

Promoting Climate Change and Health Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Benjamin Anabaraonye¹, Beatrice. O. Ewa², Kenneth. I. Okoro³ and Precious. C. Anthony⁴

¹Benjy Poetry And Music Global Concepts, Nigeria.

²University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

³Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nigeria.

⁴Chukwuemeka OdumegwuOjukwu University, Igbariam Campus, Anambra State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The impacts of climate change are felt profoundly on Nigeria's health sector. The impacts of climate change on the health sector in Nigeria implies that due considerations to health issues as part of climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts has become a pressing issue. Training is a critical component of the global climate change response.. Climate change and health education is therefore vital in every community in order to prepare them for climate change impacts and to learn how to adapt and mitigate effectively for sustainable development in Nigeria. Consequently, mitigation and adaptation approaches are important for the successful management of Nigeria's health sector.. The objective of this paper is to highlight the impacts of climate change on the health sector in Nigeria. It also outlines the adaptation and mitigation strategies to climate change for building resilience and reducing vulnerability for a sustainable future. This study highlights the need to educate communities and various institutions about climate change and its impact on the health sector in Nigeria. This paper is therefore very significant as it explores new opportunities, practices and policies for climate change mitigation and adaptation on the health sector in Nigeria.

Introduction

The impacts and risks of climate change have far-reaching environmental, social, agricultural, and economic effects and are ultimately harmful to our health and well-being. Climate change has been discovered to not only affect our physical health but can also harm our mental health. The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of illness or infirmity. Climate change affects human wellbeing a variety of ways. Extreme weather and environmental changes can heighten existing health problems and generate new ones. Acting on the health consequences of climate change requires actions rooted in both mitigation and adaptation at all levels—from global to local—and from all sectors and individuals. Climate change mitigation refers to overall efforts to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and improve carbon sinks to slow climate change pace, size and magnitude. Key climate change mitigation priorities include reducing energy demand (through reduced consumption and

increased energy efficiency); a swift and equitable transition from the use of fossil fuels to renewable energy; reducing emissions from agriculture and forestry; and strengthening land-based emissions sequestration.

Climate change adaptation refers to interventions that respond to the effects of climate change by adjusting, moderating, and coping with the risks and impacts of climate change. Adaptation is ultimately affected by the capacity to adapt, which is the ability and willingness to respond to climate change mediated by individual and collective agency. Such items as governance, economics, infrastructure, technology, information and expertise, organizations, and equity decide adaptive ability. Examples of adaptation interventions addressing climate change and health include: monitoring and monitoring of climate change and health-related disease burdens; education (e.g., promotion of vector-borne disease risks by public health), and capacity building (e.g. psychological first-aid, and surge capacities at hospitals and health care facilities); preparing for extreme weather events; and re-locating entire communities to geographic areas where sea-level rise and frequent extreme weather events are less-likely to occur. Indirect health implications that are increasingly recognized in global reports on climate change and health include illness related to food and water safety, under-nutrition related to food insecurity, malignant melanoma from UV exposure, and chronic kidney disease from dehydration. There is an increasing public and academic recognition of the extent to which rising global temperatures threaten planetary and human health. Climate change can affect all populations but some are more vulnerable than others. Especially vulnerable are people living in small island developing states and other coastal areas, megacities and mountainous and polar areas. Children – particularly children living in poor countries – are among the most vulnerable to the resulting health risks and will be exposed to the health consequences for longer. It is also predicted that the health consequences will be more serious for older people and those with infirmities or pre-existing medical conditions. Areas with weak health infrastructure – mostly in developing countries like Nigeria

will be the least able to cope without assistance from the developed countries to prepare and respond. A significant number of people who are subject to environment or weather-related natural disasters suffer uncertainty and severe consequences for their mental health. These mental health consequences can also affect them psychologically thereby leading to anxiety, depression, fear, etc. Some natural disasters are possibly going to be more frequent because of climate change. Notoriously, reactions to extreme events that involve life disruption, such as loss of life, resources, social support and social networks, or extensive relocation, are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and general anxiety, increased substance use or misuse, and suicidal thoughts

Adaptation and mitigation strategies to address climate change and health issues in Nigeria

Adaptation measures that address the health and psychosocial impacts of climate change come in a variety of forms, i.e. policies, practices, behavioral interventions, community-based interventions, specific training, and pharmacotherapeutics. More broadly, emotional resiliency may be sustained by engaging with art, literature, and spirituality. In addition to the above, the list below contains some specific priority adaptation mechanisms that ought to be considered to support human and planetary health in a changing climate:

- Policy responses by improving access and funding to quality health care;
- Tracking and reporting: administration of epidemiological surveys following severe weather events and tracking of emergency department visits during heat waves and after extreme weather events;
- Practice: the application of a stepped-care approach to mental health that is often used in disaster readiness to support different levels of interventions depending on the timing of the disaster and the level of distress.
- Community-based interventions: adaptation strategies for climate change that tackle psychosocial wellbeing; and,
- Special training for health care providers and first responders: e.g. psychological first aid.

Recommendation

There is a great need for further research in this field of study to enhance adequate knowledge and appropriate adaptation and mitigation to climate change and health for sustainable development in Nigeria. In addition,

coordinated, collaborative efforts to address the impacts of climate change on mental health require not only policy frameworks but also concrete actions on behalf of mental health practitioners. Such concrete actions may include:

1. Communicating about climate change and health in a way that helps people to see that it is relevant and salient to them.
2. Advocacy for greenhouse gas reductions in health care facilities and engagement in efforts to reduce the environmental footprint of the health care sector; and
3. Engaging in adaptation measures like preparing for and responding to extreme events.
4. Inculcating the calming effects of music, and poetry in education and sensitization of the masses on the impacts of climate change on human health and amazing preventive measures including healthy lifestyles and wellbeing. It is good to know that poetry is beauty and beauty attracts. Poetry also has a unique way of expressing emotions, ideas and experiences which is so appealing and attractive to the human mind. It turns out that there are some important therapeutic benefits of poetry which can be used innovatively in climate change and health education in Nigeria.

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