

Improving Sanitation on Tertiary Education Campuses

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the problem of sanitation on University campuses in Ghana after clearly explaining what sanitation means. Its purpose is to equip the reader with every knowledge needed to initiate actions towards improving sanitation on tertiary campuses in Ghana and possibly in other developing countries.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Sanitation - generally defined as the promotion of hygiene and prevention of diseases by maintenance of good sanitary conditions.

'Perching' – is used to describe a situation where a student who is not officially given a room in a particular hall is able to secure accommodation with the assistance of a bona fide member of a particular room and enjoys the facilities of that room or hall.

'Shit-on-shit' – is used to describe a situation where students defecate on each other's excreta as a result of lack of water to flush the toilets.

'Free range' – is used to describe a situation where students defecate in bushes around the school.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to a 2006 UNICEF report on sanitation, millions of people worldwide lack access to reliable basic sanitation facilities and about 2.6 billion people (two in five) do not have access to improved sanitation facilities. Lack of safe water and sanitation facilities is the world's single largest cause of illnesses. Poor sanitation on campuses means that students have direct contact with environmental contaminants which results in sanitation related diseases.

Better sanitation and hygiene improves the livelihood and well-being of human beings. A safe and sustainable sanitary environment is fundamental for a healthy, productive and dignified life, yet many people lack access to improved sanitation facilities. In spite of the importance of good sanitation and hygiene in improving the health status of the university community, the University of Cape Coast has not given sanitation the needed attention it deserves. As a result of this, a greater proportion of the students suffer from sanitation related diseases, mainly, diarrhea, dysentery and typhoid. There is therefore the need to develop strategies to enhance comprehensive sanitation services delivery in the University.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Generally, environment and sanitation factors are significant determinants of health and illness in developing countries. Poor sanitation, contributes to about 88 percent of deaths from diarrhea and other sanitation related diseases according to the 2006 UNICEF report on sanitation. The state of poor sanitation on the University of Cape Coast campus ranges from choked gutters, weedy environment, littered environment, inadequate sanitation facilities, overflowing refuse containers and sale of food at insanitary food vending stations. Some student residential facilities have malfunctioning or obsolete drainage and sewage systems. A typical case in point is the Atlantic Hall. These often contribute to food poisoning of students and other health related conditions and infections. It is important to state however, that comparative to other communities, the university's state of sanitation is far ahead. Over the last couple of years, the university has acquired a water tanker, waste disposal truck and a cesspit emptier, all as part of efforts to improve sanitation and reduce avoidable diseases. These notwithstanding, the spate of sanitation related ailments among students is high and therefore needs Management's attention.

III. COMPONENTS OF SANITATION

Components of sanitation include:

- (i) Personal hygiene
- (ii) Safe drinking water
- (iii) Toilet/human excreta disposal
- (iv) Disposal of waste water
- (v) Solid waste management-
- (vi) Environmental sanitation

IV. SOME CAUSES OF POOR SANITATION ON CAMPUS

- (i) Perching situation at the halls: - Most students prefer to perch with their friends or siblings at the halls in order to share food and other personal items or to enjoy the activities of that particular hall. This situation is more common with the male dominated halls on campus, such as Atlantic and Casley Hayford Halls. This situation puts pressure especially on the washrooms and water facilities. The toilet and bathroom facilities become overly dirty and students easily contract contagious diseases such as candidiasis, skin rashes and urinary tract infections. Normally, in the Second Semester, where there is shortage of water on campus, the toilet facilities then become unhygienic to use and the place develops a stench. Students then engage in '*shit-on-shit*' and '*free-range*'.
- (ii) Inadequate/overflowing refuse bins at vantage points: - there is at least a dustbin on every floor in the halls and at the faculties and departments. However, there

are not enough litter bins outside the halls, office areas and none at all at the Science Market. As a result of this, students tend to litter the campus with rubbish where they can't find any bins and this also puts pressure on the few ones that are outside. These bins then overflow with waste and breed houseflies and mosquitoes. A clear example of this is the refuse dump situated at the Science Taxi Station. This area is very close to the science market and whenever the place overflows with rubbish, food sold at the market may become contaminated and students may suffer food poisoning.

(iii) Uncommitted attitude of sanitary workers: - Sanitary workers at the University of Cape Coast are employed by the university and paid by the government. Most of these workers have adopted a lackadaisical attitude and are often absent at work. They sometimes do not clean the sanitary facilities well or clean without using the detergents provided them simply because they would have to fetch more water for rinsing. At the Student Representative Council (SRC) Hostel for example, where the cleaners are expected to clean twice daily before closing work, they mostly clean in the mornings only and use the rest of the day chatting and making unnecessary arguments. However, one of the sanitary workers in an interview gave a different angle to this. *"He said we do the cleaning alright but it means that whoever goes into the toilet and does not have water (because we do not provide water) for flushing will mess up the place again and this most at times does not motivate us to clean often"*

(iv) Lack of maintenance of sanitary facilities: -As student population keeps increasing, demand for residential accommodation is swelling up, putting more pressure on sanitary facilities. Increase in the student population now means that the facilities have become insufficient and there is the need to provide more sanitary facilities and renovate the existing ones. Most of the taps are not flowing, the sinks have become old and choked and the flush handles on the toilets are spoilt.

V. MEASURES TO IMPROVE SANITATION ON CAMPUS

Sanitation is a global problem, hence, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Instead disciplining ourselves as individuals and showing commitment in eradicating this canker can help curb this situation. Below are some measures to improve sanitation on U.C.C campus.

(i) Education/counselling and involvement of students in sanitation issues: - The first step at curbing this problem should be vigorous education and involvement of the students themselves. It is important that general awareness about sanitation issues be improved to achieve the general goal of behavioral change among students. It is important for the students to understand the link between sanitation on campus and their health. The University Health Services in

conjunction with student leadership should take a lead role in this. For greater awareness, they could institute a "sanitation day" where health workers would be invited to give talks on sanitation and the students would be involved in clean up exercises.

(ii) Outsourcing of cleaning services to private contractors: - Another way to improving sanitation on campus is to outsource cleaning of sanitary facilities to private contractors. The school authorities should find a way of managing resources to pay the services of sanitary workers from private companies. This is because the private workers would be more diligent in discharging their duties, as they are better paid and have the fear of being sacked for inefficiency by their employers. This would make the sanitation facilities more hygienic and safer to use and protect students from contracting sanitation related diseases such as candidiasis, cholera, diarrhea and skin rashes.

(iii) Institution of an efficient sanitation task force. The university management should set up a task force that would ensure among other things that students do not litter the campus indiscriminately, sanitary workers come to work on time and clean as often as they ought to. Dustbins at vantage points are emptied regularly by the cleaners and students are not allowed to perch at the halls. They would also ensure that people living in nearby communities do not engage in unauthorized hawking and littering on campus. Offenders of these regulations should be made to pay fines and the money used to purchase dustbins and other cleaning materials. The task force would also ensure that dustbins are situated almost everywhere on campus to reduce littering. Members could be motivated with stipends from fines.

(iv) Rehabilitation and maintenance of sanitary areas: since the establishment of this institution many of the washroom facilities have not been renovated and are in bad shape. Most of the taps have rusted, sinks spoilt, and bathroom accessories damaged. Management should therefore renovate these areas and make sure that the spoilt equipment are fixed and in good shape. There could even be the construction of systems that would harvest rain water which could be used to clean the bathrooms and channeled to flush the toilets whenever the taps fail to flow.

(v) Provision of boreholes and water pumps in times of water shortage: one of the major challenges for students during the Second Semester is water shortage generally in Cape Coast. The washroom facilities become extremely dirty and unhygienic during this time. Management should therefore set up committees to provide bore holes and storage tanks for every hall and water pumps to supply water for use in the washrooms at such times. This would prevent students from misusing the places of convenience and keep the places neat at all times.

(vi) Encouraging waste segregation and recycling: waste segregation and disposal is important. Accumulation

of waste particularly organic waste is not only unaesthetic but leads to the breeding of insects which aid in disease transmission. Bins for different types of waste should be made available so that plastics could be separated from organic waste and other kinds of waste. Recycled papers from the offices and from students could also be recycled and transformed into toilet rolls and distributed to the students at the halls instead of having to buy from toilet roll producing companies. With this, the university could even sell the plastic and other kinds of recycled waste to industries that need them. Plastic waste materials could also be remanufactured into plastic items such as bowls and cups and buckets for use in the school and some sold for profit. Organic fertilizers could also be produced from the organic waste materials and sold for profit. Students and lecturers from the natural sciences and agriculture departments could be consulted in designing mechanisms to make the production possible.

- (vii) Encouraging healthy competition on sanitation among the traditional halls: an award scheme could be designed on sanitation and given to particular halls at the end of each academic year. These halls should be made to embark on a sanitation projects each academic year and the hall with the most successful project should be awarded. At the end of each academic year, awards should also be given to the neatest hall on campus. This would motivate the students to keep their halls clean and cultivate good sanitation habits.
- (viii) Training campus food vendors to ensure proper sanitation.

VI. CONCLUSION

Improved sanitation ultimately contributes to nation building by enhancing the health status of the citizenry and their economic productivity. Despite management's best efforts, there appears to be gaps in finding a holistic solution to sanitation challenges on UCC campus. Ensuring good sanitation is the collective responsibility of all stakeholders (University Management, Students, and the communities around the University of Cape Coast). All actors' roles are necessary in ensuring the maintenance of high environmental sanitation standards to prevent diseases caused by insanitary conditions on campus.

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