

Public Relations as a Strategic Tool to Combat Environmental Pollution in Abuja Nigeria for National Development

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ISSN: 1533 - 9211

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KEYWORDS:

Public relations, Pollution,
Environmental pollution,
Strategic Tool and
National Development.

Received: 22 June 2025
Accepted: 26 July 2025
Published : 01 August 2025

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Abstract

In Nigeria, all the states across different ecological zones experience diverse environmental challenges, including drought-induced desertification, gully erosion, flooding, sewage problems, and so on. Environmental pollution in Nigeria is a pressing issue that poses significant risks to human health, ecosystems, and the economy, and very essential to understand the major sources of environmental pollution to develop effective strategies for mitigating its adverse effects. However, various forms of environmental abuse have put the lives of residents of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja at the risk of diverse kinds of situations and adverse health conditions. The paper postulates that ignorance of the risk posed by environmental abuse could be responsible for the lackadaisical attitude of the populace. These issues highlight the need for comprehensive environmental policies and proactive measures to mitigate their impacts. In order to address the environmental pollution in Nigeria requires a multi-faceted approach, including effective communication and public relations strategies, improved waste management, stricter environmental regulations, public awareness campaigns, and active community participation. Based on this, the study employed survey design that comprised of quantitative and qualitative methods. It also adopted purposive sampling method in selecting four informants (qualitative aspect) and lecturers of the School of Basic and Allied Sciences in Babcock University. The selection was based on their experience and role in the society. The study concluded by saying that an awareness campaign is required to enable residents understand the risks to which they are exposed and to equip them with education, knowledge and skill to combat the challenges posed by pollution. And recommended a replacement of the watch-dog role of Mass Media to that of a Guide-dog role, communication programmes should be planned to include different public relations' tools and techniques and such campaigns should be planned and timed.

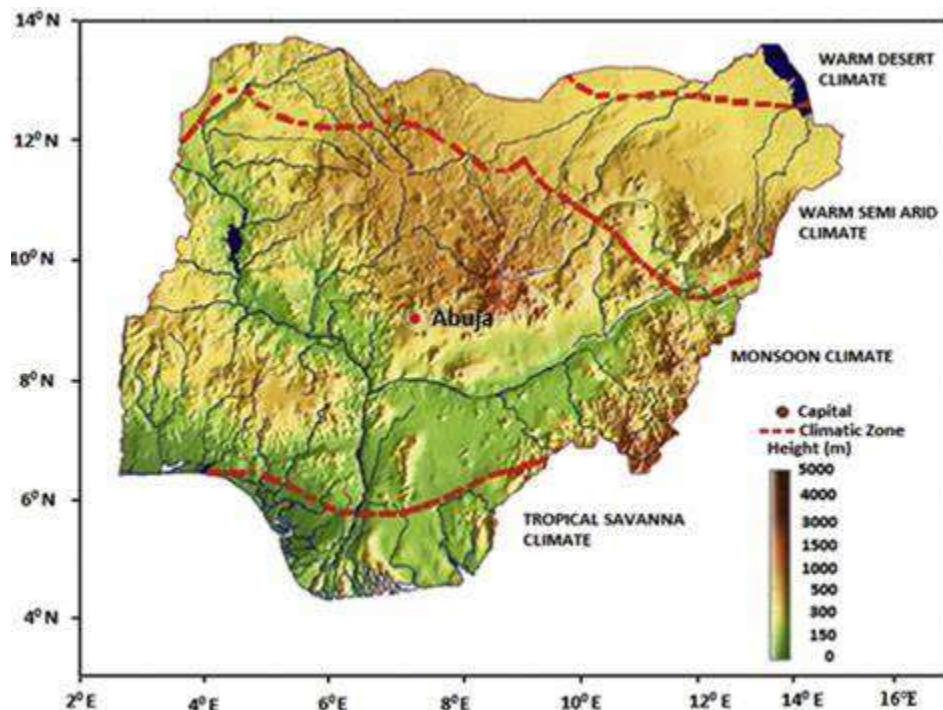
Toutou, T. C., Ekeh, C. M., Odigbo, B. E., & Ngwoke, O. U. (2025). *Public relations as a strategic tool to combat environmental pollution in Abuja, Nigeria for national development*. Seybold Report Journal, 20(8), 26–45. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.16629636](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16629636)

Introduction

Pollution refers to the introduction of harmful substances or contaminants into the environment, disrupting natural systems and posing significant risks to human health, biodiversity, and overall ecological balance. Pollutants can be chemical, physical, biological, or radiological agents, originating from both natural and human-induced sources.” Pollution becomes particularly hazardous when these contaminants reach levels that threaten living organisms and ecological processes, making it one of the most pressing environmental challenges today.

Dambisa (2012) asserts that pollutants exist in various forms, including chemicals, oil, sewage, solid waste, and organic materials. These harmful substances negatively impact human health and the environment, hindering both rural and national development. Historically, human waste has contributed to some pollution of water sources, but the scale and severity of pollution today driven largely by human activities are unprecedented. Pollution knows no political boundaries and poses a serious threat to national development, requiring urgent attention and intervention.

According to Reliefweb (2021), between January and August 2021, Nigeria recorded 31,425 suspected cases of cholera, 311 confirmed cases, and 816 deaths across 31 states. Affected states include Abia, Adamawa, Ekiti, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Taraba, Benue, Delta, Zamfara, Gombe, Bayelsa, Kogi, Sokoto, Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Kebbi, Cross River, Rivers, Niger, Nasarawa, Jigawa, Yobe, Kwara, Enugu, Katsina, Borno, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) which is the focused of the study. See below as evidence to justify the claims of this study.



Figure, 1. Map of Nigeria showing the climatic zones, with the desertification frontline zone, in brown colours, lying in the Northern half of the map bordering Abuja

The Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) attributes the cholera outbreak to inadequate access to clean water, open defecation, poor sanitation, and hygiene practices. This highlights the urgent need to strengthen water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) practices through effective communication with the aid of public relations efforts.

Anatsui (2015) emphasizes that environmental degradation, conservation; protection, sanitation, and management have become critical concerns for both business and non-business organizations. This global focus on environmental sustainability can be traced back to the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. The conference underscored the consequences of environmental neglect and urged individuals and organizations to take deliberate actions to conserve, protect, and maintain a healthy environment for sustainable development.

Touitou (2021) further asserts that environmental problems manifest in various forms and affect local, national, continental, and global levels. In Nigeria, states across different ecological zones experience diverse environmental challenges, including drought-induced desertification, gully erosion, flooding, sewage problems, deforestation, agro-chemical pollution, bush burning, oil spills, gas flaring, mining waste, industrial pollution, vehicular emissions, noise pollution, and toxic waste dumping. These issues highlight the need for comprehensive environmental policies and proactive measures to mitigate their effects.

Addressing pollution requires a multi-faceted approach, including effective communication and public relations efforts, improved waste management, stricter environmental regulations, public awareness campaigns, and active community participation. Sustainable environmental practices are essential for national growth and long-term ecological stability, ensuring a healthier future for all. All hands must be on deck for an effective result through the proper coordination of public relations experts.

According to Touitou (2021), public relations is significantly underutilized in disseminating information about environmental issues in Nigeria. Effective public relations plays a pivotal role in raising public awareness, mobilizing communities, and fostering cooperation to address these challenges. As a social science that incorporates the human element into management practices, public relations is uniquely positioned to predict and influence individual and group responses to environmental stimuli a concept akin to the Stimulus-Response Theory in psychology. Public relations will ensure that communication is fully integrated and utilized effectively, and intervention to focus on goals, audiences and messages determine by the media to be used as to get the actual result. Therefore, a more strategic, organized, and effective public relations approach is essential for promoting environmental management, which is crucial for national growth and sustainability

Concept Analysis, Discussion and Explanations

Concepts of Public Relations

Anatsui, (2020), states that public relations is the profession that influences public opinion or attitudes in a positive direction, fostering understanding and acceptance. It establishes two-way

communication to ensure mutual understanding and resolve conflicts of interest between individuals, organizations, and their publics. A common theme in these definitions is that public relations aims not only to communicate or enlighten but also to secure the necessary goodwill and understanding to successfully achieve its goals.

Why Public Relations is Inevitable

Touitou (2021) asserts that the primary objective of public relations is to establish a two-way communication channel that fosters mutual understanding and common ground based on truth, knowledge, and adequate information. Public relations principles emphasize a proactive approach as the most effective strategy for addressing issues that could potentially lead to conflict or crisis. The best method for managing a crisis is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. This is achieved through a well-planned and sustained communication strategy that is consistent and targeted. Rather than simply managing crises as they arise, it is more advisable to adopt a “crisis management” approach, which involves taking appropriate preventive measures before a crisis escalates.

Pollution, in itself, represents a crisis that demands a proactive response. Through effective public relations, awareness can be raised, stakeholders can be engaged, and preventive strategies can be implemented to mitigate the adverse effects of pollution on the environment and public health.

Public Relations in Environmental Management

Public Relations, as a strategic communication process, is especially crucial when aggressive mobilization is required for campaigns. PR practitioners are specialized, skilled, and professionally capable of addressing environmental issues in Nigeria. They have the ability to create conscious awareness among the populace by employing strategies such as the Agenda Setting Theory, effective two-way communication, and persuasion. These tools not only mobilize the public but also help internalize critical environmental issues.

Environmental Public Relations is particularly adept at analyzing and defining scenarios to assess the impact of pollution and other environmental challenges. This specialized field evaluates environmental impacts and relates them to the government or top management of organizations. Although the decision on what should be communicated rests with the government or top management, public relations practitioners execute these directives by developing and implementing effective communication plans and programs.

Furthermore, PR practitioners play a strategic role in the formulation of communication strategies. They engage in decision-making processes regarding which issues to communicate and highlight the potential consequences of various strategic positions, goals, or priorities. By doing so, they offer valuable suggestions on how to handle environmental issues more effectively, as well as, integrating environmental PR's analytical skills with mobilization tactics, such as Agenda Setting Theory to create a compelling narrative.

Public relations involves in educating, enlightening and managing human reactions. It's also engages in fostering acceptance of ideas that can mobilize communities both locally and nationally. As a social science that incorporates the human element into management, public relations bears the responsibility of teaching how to predict and control individual or group reactions to a given stimulus, a concept that psychologists refer to as the Stimulus-Response Theory (SRT). Ultimately, public relations is about effective communication: persuading people to embrace ideas and take action while simultaneously creating an environment conducive to growth and development.

Touitou (2021) asserts that wherever people exist, communication must occur, and it must be planned and orderly to be effective. Such structured communication facilitates understanding and cooperation among all parties involved. The primary goal of public relations is to ensure that stakeholders have a clear grasp of an institution's policies and the "modus operandi" for executing these policies.

A landmark instance of environmental awareness in Nigerian journalism was the dumping of toxic waste in Koko, Delta State in 1988, followed by the chaos in Lagos in March 2006 due to a sudden atmospheric change. The way the mass media reported these events confirmed its indispensable role in upholding and building a safe environment, thereby validating the importance of public relations in such contexts.



Figure 2. Source: www.wikipedia.

This is the period when pollution began to draw public attention in the United States between the mid-1950s and early 1970s; it is through the effort of Mass Media that the Congress passed the Noise Control Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, (www.Wikipedia.com). The illustration above enable one to understand the power of public relations in communicating issues of national interest, as to provoke government into action and public discussions.

Public Relations Proactive Strategies to combating Environmental Pollution

Anatsui (2015) identified several key strategies:

1. Effective Communication

Public relations principles recognize that a proactive approach is the best way to address issues that could lead to crises. This is achieved through a regularly planned and sustained communication program that is both consistent and persistent. With thoughtful planning and ongoing communication, public relations practitioners are better prepared to manage environmental challenges with calm and success. The fundamental tools for proactive management are information, knowledge, and communication (IKC).

2. Social Marketing and Conflict Management

Social marketing is regarded as an element of communication for growth. The concept of diffusion of innovation and behaviour-change models is based on social marketing. Agricultural extension studies first discovered in the 1960s that social change always goes through different phases: awareness, interest, assessment, trial, acceptance, or rejection. To increase the effectiveness of interventions, social marketing also focuses on marketing techniques such as market segmentation and formative research (GTZ, 2006; Oepen & Hamacher,

In open conflict situations and conflicting decision-making processes, conflict management is designed as an alternative policy tool to provide ways of building consensus and convergence. Social communication processes, such as the promotion of dialogue, reflection, participatory situation analysis, consensus building, decision-making and action planning for change and development among individuals and institutions at different levels, are often required for specific aspects of strategic communication (GTZ, 2006; Oepen & Hamacher, 2000).

3. A Massive Educational and Enlightening Campaign

This campaign is designed to inform, educate, and sensitize the public about the impact of environmental pollution, the causes of environmental degradation, and the adverse effects of harmful activities on both the environment and human life. Utilizing strategic public relations communication, practitioners work to unravel and simplify the complexities of environmental issues, ensuring that stakeholders gain a clear and sound understanding. This process demands innovation, creativity, adaptability, imagination, and decisive action.

4. Identification and Prioritization of Environmental Issue

This strategy involves a bottom-up planning process that actively includes all stakeholders, those affected by the issues, those with relevant information and expertise, and those who control the instruments for implementation. Stakeholders, including private individuals, informal organizations, state and local governments, institutional organizations, professional bodies, and international agencies, are invited to participate. This inclusive process provides a forum for discussing future developments and fosters effective collaboration through public meetings, consultations, and working sessions.

5. Mobilization of Working Group Members

A dedicated Working Group should be established to address the prioritized environmental issues. According to UNCHS (1996), a Working Group is an international, cross-sectional body created to tackle specific environmental concerns. It serves as a forum for generating ideas; mobilizing resources for project implementation and sharing information.

6. An Independent Monitoring Committee

This committee is responsible for tracking developments and events, ensuring that the set goals and objectives are adhered to. It also monitors progress and informs stakeholders about the issues at stake, ensuring transparency and accountability throughout the process.

7. Evaluation

From the outset, evaluative criteria or standards must be established. An evaluation committee, comprising experts and credible individuals, should periodically review the success of the initiatives and recommend ways forward to ensure continuous improvement.

Each of these strategies is integral to managing environmental issues effectively through public relations, ensuring that efforts are proactive, inclusive, and continuously improved based on evaluative feedback.

What is Environment?

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2001) defines the environment as the conditions that affect the behavior and development of someone or something. The term "environmental" refers to the natural conditions in which people, animals, and plants live. In contrast, pollution is the

introduction of contaminants into the environment that causes instability, disorder, harm, or discomfort to physical systems or living organisms. Pollution can take the form of chemical substances or various types of energy such as noise, heat, or light. When naturally occurring elements or energies exceed their natural levels, they are considered contaminants. Pollution is often classified as either point source or non-point source (www.wikipedia.co).

Concepts of National Development

Lawal Oluwatoyin (2011) describe national development as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. National Development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time, while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems (Munasinghe, 2011). Dambisa (2012) opines that most African countries are confronted with major developmental challenges orbiting on leadership, corruption; insecurity of varied degrees like kidnapping, terrorism, child industry, ritual killing, armed robbery and the most endemic problem is poverty. Furthermore, the scholar adds there is no denying the fact that all these indices of backwardness are similar to what is operating in Nigeria today. Nigeria is grappling with such problems such as illiteracy, hunger, poor health condition, humiliation, unemployment, and, citizens of Nigeria are feeling frustrated, not cared for, basic amenities to keep life going are not seen while corruption and nepotism keep growing in the hands of the political gladiators. Nigeria economic prospects are now in grim and the economy is in recession (Eboh, 2016), while corruption is on the high side demoralizing every aspect of the governance (Nwabughio, 2016).

Nigeria Government' Policies and Initiatives to address Environmental Challenges

The policies include:

- The National Environmental Policy (NEP) which focuses on the conservation, pollution prevention, and resource management.
- The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act of 1992 requires projects to undergo assessments to minimize environmental degradation.
- The National Policy on Environment (2013) prioritizes climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable natural resource management.

The Nigeria government came up with a strategy of establishing agencies such as Federal Ministry of Environment and the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) to enforce environmental laws, monitor compliance and prosecute offenders, empowered by the NESREA Act of 2007, to set and enforce standards for air, water and soil quality. Also, with the collaboration of State and local environmental agencies to implement policies at regional levels; these agencies engage in public awareness campaigns, community outreach, and capacity-building initiatives to promote environmental challenges and stewardship. Irrespective of Nigeria policy framework and efforts, there are several obstacles such as inadequate funding, weak enforcement, and bureaucratic inefficiencies that impede their effective implement of these polices and strategies across the country. Inadequate funding remains a critical challenge, limiting resources available for

monitoring enforcement and sustainable development initiatives. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and overlapping mandates among various governmental bodies also pose significant barriers. Lack of coordination and clarity in responsibilities often lead to delay in policy implementation and enforcement actions. The capacity constraints at the State and local levels further hinder the implementation of national development. Corruption presents a formidable obstacle to effective environmental governance in Nigeria. Instances of bribery, influence peddling, and regulatory capture undermine the integrity of environmental decision-making processes. Industries and individuals often exploit these vulnerabilities to circumvent environmental regulations, leading to unchecked pollution and degradation of natural resources.

Public relations as a communication process, plays an important role at all stages in the life cycle of a policy or project. As such, environmental-related concepts, techniques, and skills need to be imparted to policy makers, opinion leaders, strategic groups or the public at large. A prerequisite for building consensus and change in any civil society is the splitting of complex information into understandable elements and putting it on the agenda (GTZ, 2006). According to GTZ and OECD (2020), the Operational Communications Unit for Sustainable Development of the World Bank defines environmental communication as “a planned and strategic use of communication processes and media products to promote effective environmental sustainability policy making, public participation and project implementation” (cited in GTZ, 2006, p. 10).

As earlier said that addressing pollution requires a multi-faceted approach, including, effective communication through public relations efforts, improved waste management, stricter environmental regulations, public awareness campaigns, and active community participation. Sustainable environmental practices are essential for national growth and long-term ecological stability, ensuring a healthier future for all. All hands must be on deck for the achievement of the desire goal, through the proper coordination of public relations experts.

Theoretical Framework

The Information Processing Theory

This effort is hinged on the information processing theory, articulated by Williams J. McGuire. Tseebee (2016) provide insight into McGuire’s postulations. They explain that a change in attitude involves twelve steps, namely; (1) exposure to communication; (2) attending to the message; (3) becoming interested in the proposed stand point; (4) comprehending the message and learning the skill; (5) acquiring the skill; (6) yielding to the proposed standpoint (attitudinal change); (7) memory stage of agreement; (8) information search and retrieval; (9) making a decision on the basis of retrieval; (10) behaving in accord with the decision; (11) reinforcement of the desired actions; (12) post behavioural consolidation.

McGuire however, warns that the process might not easily and automatically move from one step to another, as any independent variable in the communication situation can affect any of the steps. Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) and ain that intelligence; for instance, can disrupt the journey to a change in attitude as intelligent audience members could detect flaws in messages offered them. This theory is relevant to this study as the FCT residents to whom messages are targeted would need to process the communication geared towards disseminating issues of

pollution for attitudinal change.

Here comes the need of public relations experts and other change agents to expand their efforts to ensure residents of the FCT receive their messages and interpret them appropriately; some might rationalize the messages to provide counter evidence. However, as Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) posit that communicators would have to design several kinds of persuasive messages to the audience to equip them well enough to move from one stage of information processing to another and then finally take on the desired behaviour. This is of utmost importance as other variables are involved in the subject of study and such variables (such as: lack of access to potable water, lack of access to appropriate waste disposal system and financial jeopardy could frustrate the communication effort if not managed with utmost care.

Methodology

The research design adopted is a survey research design that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study's population comprised 50 lecturers from the School of Basic and Allied Sciences at Babcock University, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or religion. The qualitative component involved four key informants, purposively selected based on their roles and experiences related to the subject matter. Respondents were chosen using a convenience sampling technique, with the researcher meeting them at their scheduled times and pace.

For the presentation and analysis of the quantitative data, frequency distribution tables and simple percentages were employed. A questionnaire, containing both open- and closed-ended questions, was used as the instrument for data collection. The data were analyzed using a Likert three-point scale, a psychometric tool commonly utilized in survey research. This scale comprised three response options: Agree (A), Undecided (U), and Disagree (D), allowing respondents to indicate uncertainty by selecting the "Undecided" option when necessary. In analyzing the Likert scale data, a coding process was applied to facilitate swift and accurate interpretation.

	3	2	1	
	A	UD	D	

Copies of questionnaires were randomly distributed to the lecturers of the School of Basic and Allied Sciences in Babcock University irrespective of age, gender, ethnic and religion. All the questionnaires were returned giving 100% returned rate. The presentation and the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire was therefore, based on the 50 respondents.

Discussion of the Findings on the Quantitative Aspect of Research

Table 1: Responses on Questionnaire for School of Basic and Applied Sciences

No	Items	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree
1	There are environmental problems and challenges in Nigeria	50(100%)		
2	Nigeria is free from environmental pollution			50(100%)
3	Nigerian Government makes no effort to mitigate environmental (Problem) pollution			50(100%)
4	Nigerian Government made a lot of efforts to mitigate environmental pollution	30(60)	10(20%)	10(20%)
5	There are strategies laid down by the Nigerian government to control environmental pollution?	50(100%)		
6	If yes state some of these strategies laid down by the Nigerian Government			
7	State two environmental problems and challenges best known to you in Nigeria.			

Frequency Distribution showing Presence of Environmental Pollution in Nigeria

Table 1. Item 1: The finding of the study shown that 100% of respondents agreed that Nigeria faces significant environmental pollution, issues and challenges. This unanimous response substantiates the existence of pollution in Nigeria. In accordance with Alfred, & Joseph, 2006 postulated that the Nigerian government has been unable to halt preventable illnesses such as: measles, whooping cough, polio, cerebrospinal meningitis, and diarrhea, due to problem of pollution in Nigeria. The survey findings from all 50 respondents representing (100%), clearly indicating widespread acknowledgment of environmental challenges in Nigeria

Nigeria is Free from Environmental Pollution

Table 1. Item 2: The 100% of the respondents disagreed that with Nigeria is being free from pollution. Therefore, the finding indicated that Nigeria is not free from environmental pollution. In support of the above assertion according to Ugwuanyi, J. U., Ossai, I. C., & Onwuka, S. U. (2018). Environmental pollution in Nigeria is a pressing environmental issue that poses significant risks to human health, ecosystems, and the economy. An it is essential to understand the major sources of environmental pollution to develop effective strategies for mitigating its adverse effects. Abulude, et al. (2024) opine that the use of generators to supplement inadequate electricity supply is common in Nigeria. The combustion of diesel or petrol in these generators results in the release of pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO), and particulate matter (PM),

contributing to air pollution

No Effort to Mitigate Environmental Pollution by the Nigeria Government

Table 1. Item 3: Every respondent representing 100% rejected the statement that the Nigerian Government makes no effort to control or mitigate pollution, indicating a belief that some actions are being taken. Although responses were mixed, in item 4, there was general agreement that the Nigerian Government is indeed making efforts to mitigate environmental pollution for the sake of human and national development. In item 5, the respondents identified several strategies implemented by the Nigerian Government to combat environmental pollution. These strategies include:

- National Environmental Sanitations
- Recycling of Waste in the Western Part of Lagos
- Reduction in Gas Flaring by Nigeria Liquidized Natural Gas Ltd.
- Establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency
- Local and State Government Environmental Commissions
- Vehicle Waste Control and Proper Disposal of Waste
- Federal Road Safety Commission
- Reduction in the Use of Fossil Fuels

In overall, the data clearly demonstrated that respondents recognized both the severity of environmental issues in Nigeria and the government's efforts to address these challenges.

Finally, in item 7 above, the respondents identified some of the environmental problems and challenges best known to them such as: Erosion and flooding; Indiscriminate sewage disposal ; Gully erosion in the Eastern part of Nigeria.; Gas emission from industries by use of generators and vehicles, Uncontrolled cutting of trees without planting back and desert encroachment (Deforestation). Indiscriminate waste disposal-smelling in littering and blocking drainages; Oil spillage in Southern part of Nig. Air pollution caused by local individual generators (smoke) ; Water pollution caused by oil mining in southern part of Nigeria; Air pollution from industries and Global warming or excessive heat. In support of the above,

Census Report (2006) supported the assertions by indicating that 80% of industries in Nigeria discharge liquids, solid and gaseous waste directly into the environment without adequate treatment that meet the basic standards. Most Nigerian industries lack waste treatment facilities, so the solid wastes are most times disposed of in environmentally insecure dumpsites. The study also proved that the majority of environmental pollution in Nigeria is man-made, due to the action or inaction of man's abuse and neglect in the environment.

Presentation of the Findings on the Qualitative Aspect

Responses by the key informants were transcribed and placed in the following categories: (1)

awareness of pollution being a matter of concern in Nigeria, especially, Federal Capital Territory, (FCT). (2) Categories of people at risk to the danger posed by pollution (3) the need to communication plan of action to curb the challenge of pollution in the FCT.

Awareness of Pollution as a Matter of Concern in the FCT

The first interviewee affirmed that pollution has been a significant public health concern in Nigeria, particularly in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It was noted that the rate of pollution has been increasing over the years. Pollution were categorized into four major types and provided details as follows:

1. **Air Pollution:** This is primarily caused by vehicular emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter. Other major sources include toxic emissions from fuel-powered generators, industrial activities, and gases released from decaying waste due to indiscriminate disposal. Indoor air pollution also arises from the burning of fuel-wood.
2. **Land Pollution:** This results mainly from indiscriminate disposal of solid and liquid waste, open defecation, and unwholesome agricultural practices, such as excessive use of chemicals and herbicides, which alter soil chemistry and affect plant growth. Additionally, unregulated mining activities contribute to land degradation.
3. **Water Pollution:** Natural water bodies and groundwater sources are increasingly polluted due to indiscriminate waste disposal, including decaying solid waste and untreated liquid waste dumped into drainages and streams. Improper sewage containment, such as unlined soaker-ways, can also contaminate groundwater, affecting the quality of shallow wells and boreholes. Mining activities, especially those that extend to groundwater levels such as mineral extraction and granite quarrying—further exacerbate water pollution through the use of heavy metals and explosives.
4. **Noise Pollution:** This is largely caused by excessive noise from fuel generators, loud music, and religious centers, including churches and mosques.

The growing pollution levels in the FCT underscore the need for urgent intervention and sustainable environmental management practices to safeguard public health and ecological balance

Categories of People at Risk to the Danger Posed by Pollution

According to second interviewer, a medical doctor and public health practitioner, pollution is on the increase in the FCT. According to him, a large number of people are victims of pollution, as they suffer from respiratory illnesses, one of which is chronic cough. Some people come down with chronic respiratory ailments due to the nature of their duties in certain kinds of industries; some have their organs damaged as the industries operate as though government has laid no ground rules for them. Many people suffer from cholera and typhoid fever, from contaminated water.

Third interviewer is aware of a high rate of various forms of pollution in the FCT and showed particular concern for water borne health challenges such as cholera, an outbreak of which has been reported in the FCT in recent times. According to him, the authorities planned the city to accommodate the elite but made no adequate provision for the poor who would provide support to the elite. The poor do not have good accommodation, cannot dispose of waste properly and have no access to running water; hence, concerning pollution, they are mainly both the perpetrators and the victims.

According to the forth informant, cases of pollution in the FCT are on the increase. Fumes emitted from vehicles and generators, cigarette smoking and industries pollute the air. Inappropriate waste disposal also constitutes pollution and a lot of the residents consume and use polluted water because they lack access to running water.

Communication Plan of Action to Mitigate Pollution in the FCT

The first informant averred that there is dire need for a high rate of awareness of the risk posed by pollution, and the need for planned communication programmes to tackle the challenges. The informant is an experienced environmental scientist with over 24 years' environmental management work with the environmental regulatory agency of the FCT and also a former Head/Deputy Director of Environmental Monitoring and Environmental Conservation in the FCT. She is of the view that basic schools' curriculum should be modified to include basic environmental education. Grassroots advocacy and community programmes should be organized to increase environmental awareness and education. This, according to her, should include print, electronic and the social media.

Second informant is a medical doctor and public health practitioner residing in the FCT emphasized the need to create awareness among staff of chemical industries to adhere to the rules of engagement, and actions should be taken by their employers to ensure minimum contamination and maximum protection for workers and people in the environment. Enlightenment education should be provided to residents of areas prone to cholera, on basic healthy practices, and emotional appeal could equally be deployed for this.

Third is a professor of Public Relations and Advertising and a mass communication teacher at a State university in Nigeria says that the combination use of information, education and communication (IEC) will to a great extent tackle pollution in its various forms. The people need to be knowledgeable about pollution, its various forms, consequences and various preventive

measures. Communication research on the situation need to be conducted, the publics should be segmented and their media consumption habits determined. Such segmentation should reflect (1) high social economic status; (2) middle social economics demographics and (3) low social economics psychographics. Habitats of the various ethnicities should be determined and door to door campaign employed. A multimedia approach which would include all tools of communication should be deployed. Opinion leaders, such as traditional/community leaders and religious leaders should be involved in the campaign.

Forth Informant is a scholar of mass communication in the Development Communication, currently serving Head of Department in a Federal government owned Tertiary Institution, opines that deploying various means to raise awareness of the populace of pollution, its various forms and its consequences is of great importance, as residents seem to be going about their affairs normally, unaware of the dangers to which they are exposed. A properly planned awareness effort would literally “wake them up” to enact laws against noise from worship centers and markets and other public places should be made and enforced. Residents are exposed to various forms of pollution and are consequently at risk of various ailments triggered and aggravated by the diver’s forms of pollution. An awareness campaign is required to enable residents understand the risks to which they are exposed and to equip them with education, knowledge and skill to combat the challenges posed by pollution. Communication programmes should be planned to include different tools and techniques, and such campaigns should be planned and timed.

Conclusion

The study exposes the inevitability of Public Relations as strategic communication to tackle environmental pollutions, through successful and effective grassroots mobilization of environmental campaigns in Nigeria. An awareness campaign is required to enable residents understand the risks to which they are exposed and to equip them with education, knowledge and skill to combat the challenges posed by pollution. Communication programmes should be planned to include different tools and techniques, and such campaigns should be planned and timed. Implementing this comprehensive communication plan will require collaboration among environmental agencies, health professionals, academic institutions, community leaders, and the media. By combining educational reforms, targeted messaging, community engagement, and

rigorous monitoring, the FCT can effectively mitigate pollution and safeguard public health through the efforts of public relations strategies and techniques for current and future generations. Any nation that strives to succeed both in stability, profitability and growth must embrace the proactive principles of Public relations approach as measure of checking environmental pollution for national development and sustainability.

Recommendations

- This study recommends a replacement of the watch-dog role of Mass Media to that of a Guide-dog role. The basis for this recommendation is that the Mass Media watch dog role has been interpreted to meddlesomeness by both the government and the governed (Tejumaiye, 2000). Guide-Dog journalism is derived from general disinterestedness of citizens in societal or collective problems. It is a proactive as well as reactive phenomenon to the collective will of ensuring that the society in which we live is made better for all. Guide dogging not only gives the people news and information but also help them do their jobs as citizens. It does not watch the environment, but also actually challenge the people to engage and take ownership of the problems of the society, through the efforts of public relations. The purpose is not to position the people as spectators, but as active participants in the societal problems and successes in solving those problems.
- Basic schools' curriculum should be modified to include basic environmental education. Grassroots advocacy and community programmes should be organized by public relations experts to increase environmental awareness and education.
- Education should be provided to residents of areas prone to cholera, on basic healthy practices, and emotional appeal could be deployed for its effective impart.
- While the key informants interviewed make the following recommendations by saying that there should be running water in both rural communities and in national cities in Nigeria.
- Electricity supply should be constant as this will make the use of power generators unnecessary.
- Government should lay ground rules for industries, causing them to take appropriate measures to protect their staff from hazard posed by emissions. It should be noted that no amount of communication will change unhelpful practices, without the

involvement of effective public relations efforts and strategies.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have disclosed no conflicts of interest.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Touitou, T. C., Ekeh, C. M., Odigbo, B. E., & Ngwoke, O. U. (2025). *Public relations as a strategic tool to combat environmental pollution in Abuja, Nigeria for national development*. Seybold Report Journal, 20(8), 26–45. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.16629636](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16629636)

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