will do or not. In line with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and its ancillaries' water, sanitation, and hygiene policy implementation in secondary school and beyond have come to stay to improve the overall health outcomes of students and to still in them positive behavioral changes that will ensure, promote and sustain good health without cohesion. Furthermore, these policies and programs are indispensable for providing an enabling environment for

sustainable development, addressing fundamental issues such as access to functional water supply, toilet, infrastructure, sound hygiene practices, effective waste management, hand hygiene including menstrual hygiene of the girl child (students). With absolute knowledge and understanding of the unique challenges of the Riverine communities, the government can successfully come up with a blue print and implement policies and program that supports or encourages sustainable development and any program therewith as to improve the quality life of the student's community. Government can ensure that these policies and programs are successfully addressing the felt needs of the riverine secondary schools in Rivers State through effective and efficient system of monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder's engagement and the participatory rural appraisal or the need assessment within the nexus of Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Environment. The overall of this, will be an immeasurable benefit not only to the schools but the entire stream of Riverine communities and a revolutionary progress of the state defining equitable distribution and development.

Policies and Programs Of Government On Education And The Riverine Communities

Government policies and programs simply mean and include an action plan and initiatives set out by government to address issues such as education, economics, social, political, finance, wealth etc. The overall interest by these programmers is geared toward achieving an improved health and social well-being of the citizens, promote economy growth including social security. These policies are patterned via "the process" (i.e., rules and regulations must be firmly upheld by all no matter how highly place one may be). It contains procedures and encourages effective disciplined personalities to adapt to its regulations. However, in Nigeria, political power has reached a faux-pass, and thus, weakened the back bone of check and balance (the due process). Thus, at all levels of the government (Federal, State and Local Government) some immeasurable level of indiscipline has characterize government conduct to work. It is an "evil wind" that blows no man good in the system inadvertently.

Holistically, at the secondary school levels, several government programs and policies abound which are not limited to the following National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), the Universal Basic Education (UBE) among others as posited by Orji et al., 2024. The center seat of NEEDS outside making more money from business and jobs is that it provides or ensures improved access to water supply, better health outcomes, increased social support for the vulnerable population, and better education. One fundamental question that comes to mind is this: are these lofty programmers been carried out at the rural areas of Rivers State especially the riverine communities hosting these secondary schools? In my attempt to answer this question, I relied upon Ahmed et al., (2021) who averred that "despite the enormous contributions of the rural dwellers to national wealth, it appears ironically as if successive development programmers implemented by government were geared towards exploitation and impoverishment". Against this backdrop, Orji et al., (2024) suggested that priority attention is needed in the rural areas of Rivers State to cushion the effects of whole poverty, unemployment, crime, etc. which are on the increase.

Most poignantly, the riverine communities contribute to the geometric economic progression of the state and by extension Nigeria. For Example, Kula, Ifoko, Bukuma, Torusarama Piri (Elem Kalabari), Bonny, Bille, Odual in Abua/Odual L.G.A, Soku, Idama, Sangama, Alakiri in Walga, just to mention but a few are contributing immensely to the national economy of Nigeria. These communities need equitable distribution of WASH infrastructure that is sustainable not merely effective and efficient at the moment. The communities need to be sensitized in the right perspective and well-integrated into government policies and program which exert influence on them implicitly or explicitly. This will give them a sense of belonging and promote participation.

Secondary School Wash Related Policies and Programs in Nigeria

The Government of Nigeria has established national policy and programs to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in secondary schools that are focused on infrastructure, community involvement, and capacity building. These policies are not limited to the following:

1. The National Youth WASH Program: The Program was initiated by the Federal Ministry of Water Resources dated 12th May, 2024. It is a strategy aimed at mobilizing youth at all level to reposition and strengthen the water and sanitation sector targeted at secondary schools' students and

youth corps members. It prepares WASH ambassadors who run clubs, peer education session, and small-grant project such as rain water tanks, tippy tap hand washing stations. The National youth WASH program partners with Federal Ministry of Youth & Sports, UNICEF and NGOs such as Self-Help Africa.

2. State Level Initiative: The adoption of National Guideline and initiative of WASH is inevitable. For example, in Rivers State, WASH is anchored on the State Water Policy (SWP) of 2012. The policy reveals or avers to clean water, sanitation and hygiene services, and it has been linked with the SURWASH program under the aegis of the SDG 6 framework. The policy is the brain child of the Ministry of Water Resources and Rural Development (MWRRD) whose focus were:

- (a) Expanding access to potable Water.
- (b) Encouraging community participation.
- (c) Strengthening institutional framework for water governance.
- (d) Promoting significant facilities in schools, health centers and communities.

Other states like Cross- Rivers State and Lagos also have an excellent WASH Policies. In Lagos State, there is an “EKO Water for All” (EWA). The objective of EWA is to upgrade water supply and simulation infrastructure in both public and private secondary schools. To achieving her objectives, the Lagos state set out activities to include: Rain-water harvesting system (RHS), Hand washing stations, installation of borehole, integrate hygiene education and gender-segregated latrines into the curriculum. The strategy employ for sustainability of the said activities by the Lagos State government is to partner with reputable organization such as Lagos State Ministry of Education, Local and International NGOs, UNICEF Etc. Whereas in Calabar, Cross River state, “Revision 2024” policy pathway replaces the “2011 framework” The new policy account for community led sanitation, climate-resilience water supply, and a clear timeline. Cross-River’s state share partnership with UNICEF, Local NGO’s, Self-help Africa, and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) via the Wash System for health (WS4H) program. In this scenario, it adjudged that the focus of the Cross River state Government is to ensure among others gender-equitable access to safe water and sanitation, strengthening accountability and financing for WASH, and scaling up community led total sanitation (CLTS) in schools and rural areas.

3. Development Partners and NGO Support: In line with the policy statement of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as it affects WASH, the development partners are not limited to the followings:

- (a) Self Help Africa and WASH Programme: This initiative is aimed at achieving technical assistance, small grants, and ensure capacity building for secondary school WASH committee. This, the Cross-Rivers state government explore including some Northern State of Nigeria to sensitize, create awareness, and there to sustain the program lifespan.
- (b) CSHEEH (Culture for school Health, Education and Environmental Hygiene) Project: This initiative focuses on renew water taps, reconstruct toilets, run hygiene sensitization, and install hand-washing sinks. It is a collective drive mostly as expected in the Nigeria Capital territory Abuja.
- (c) UNICEF WASH IN Schools (WINS) Pilots: In this regard, it is expected that development partners, program proponents and the statutory ministries where WASH activities are ongoing should work in harmony to develop monitory tools, infrastructure pilots (e.g., boreholes rehabilitation, gender-friendly latrines, etc.), and training modules. Already in Imo state and Lagos State respectively, this practice is ongoing.

Implementation Deficiencies of Secondary Schools Wash Program In Rivers State

The deficiencies in WASH implementation in Rivers State Secondary Schools has multidimensional phases which are not limited to the followings:

- a. **Wash Infrastructure Deficiency:** There is virtually no functional sanitarium and hygiene management or services. All the government own secondary schools lacks basic sanitary provision and many if not all lacks effective water supply. This endeared students to practice open defecation and very poor hand hygiene habits.

- b. Bottom Line:** Secondary Schools in Rivers State are faced with succession of implementation deficiencies rising from inadequate WASH and scrambling buildings to insufficient funding and weak teacher competencies. Government needs a well-coordinated and integrated plan of action (i.e., local communities, NGOs, governmental agencies, etc.) to avert the menace been practiced by secondary school students.
- c. School-based Assessment and Continuous Assessment Programs:** Most teachers exercise paucity of independencies, facilities, and the needed nexus of record keeping culture to run the continuous assessment (CA) scheme effectively. Large class size (Class with higher population of students), insufficient funding and inadequate training further exacerbate proper implementation processes.
- d. Physical Structure and Maintenance:** Studies have shown that over 65% of the public schools' buildings are in a state of dilapidation. Inherent under funding, vandalism, lack of community involvement and participation, and delayed maintenance culture influences secondary school facilities to a state of comatose.
- e. Teacher Training and Digital Literacy:** Training of teachers and instilling in them virtue of WASH is sacrosanct. However, teachers often lack the digital skill and technological infrastructure to implement them, which hitherto, limits the effectiveness of new teaching and assessment tools. This is predominant due to artificial intelligence (AI) initialization for supervision as expressed by many scholars in most recent times.
- f. Lack of Privacy:** Many of the Secondary school do not have latrines or public conveniences separated for girls. This particularly influences older female students negatively. The physically challenge is not left out in this limitation or quantum denial.

Causes of Wash Inplementation Deficiency In Secondary Schools

Consequently, The Underlying Causes Are Traceable To The Followings:

- (a) Lack of Governmental intervention:** Government political will for pragmatic support and intervention is in a snail track for where it does exist, and poor intention used to the overall poor state of secondary school infrastructure.
- (b) Poor maintenance and management culture:** Due to placidity of routine inspection, monitoring and maintenance mechanism, broken school facilities are not repaired in a timely manner. This promotes infrastructure decay and often times gives window for the men of the underworld to cart away properties which ordinarily would have benefited students at large.
- (c) Limited Awareness:** It is said that information is power. This lack of awareness, sensitization and knowledge with specific importance to hygiene and sanitation in secondary schools program and practices mostly in the riverine countries influences WASH implementation negatively.
- (d) Inadequate Funding:** Funding has become a great issue in implementing WASH activities mostly in the Riverine Area where the cost of transportation of materials and personnel is capital intensive. Thus, insufficient funding serves as barrier to the implementation of WASH program.
- (e) Lack of Training and Retraining of Staff:** Most teachers manning the various institution lacks basic training, knowledge and understanding of WASH, hence, they do not attach much interest and value towards it policy implantation processes.
- (e) Stakeholders Indifference and Disparity:** In most cases, critical community stakeholders were not integrated ab initio and thus they exhibit indifference in terms of implementation of the policies. Furthermore, at some point, favoritism and nepotism among stakeholders can precipitate to disparity which could exert negative influence on the general implementation process of the policy.

Consequences of Wash Implementation Deficiencies

The negative significant impact of WASH implementation deficiencies includes the following:

- 1. Higher Absenteeism:** Both students and teachers are likely to be absent from school due to illness. Such illnesses could result from poor sanitation and hygiene practices, toilet related infection mostly for the female gender, poor quality water supply e.g., diarrheal, etc.

2. **Reduced Academic Performance:** Absenteeism and poor in health are hydra-headed template that negatively influences students' ability to learn and perform creditably well.
3. **Increase Illness:** Inadequate sanitation and paucity of hygiene management are driver factors for higher burden or hygiene related illnesses. In this regard, students' health risk will be high.
4. **Equity Concern:** Observed disparities in WASH can prolong social and educational discrepancies especially between urban and rural secondary schools, and between the male and the female students including the physically challenged students.

Key Challenges In Wash Implementation In Secondary Schools

- **Poor Hygiene Facilities (PHF):** Studies have reported that less than 10% of students asserts the availability of soap and water for hand washing.
- **Funding Constraints (FC):** There is lack of sufficient funding of secondary schools which explicitly influences the provision and maintenance of WASH programs.
- **Poor Accessibility to Water supply (PAWS):** A minimum of 30% of secondary schools have limited water and sanitation services. Many of the schools are relying on an unwholesome water resource and services as their only means of water supply.
- **Inadequate Sanitation Infrastructure (ISI):** Toilet infrastructures are mostly inadequate, and there is a segregation of these few toilets to accommodate the girls or female students. This singular act can change students' behavior negatively mostly the older females.
- **Inequalities Across Schools (IAS):** Schools in rural areas mostly within riverine areas are grossly affected with greater WASH services gaps when compared to urban schools.
- **Management and Accountability Gaps (MAG):** Unclear ownership responsibility and weak in structural framework perverse effective WASH service delivery in many secondary schools mostly the Riverine communities.
- **Paucity of Waste Management Facility:** In most of the campuses, litters and heaps of refuses abound due to lack of waste management infrastructures. At some point, solid wastes are disposed at every blind alley, a situation that affect public health negatively.

Gaps Identified

The following gaps can be identified:

- **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Weak monitoring systems super-imposed with limited data collection to track WASH program in secondary schools is highly discouraging.
- **Community Engagement and Participation (CEP):** Local Communities and parents more often than not are not involved in this sustainability process of WASH facilities which eventually cumulate to neglect and total decay of facilities.
- **Gender - Sensitive Approach (GSA):** Most of the schools in River State especially in the Riverine communities lack menstrual hygiene management (MHM) facilities. This tends to creating barriers for the adolescent girls.
- **Policy Practice Disconnect (PPD):** Notwithstanding the alignment of Nigeria with SDGs, implementation of these adopted protocols in the exact manner as expected has become a faux pas as inconsistency in the operation is now a continuum.

Conclusion

In Rivers State, Secondary Schools in general is facing serious WASH challenges. These challenges are many and varied, and are not limited to the following: Weak management, inefficient and ineffective water supply and sanitation, and paucity of hygiene infrastructure including waste management deficiencies. The ladder to these deficiencies could be linked with the decision-making process, insensitiveness on the part of government to create awareness and integrate community participation and involvement in policies derivatives and governance ab initio as it affects WASH implementation in secondary schools. More so, the inability of government to identify critical stakeholders and cementing robust cordiality with reference to sustenance of WASH program has become a teething issue. To address these gaps underscore accountability, stronger funding, strong political will, community involvement and effective community participation, and stern commitment at both ends (i.e., donors' agencies and recipient) pragmatically.

Recommendation

1. There should be establishment for monitoring and evaluation in a bid to trail progress and gaps regularly. This could curtail infrastructure decay as early signs warning can be identified.
2. There should be an increase funding by all government agencies link to WASH in secondary schools. Alumni can supplement funding were necessary as a way to give back to society.
3. There should be an integration of gender-sensitive WASH programs (i.e., industrial hygiene support, toilet facilities, etc.).
4. Strength Management structure with possible and clear accountability for improve maintenance culture be encouraged at all level of the process mostly at the concerned agencies.
5. There should an encouragement in the promotion of community participation to drive home the involvement of critical stakeholders from the various community in the policy formulation and implementation process in bid to ensure and enhance sustainability.
6. Pragmatic Resilience to SWOT Analysis: Ensuring a workable approach to strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (SWOT) towards WASH activities can be an effective nexus to bridging gaps at any point of the half-life of WASH program. Ipso facto, this will serve as an identifier or warning signal toward sustainability.

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