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Addressing the Burden of Open Defecation in Nigeria: Some policy recommendations

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Executive Summary

This brief discusses the issue of open defecation in Nigeria. It notes that open defecation is a major issue in Nigeria, as more than 47 million Nigerians (or 10 million households) are estimated to defecate in the open.¹ The effects of this has been the deaths of thousands of people, mostly women and children under the age of five. The brief therefore proposes some policy recommendations that could be adopted to address the problem. These include:

- i. The need to speedily consider and pass the Bill for an Act to Establish Clean Nigeria Agency, 2021, so as to give a legal framework to all efforts to stop open defecation in Nigeria;
- ii. The National Assembly may wish to engage Ministries of Health, Environment and Water Resources to strategically create more funds to build and maintain easily accessible public toilets for males and females;
- iii. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) needs to embark on a deliberate and aggressive reorientation of Nigerians on the danger of open defecation, and the importance of good hygiene;
- iv. The National Assembly may wish to collaborate with State Houses of Assembly to advise their political executives to install CCTV cameras across the country to prevent crimes and also deter perpetrators of open defecation
- v. The Ministries of Health and Environment should be mandated by the National Assembly to assess the level of availability of toilet facilities in public places across the country and submit a detailed report;
- vi. The National Assembly may wish to encourage the federal government to collaborate with local and international donor partners in procuring and providing toilet facilities in public places in Nigeria.

¹ United Nations (2020). Water, Sanitation, Hygiene National Outcome Routine Mapping 2019: A Report of Survey Findings. Available on <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/reports/water-sanitation-hygiene-national-outcome-routine-mapping-2019>. Accessed 13/7/2021



1.0 Introduction

Open defecation is the act of passing excreta in open-air locations instead of in hygienic, covered locations. In Africa and the world, Nigeria tops the list of countries with the highest number of people practising open defecation and urination. In 2010, for example, Nigeria ranked 2nd (in Africa), 5th (in the world), while in 2015, it ranked 1st (in Africa), and 3rd (in world).²

The World Development Indicators in 2016 also revealed that the practice of open defecation in Nigeria rose from 24% to 25.1% of its population³. More recently, precisely in 2019, Nigeria ranked first in Africa and second (after India) in the world among countries with the problem of open defecation.⁴ A 2020 UN report revealed that about 47 million Nigerians (or 10 million households) defecate in the open,⁵ and only 14 out of the 774 local government areas in the country are open defecation-free. Though a national issue, the practice of open defecation in Nigeria is more rampant in the rural areas than in urban areas, and it is more prevalent in the north-central states, including Abuja, the country's capital, than in other states of the country.⁶

While a number of efforts have been made to tackle the problem, including the introduction of Executive Order 009 (2019), the National Roadmap for making Nigeria Open defecation free by 2025, and the recently introduced Bill for an Act to Establish Clean Nigeria Agency (2021) at the National Assembly, Nigeria has lost thousands of lives due to the outbreak of various infectious diseases. Some states in the northern part of the country, including Jigawa state, as well as Abuja, the FCT, are currently battling with cases of cholera outbreak due to, among other things, to open defecation and the lack of sanitation.⁷ It is against this backdrop that this brief sheds more light on the menace, and proffers some workable policy recommendations to tackle it.

² Okuku, M.O. (2020). Ending Open Defecation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Tropical Disease and Health*, 41 (19).

³ World Bank (2016). World Development Indicators: Featuring the Sustainable Development Goals, Data bank. Washington DC: World Bank Group.

⁴ Nigeria Federal Ministry of Water Resources (2019). Water, Sanitation, Hygiene National Outcome Routing Mapping. Available on <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/3576/file/WASH%20NORM%20Report%202019.pdf>. Accessed 13/7/2021.

⁵ United Nations (2020). Water, Sanitation, Hygiene National Outcome Routine Mapping 2019: A Report of Survey Findings. Available on <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/reports/water-sanitation-hygiene-national-outcome-routine-mapping-2019>. Accessed 13/7/2021.

⁶ Obiezu, T. (November 19, 2019). Nigeria Authorities Launch Campaign against Open Defecation. Available on <https://www.voanews.com/africa/nigerian-authorities-launch-campaign-against-open-defecation>. Accessed 13/7/2021.

⁷ <https://www.africanews.com/2021/05/26/cholera-outbreak-kills-at-least-20-in-northern-nigeria/>. Accessed 13/7/2021.



Causes of Open Defecation in Nigeria

There are numerous reasons why open defecation is practiced in Nigeria. According to Akindayo (2020) and Okuku (2020), the major causes of the practice in Nigeria include:

- i. Inadequate toilet facilities in government institutions, including schools at all levels, MDAs, and other public places;
- ii. lack of water supply to existing toilet facilities, making them to be abandoned by people
- iii. Poor maintenance of existing toilet facilities;
- iv. Ignorance, and lack of awareness of the danger of open defecation;
- v. Lack of necessary technology for appropriate toilet models;
- vi. Lack of legal framework and enforcement mechanisms to coordinate and enforce the provision of toilet facilities in households, public and private buildings;
- vii. High rate of poverty.

Consequences of Open Defecation in Nigeria

Open defecation has a myriad of consequences. While some of the consequences relate directly to the health and wellness of people, others, which are economic and social, have indirect impacts on the people.

Impact on Health

Open defecation affects the health of individuals, worsen the weak and causes death. The vulnerable, including children and women, are mostly hit by the menace of open defecation. Water Aid Report (2019) revealed that 100,000 children under the age of five (5) died each year in Nigeria because of water and sanitation-related diseases.⁸ About 88% of diarrhoeal diseases reported among children in Nigeria are linked to open defecation.⁹ There is also

⁸ WaterAid Report (2019), op. cit.

⁹ Oloruntoba, E.O., Folarin, TB, Ayede, A.I. (2014). Hygiene and sanitation risk factors of diarrhoeal disease among under-five children in Ibadan, Nigeria. African Health Science. 14 (n.k): 1001-1011. 17. And Yaya S, Ekholuenetale M, Tudeme G, Vaibhav S, Bishwajit G, Kadio B. (2017). Prevalence and determinants of childhood mortality in Nigeria. BMC Public Health. 17(1):485.



evidence that children living in areas where open defecation is practised have retarded growth.¹⁰ Additionally, close contact with the faeces of humans could give rise to other diseases such as typhoid, worm infestation and cholera, all of which are contracted through the faecal-oral route (ingestion of water or food contaminated with faeces). Studies, including by UNICEF, have also linked the outbreak of cholera in Nigeria to open defecation practices.¹¹ In April, 2021, for example, cholera outbreak in northern Nigeria resulted in the death of at least 20 people and over 300 hospitalisation.¹² Also, open defecation can result in water pollution, which causes diseases in humans and also endangers aquatic life. This happens mostly during rainy session, when human faeces are easily carried by rainwater into streams, rivers and other water sources.¹³

Impact on Girl-Child and Women Security and Safety

The practise of open defecation, especially in rural areas, puts the security and life of people in danger. Research has shown that children and women are prone to numerous attacks from animals and men during defecation in the bush.¹⁴ Incidences of sexual molestation, rape and even death have been recorded on several occasions.¹⁵ High rates of secondary school absenteeism of girls have also been linked to lack of latrines and safe places to defecate or use during their menstrual period.¹⁶

Policy Recommendations

The following are some recommendations that would address the problem of open defecation in Nigeria:

¹⁰ Okuku (2020), op. cit.

¹¹ Ngwa MC, Ihekweazu C, Okwor T, Yennan S, Williams N, Elimian K, Karaye, N.Y., Bello, I.M., and Sack, D.A. (2021). The cholera risk assessment in Kano State, Nigeria: A historical review, mapping of hotspots and evaluation of contextual factors. *PLoS Negl Trop Dis* 15(1): e0009046. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0009046>.

¹² <https://www.africanews.com/2021/05/26/cholera-outbreak-kills-at-least-20-in-northern-nigeria/>.

¹³ Federal Ministry of Water Resources Nigeria / United Nations Emergency Children's Fund. Making Nigeria OpenDefecation-Free by 2025: A National Road Map. Abuja: FMWR & UNICEF; 2016.

¹⁴ O'Reilly K. (2016). From toilet insecurity to toilet security: creating safe sanitation for women and girls. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews Water*, 3(1):43-51. Available on <https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/wat2.1122>. Accessed 19/07/2021. And Tong T. (20017). A lack of clean and safe toilets leaves women vulnerable to rape and attacks [online]. Public Radio International. Available on <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-11-29/lack-clean-and-safe-toilets-leaves-women-vulnerable-rape-and-attacks>. Accessed 19/07/2021.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid.



- i. The Bill for an Act to Establish Clean Nigeria Agency, 2021, needs to be speedily considered and passed by the National Assembly because it has the capacity to adequately address the phenomenon of open defecation in the country;
- ii. The National Assembly may have to advise the federal government to earmark special funds for the construction of easily accessible, gender-friendly toilets in public places across the country;
- iii. The National Assembly may have to demand accountability from the National Orientation Agency (NOA) on efforts so far put in place to sensitize Nigerians about the issue of open defecation. The NASS may wish to demand that NOA intensify or embark on aggressive value reorientation of the populace on the dangers of open defecation. This requires diverse communication strategies (radio jingles, town criers, posters, seminars, campaigns) to educate Nigerians on the importance of good hygiene;
- iv. The National Assembly may request that the Ministries of Health and Environment assess the extent of availability of toilet facilities in public places across the country and submit a detailed reports;
- v. Legal framework and enforcement mechanism to regulate, enforce and prosecute offenders including landlords and owners of and private places with inadequate toilet facilities, need to be put in place.
- vii. Large social and religious gatherings, especially by faith-based organizations, need to be monitored to ensure compliance with sanitation rules, including in the area of provision of adequate toilets and clean water at such gatherings;
- viii. The National Assembly may wish to collaborate with State Houses of Assembly to resuscitate and make functional local government sanitation inspectorates. This is to carry the fight against open defecation to the grassroots.
- ix. Installation of closed circuit television cameras (CCTVs) may be embarked upon by federal and state governments as a strategy to prevent not only criminal activities but also deter perpetrators of open defecation. Hence, the National Assembly may wish to collaborate with State Houses of Assembly to advise their political executives on the need to install CCTV cameras across the nooks and crannies of the country;
- x. The National Assembly may wish to encourage the federal government to, as a matter of necessity, collaborate with local and international donor partners in procuring and



providing toilets facilities in public places so as to reduce the menace of open defecation in Nigeria.

7.0 Conclusion

There is no doubt that open defecation is a serious problem in Nigeria. As a result, no policy measure should be too big or too small to be deployed in addressing the problem. The introduction of the Bill for an Act to Establish Clean Nigeria Agency, 2021, is therefore a noble and novel initiative, among other similar initiatives as shown above, which the National Assembly may wish to speedily consider and embrace.

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