

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION COMPLIANCE IN YENAGOA CITY BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract:

The effects of environmental law enforcement on environmental sanitation compliance in Yenagoa City, Bayelsa state is discussed. It suggests that laws and regulations are not enough; there is a need for enforcement of laws and regulations, public awareness and basic sanitation infrastructure. The study employs a qualitative documentary method that involves reviewing documents related to the environment, public sanitation announcements, enforcement reports and Nigerian literature. The findings indicate that the Bayelsa State government actively engages in sanitation activities and sanctions offenders, but the sanctions do not seem to be working as continued violations indicate. The research also reveals that the lack of infrastructure, irregular collection of refuse, lack of awareness amongst the public and inadequate institutional capacities are still a barrier in the proper management of sanitation. The paper suggests that for sustainable sanitation in Yenagoa, a balanced approach of law enforcement, civic education and infrastructural support are needed.

Keywords: Environmental law enforcement, environmental sanitation, compliance, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of environmental sanitation is very important to public health, urban order and sustainable development particularly in fast growing cities like Yenagoa. As waste in Bayelsa State has continued to grow in volume, disposal methods are inadequate and there is a low compliance of the residents to the regulations to take care of waste, it has continued to affect environmental quality and the health risk of the inhabitants. According to Ikemike (2015), sanitation and waste management problems are still very much a concern among the urban areas in Nigeria, while Ologunagba et al. (2025) noted that socio-cultural and institutional factors are still affecting the compliance with environmental sanitation rules.

Environmental sanitation is a public health need and a governance challenge, as it is an indicator of the effectiveness of the state in safeguarding public space from pollution, waste and preventable disease. Sanitation outcomes in Nigerian cities rely upon a connection among law, law enforcement organizations, and citizens' adherence to laws. Yenagoo is a good example, as sanitation drive posters are displayed, enforcement notices are posted and arrests of non-compliant individuals are reported, indicating that compliance is not merely a matter of personal choice. However, if violations persist, then there is a need for enforcement, which is occurring even though norms for sanitation are not yet fully internalized by all residents and businesses.

Environmental law enforcement is the use of monitoring, inspection, sanctions and other means by government authorities to help individuals, families and organizations abide with environmental law. The study titled: Rethinking Environmental Law Enforcement in Nigeria (2015) posited that the enforcement is hampered in Nigeria by lack of coordination, weak penalties and lack of public participation, thus making the legislative purpose difficult to attain. Likewise, Environmental Sanitation (2025) emphasized the need for regular monitoring and oversight to ensure adherence.

While Nigeria has laws on the environment and sanitation, there are still some enforcement issues that are making the effect of these laws weaker. In Yenagoa, there are still reports of arrests of defaulters during sanitation drives, indicating that defaulters are not being caught off-guard. Meanwhile, sanitation problems like the lack of adequate poor waste disposal systems and public non-cooperation makes compliance difficult. The issue is not regulation but the disconnect between regulation and urban practice.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- 1.To examine the legal and institutional basis of environmental sanitation enforcement in Nigeria.
- 2.To assess sanitation compliance patterns in Yenagoa city.
- 3.To examine the enforcement strategies used by sanitation authorities in Yenagoa.
- 4.To propose measures for improving environmental sanitation compliance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have revealed that the state of environmental sanitation in Nigeria is influenced by weak institutional capacity, poor governance and weak enforcement. Ofulue and Gasiokwu (2025) suggest that sanitation laws are not always enforced due to weak law enforcement and fines that are not punitive enough. Their research also reveals that lack of public awareness and of environmental responsibility are two important factors that hinder compliance. This applies to Yenagoa as enforcement announcements and arrest are still needed, indicating weak compliance.

Sanitation compliance is the degree to which people, families and institutions adhere to environmental health laws and waste management guidelines. In urban areas, compliance is key to stopping the spread of disease, lowering pollution levels and keeping the environment healthy. Many households were still lacking adequate sanitation facilities and poor hygiene practices in Yenagoa were reported by Ohwo (2017). The results of the study reinforce the notion that compliance is an issue that is evident at the household level and in the public space.

A review of urban sanitation literature in Nigeria indicates that promises in policy often do not have an implementation capacity. Weak policy prioritization, institutional coordination, and enforcement are some of the challenges to urban sanitation in Nigeria, as noted by Ohwo (2017). This implies that non-production in Yenagoa is not a local issue, but a national problem.

Waste disposal continues to be an issue as evident in Yenagoa. Ofulue U.G and Gasiokwu P.I (2025) identified that despite knowing how to dispose of waste properly, the Authority's access was limited, and there was a lack of personnel and equipment in the city. Agbedi and Oweibia (2026) also reported that improper storage, burning, and dumping of waste in open spaces are common practices that lead to air pollution and contamination risk as well as vector breeding. The results suggest that inadequate enforcement allows for waste practices that are not sustainable.

Brisibe & Ebakpa (2021) also found waste disposal issues and decaying infrastructures to be associated with slum formation in inner-city communities in Yenagoa. If the infrastructure in the city is not in place, and the monitoring is not strict, sanitation becomes the norm and it becomes difficult to build clean and orderly neighborhoods.

The national sanitation policy framework puts great stress on the role of trained environmental health officers, regular visits and fines for violators. This confirms that the policy context is already seeing enforcement as key to sanitation improvement. Yet the challenge comes as to how these provisions are implemented at the local level. In practice, weak staffing, inadequate logistics and limited institutional reach affect the capacity of authorities to effectively monitor compliance as demonstrated by Ofulue U. G and Gasiokwu P.I (2025) in Yenagoa.

Environmental laws are enforced by nature and benefit.Nature and benefit of the environmental laws.

Environmental laws and Regulations need to be enforced effectively at the Federal, State and Local levels to be effective in environmental management. Environmental law enforcement is action to protect the environment, based on the laws

and regulations. Environmental sanitation is the act of promoting clean and healthy environments by providing proper waste management, clean water and sanitation facilities. Both human, civil societies and corporate activities are controlled by the State through legislations. The stake holders and different sectors of the economy as well as individual users of the environment, a precise indication of which activities they can undertake, which activities are forbidden and what their responsibilities are in the event that their activities jeopardize any component of the environment.

This justifies the creation of Federal and State ministries of environment between 1999 and 2001 during the President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration and also the national and State environmental protection agencies. The fundamental environmental objective was also established during the period in the Nigerian Constitution which states in Section 20 that the State "shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air, land, forest and wildlife of the Nigeria for the benefit of the present and future generations. Environmental enforcement is therefore an integral part of environmental governance and aims to fulfil the noble aspirations of our environmental status. It is the various actions taken by the government to ensure and promote compliance with environmental law. It is actually the use of all available tools to ensure compliance, such as compliance promotion, compliance monitoring and non-compliance response. Enforcing environmental standards and regulations is one of the surest ways governments can use to checkmate the negative impact of unsustainable developmental activities on the environment and on the lives of citizens. If there is no culture of environment enforcement that can ensure compliance by big companies, which can have an impact on drastically improving the quality of life. Environmental enforcement generally has to do with evaluation of compliance with the various environmental legislations.

Government enforcement of the regulations includes:

- i. Inspections to establish compliance position of the regulated community and to identify breaches.
- ii. Discussions to establish mutually acceptable time frames and methods to reach compliance with individuals or facility managers who are non-compliant.
- iii. If a law requires it, legal action to ensure that it is observed and some consequences for its violation or its potential for damage to public health and/or environment quality.
- iv. It also may involve compliance promotion (such as education, technical assistance, subsidies etc.) to facilitate voluntary compliance.

When enforcement is effective it can bring about several benefits such as improved quality in public health, credibility of environmental protection efforts and the enforcement agencies including the Courts, fairness to those who comply with environmental requirements and economic benefits both to individuals and the State.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this paper is qualitative research with a documentary approach. It utilizes secondary sources such as articles from journals, articles from legal documents, public notices and news reports on environmental sanitation in Bayelsa State and Nigerian context. The data was analyzed thematically, with emphasis on enforcement, compliance, infrastructure and public behavior. This approach is suitable as it enables the study to relate formal environmental law with the actual sanitation practice in Yenagoa.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study found that environmental law enforcement is an important factor influencing environmental sanitation compliance in Yenagoa city. Sanitation laws, regulations and enforcement institutions offer legal backing to the control of indiscriminate waste disposal, drainage channel blockages, improper maintenance of premises and lack of participation in sanitation exercises. But the findings suggest that the presence of environmental regulations does not necessarily result in compliance. The effectiveness of the law is highly dependent on consistency of monitoring, impartial enforcement, clarity of sanctions and capacity of the responsible authorities.

One major finding is the existence of sanitation enforcement which is very reactive in Yenagoa. During the monthly sanitation exercises, arrest of sanitation defaulters indicates the readiness and institutionalization of the enforcement of environmental laws. When it is enforced, it can make residents and business operators aware that their actions are prohibited and that they could be arrested, fined, prosecuted and/or face other penalties. However, reoccurring violations indicate that there may not have been consistent and lasting changes in behavior as a result of enforcement efforts. This further confirms the need to have regular arrests and inspections which must be continuous, predictable and uniform across each offender group.

Another important finding is that Lack of sanitation infrastructure restricts compliance in Yenagoa. The residents cannot be expected to fully adhere to the rules governing waste disposal if refuse bins, public toilets, drainage facilities and regular garbage collection are limited. For instance, in commercial areas, lack of toilet facilities may lead to open defecation and unclean disposal of human excrement. Likewise, if the refuse is not picked up quickly, the residents can dump the garbage in a drainage ditch, an uncultivated plot, roadside or waterways. If they are enforced without facilities, there is an implication that it is not fair, since the government is asking people to do something without also offering them the facilities they need.

The study further revealed that public opinion and awareness of the environment impacts on the sanitation behavior. Issues of knowledge and lack of proper information about the health and environment impacts lead some residents to still throw waste indiscriminately. Others may know the law but don't follow it due to convenience, cost, habit or the assumption that everyone else is breaking the law. This means that sanitation compliance is a legal and social process. A change in public attitudes, rather than simply more police arrests is therefore essential for effective environmental management.

The study also suggests that the enforcement may be insufficient due to lack of technical capacity, logistics, personnel

and funding. The vehicles used for inspecting vehicles, protective equipment, communication systems, facilities for collecting waste, the training of personnel and reliable records are essential for effective enforcement. In the absence of these resources, sanitation officers may not be able to cover all sections of Yenagoa and/or may not be able to act swiftly on complaints. A small budget can also incentivize irregular sanitation practices and make it more difficult for governments to keep up public facilities. In this way, institutional capacity is key to the effective enforcement of the law. The other study is about the relevance of fairness and equality in the implementation of environmental legislation. Likely to be less compliant when residents feel regulations are applied in an unequal manner. Petty traders and low income residents can be picked up if they break the rules on sanitation, but bigger businesses or those more strongly politically connected can escape with no repercussions, making enforcement feel unfair. To ensure fair enforcement, all households, traders, businesses, institutions, and government establishments need to be treated equally. It also calls for clear rules for warning, punishment, appeal and prosecution.

The results lend weight to the discussion that environmental sanitation should be a collective responsibility. Government agencies are expected to enact legislation, build infrastructure, enforce it, and punish infractions. The residents, traders, landlords and businesses also have a responsibility to keep their premises clean, utilize approved disposal sites and to take part in sanitation activities. If either side fails, the results of sanitation suffer. Citizen participation is essential if government is to keep cities clean, and the provision of effective public services and enforcement is essential if citizens are to have sustainable sanitation.

In general, the results showed that the compliance of sanitation was positively affected but in a limited way by environmental law enforcement in Yenagoa city. Enforcement can help to improve short-term compliance and help to deter some violations, but is dependent on consistency of institutions, public trust, infrastructure, awareness and community involvement. An integrated model, therefore, which incorporates sanctions, education, service delivery, stakeholder involvement and ongoing monitoring is the most effective model. This would facilitate to establish a culture of environmental responsibility as a permanent practice of the government instead of occasional interventions.

CONCLUSION

The function of environmental law enforcement is necessary and important in ensuring sanitation compliance in Yenagoa city, but enforcement is not enough. The call to action in the context of Bayelsa shows that the enforcement agencies have been inspecting, arresting and warning offenders but the offenders continue to play with fire year after year. A multipronged strategy will be needed for sustainable sanitation – robust enforcement, improved infrastructure, frequent collection, and ongoing education. In summary, the sanitation issue in Yenagoa is more of a governance issue than legal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Sanitation enforcement must be carried out consistently, to discourage re-offenders.
- ii. Having more toilets, bins and bin evacuation services in public and commercial areas.
- iii. Public enlightenment campaigns ought not to be sporadic.
- iv. Market leaders, community groups and traders' associations should be engaged in sanitation monitoring.
- v. Environmental offences should be dealt with through quicker adjudication systems, if possible.
- vi. Enforcement to be congruent with infrastructure investment to ensure compliance is practical, not punitive.

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