

Anthony Mensah-Kumah

Professor Molar Ogundipe

Expository Writing

13th December, 2007

The Situation of Waste Management in Ghana

In recent times, waste management has been visibly poor in Ghana's major towns and cities. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines waste management as "the administration of activities that provide for the collection, source separation, storage, transportation, transfer, processing, treatment, and disposal of waste"

(<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/education/quest/gloss1a.htm#w>). Due to inefficient waste management in Ghana, issues relating to sanitation are a major problem. Taking a tour through the

city of Accra for example, one will encounter the common sight of litter scattered indiscriminately, mostly at densely populated areas. Matters regarding filth are worsening and must be tackled before the situation

gets completely out of hand. There have been many attempts to clean up

Ghana's cities on several occasions. In an article published in the Ghanaian Spectator by Dartey, she says, "As a country, we give our sanitation problem the cemetery treatment: white-wash the grave, while underneath is nothing but rotteness. We do this so well through occasional clean-up campaigns for which media-hungry leaders get publicity"(24). This observation by Dartey is very true. In order to solve a problem, one must begin with the roots.



Figure 1: Indiscriminate dumping of waste at Kaneshie, a suburb of Accra

Source: David Adjetey, "The Filth on Accra Streets"

<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/photo.day.php?ID=92722>

The manner in which waste is collected in our metropolises leaves a lot to be desired. The time intervals between the times for waste collection are unreasonably wide. To make this already bad situation worse, the number of waste collection vehicles on our roads is woefully inadequate. The vehicles are unable to manage the rate at which waste is produced in these densely populated areas. Large heaps of un-emptied garbage containers are widespread within the metropolises, mainly due to limited, inefficient and under sourced waste management practices.

When it comes to the case of sewage waste disposal, many people have adopted the ‘free range method.’ People defecate indiscriminately, even in open places such as beaches and at the sides of the Odaw River running through the centre of our capital city, Accra. Others resort to easing themselves into black polythene bags and dumping them anywhere, often in gutters. To make matters worse,



Figure 2: The dumping of untreated sewage waste into the ocean at ‘Lavender Hill’ at Korle-Gonno, a suburb of Accra.

Source: Justin Morensco, “GHANA: Raw Sewage Dumping a Public Health ‘Time Bomb’” <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=59809>

sewage tankers dump their contents directly into the sea at Korle-Gonno, a suburb of Accra. The sea blue water instantly becomes faecal brown, a truly disgusting sight. This place has been sarcastically named ‘Lavender Hill’ due to the stench that has engulfed the whole area. One can only imagine the intensity of the odour present in this area. An IRIN article on Ghana states that, for well over a year, more than 80 percent of the sewage generated by the two million people of Ghana’s sea-front capital Accra has been dumped, untreated, into the ocean

(<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=59809>). If tourism is an important income earner for Ghana, how can such a practice go on unnoticed? The beaches are a main tourist attraction especially in tropical countries. Ever since the Achimota waste treatment plant went out of operation in order to

make way for the construction of the new transport terminal, no alternative waste treatment plant has been drawn up. The government is still searching for land to build this sewage treatment. These shortcomings exhibit the poor planning and execution of some government projects.

The health implications of poor waste management can be very damaging to the people exposed to these unsanitary conditions. Diseases such as cholera, dysentery, ENT infections, guinea worm and malaria are all related to the practice of poor waste management. In a Daily Graphic article by Yeboah K., he says that in an interview with Professor Joseph Orleans Mends Pobee, the professor stated that “the rate of malaria and guinea worm infection in the country is a blot on the state of the nation’s health...” The professor further states that “...Ghana is ranked number two in the world in terms of guinea worm infection while malaria was the major cause of death in the country, especially children”(48). Malaria is a disease spread by the female Anopheles mosquito which could be prevented by making the environment unsuitable for the breeding of these mosquitoes. Breeding is suitable in places where water is stagnant, mostly caused by drains choked by the rubbish in our country. The diseases associated with unsanitary living conditions result in the loss of human resources needed in developing the country. The government is forced to increase its spending on health to keep these diseases under control when they could have easily been prevented. This unnecessary increased spending on combating diseases retards national development.

According to statistics, tourism is the third highest income earner in Ghana. An article by Travel Document Systems on Ghana says, “Tourism has become one of Ghana's largest foreign income earners (ranking third in 2005 at \$836 million), and the Ghanaian Government has placed strong emphasis on further development of the sector” (<http://www.traveldocs.com/gh/economy.htm>). If this is truly the case, why is it that the government does not put in enough effort to rid the country of filth in order to attract tourists? As they say, talk is cheap, whereas actions are tough. The beaches in particular are a place of choice for most tourists visiting tropical countries. How serious is the Ghanaian government if they allow the dumping of

untreated sewage directly into the sea? These questions need answers; these unsanitary practices are against international standards and are unacceptable.

In January 2008, Ghana is going to host the 26th African Cup of Nations, Ghana CAN 2008. Participants from many African countries are going to be present in our country. It is estimated that the number of visitors coming will be in the hundreds of thousands. With the current state of sanitation and poor waste management practices, what sort of impression are we expecting to leave in the minds of these foreigners? Investors may be amongst the visitors coming to Ghana during this festive period to take advantage of the soccer event and explore investment opportunities. With such a bad presentation of our country, convincing potential investors to stay and invest will be a tough task. Even the president of the Local Organizing Committee for CAN 2008, Dr. Kofi Asamoah, said during a speech aired on TV3's Evening News Sports Segment that, "Ghana is not poor [in terms of resources] but it is rather the environment and the conditions that we live in that makes Ghanaians poor". He emphasized that "children should be given advice on good waste management practices so that they grow up with it". In spite of all these negative practices by many Ghanaians, there are some organizations such as ZoomLion that are making the effort to create and maintain clean and beautiful environments in time for the tournament. The question is, are these activities effective only for the short-term? What is going to happen after the tournament is over? From past experiences in Ghana, these last minute clean-up activities do not last for long and are not sustainable after an international event has taken place on Ghanaian soil.

The situation of waste management in Ghana is very bad but is not completely hopeless. A profitable way to rid the country of the huge amounts of waste produced daily is by recycling. There are a number of recycling plants in Ghana set up to handle such waste. On a feature article published in The Daily Graphic, it was noted that, "Blowplast Recycling Industries Limited near Tema is producing below optimum capacity"(7). People must be encouraged to separate waste according to their contents and incentives must be put in place for such efforts. Employment opportunities can be

created by offering jobs for people to collect and deliver the sorted waste to collection points to be recycled. Another way of maintaining a clean healthy environment is by putting strict punishments in place to deal with people that contribute to the pollution of our environment. Sanitary inspectors should be effective and given a lot of support. Ultimately, the efforts to make Ghana a cleaner place will succeed by changing people's attitudes towards the environment. This change of attitude can be achieved in the same manner by which people were educated on the re-denomination exercise for the Ghanaian currency. Environmental Studies should also be integrated into the compulsory formal education syllabus at all levels. This education will go a long way to improve the current situation of waste management and sanitation in Ghana. The future can be bright; the power lies in the hands and minds of Ghanaians to make a change and help make Ghana a cleaner, healthier and more prosperous nation.

Works Cited

Adjetei, David. "The Filth on Accra Streets." 23 Oct. 2005

<<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/photo.day.php?ID=92722>>

Dartey, Doris. "Nice Speeches; and The Environment is The Same." The Spectator, 29 Sept. 2007: 24.

EPA Educational Resources. Glossary of Terms. 4 Dec. 2007

<<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/education/quest/gloss1a.htm#w>>.

Morensco, Justin. "GHANA: Raw Sewage Dumping a Public Health 'Time Bomb.'" 4 Dec. 2007

<<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=59809>>

TV3 Evening News: Sports Segment. Prod. I. Laryea. Adesa We, Accra. 12 Dec. 2007.

"Support Waste Management Efforts." Daily Graphic, 6 Dec. 2007: 7.

"Travel Document Systems – Ghana Economy." 5 Dec. 2007

<<http://www.traveldocs.com/gh/economy.htm>>

Yeboah, Kofi. "Let's Deal with Malaria, Guinea Worm Menace." The Daily Graphic, 7 Nov. 2007:

48