



HOW LIBRARIANS CAN ENGAGE KIDS AND YOUTHS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 13 – CLIMATE ACTION

Helen Nneka Okpala [@helenekez](#)

[YALI Green Champion & UNLEASH SDG Talent]

I usually tell people that I'm not an **accidental librarian**. Why? Because I applied to study Library and Information Science (LIS) at the University of Nigeria, when I took my **JAMB**. I never shopped nor made LIS my **second choice**. When I was in the Secondary school, I was the **deputy school librarian**. I had access to books on different subjects. Then I told myself, 'If I study Library science, I would be an **embodiment of knowledge**.' Not only will I grant people access to their resources, I would have to know **little about all subjects**. Then my journey began. I combined Library Science with Botany. In University of Nigeria, Nsukka, one just has to combine Library Science with other subjects. I would confidently say I am also a Botanist due to the high number of courses we offered in Botany, Microbiology and Chemistry.

Many of us don't know **who librarians truly are**. I recently **posted on [my blog](#)**, defining who a true librarian is. **A true librarian is passionate** about his job, always **smiling** and happy to **satisfy** people's information needs. A true librarian is **proactive** and always on the lookout for new **knowledge to share**. Please when you visit the library and you see people with tight faces, too busy to attend to your information needs, ask to see a librarian, because they aren't one. Some people see librarians as archaic people who never smile and always shushing people. But I am here to tell you that you may wish to say **that I am a true definition of a librarian** *[Smiles]*.

As a librarian in the contemporary age, I have learnt to keep abreast of what happens in my immediate environment and beyond. Now, the Sustainable development goals actualization is the focus of the world today, especially the 13th Goal which is **taking climate action**.

The world is facing the significant challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. The earth is undergoing a series of changes as its surface temperature

increases each day. These changes are catalyzed by human activities, so it is only humans who can abate the changes; these changes have also raised concerns among governments and international bodies more than among individuals. Addressing climate change is one of the 17 Global Goals constituting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNDP, 2016).

Thirteen years from now, we'll be evaluating if and how the Sustainable Development Goals have been achieved. In this part of the world, we hear about the SDGs, we write about the various goals, but how do we engage ourselves in actualizing these goals? In 13 years time, so many of us would be in our thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, seventies, except we have some immortal beings here *[laughter]*.

You know, when you talk about death, people's heart skip. But that is a reality. But then, what can we do to make the earth a safer place to live in? We teach our kids to read, write, play, etc, but how often do we let them learn about the Sustainable Development Goals, especially the thirteenth goal which is Taking Climate Action?

I bet you, if we take a survey of SDG awareness among all of us here, you may find that none of us knows much about taking climate action. That is why we are here. Probably right now as we speak, there is no time allotted in schools, for the teaching of climate change to our kids. I may be wrong, but from my interaction with some of these students, I came to a conclusion that there is need to engage the kids in SDGs actualization.

Apart from being the leaders of tomorrow (which never comes, courtesy of...), the kids constitute the target audience in the actualization of SDG 13. Sometimes we become so selfish that we do not care about how the world where our kids will live in, will look like.

In the library, we talk about books, magazines and more recently, audio-visual materials and online resources. We have the library for kids – the children centre library which is University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This serves the kids during non-school hours and long vacation periods. In the schools, we have libraries that serve the pupils or students as the case may be.

The librarian exists to provide answers to queries of library users and also engage them in various literacy programmes. I personally see a librarian as someone that knows a little about everything. Why? Because an ideal librarian knows where to locate all books on the shelf and is opportune to read every single material that comes into the library. We find this obtainable among school librarians who do not spend extra time in publishing papers for promotion like the academic librarians do.

It is well known, that librarians offer library literacy, information literacy, and technology literacy. I have added **climate literacy**.

Climate literacy is knowledge delivery on climate change and how to combat it, and I take THIS, to be the **number one solution to climate change**. According to the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), ‘Libraries are proven, cost-effective partners for advancing development priorities’and are known to support development across nations by granting individuals access to relevant and precise information’.

I say here, that a **climate literate person** possesses the required knowledge on climate change, including how it affects and is affected by his daily life.

Climate literacy allows students to gain background knowledge on climate change and how it affects their environment. According to the [Climate Literacy Network](#), a climate literate person exhibits the following abilities:

- understands the essential principles of Earth’s climate system,
- knows how to assess scientifically credible information about climate,
- communicates about climate and climate change in a meaningful way, and
- can make informed and responsible decisions regarding actions that may affect the climate.

The thirteenth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a call to take climate action. Responding to this call involves collaboration between libraries and non-governmental organisations to educate the public about climate change and how it affects the world.

Climate literacy in libraries can be implemented through word of mouth, seminars, flyers, posters, e-learning, social media platforms such as Facebook, blogs, and Twitter. Recently, as reported by American Meteorological Society in 2016, the University of Wisconsin-Madison hosted a massive open online course (MOOC) on January 16, 2016 entitled ‘**Climate Literacy through a partnership with public libraries**’.

How Librarians can help the kids to take climate action

1. Documenting and providing resources on climate change such as newspaper and magazine clips.
2. Access to Online video clips on Climate change
3. Word of mouth, flyers, radio programmes
4. Social media platforms – Facebook, blogs, twitter
5. Library Seminars
6. Putting up displays in the library on reducing your carbon footprint
7. Organise essay competition for kids on climate change
8. Displaying books on climate change at strategic locations in the library
9. Archiving materials on Climate change in the repository

10. Forming climate change clubs

My personal efforts as a Climate Change Enthusiast

1. Hosting of Climate Change event with Undergraduates
2. A class on 'Understanding Climate Change' with UNN kids

The Events

The kids and youths were introduced to the concepts of weather and climate, then climate change

The BIG QUESTION was: **“What can you do to Stop Global Climate change and what can we do to help?”**

We got answers like:

1. Use clean energy
2. Watch your water use
3. Green your transport. The less you drive, the more energy you save...If all our kids and students can get a bicycle or choose to walk, there will be less emissions. During my visit to University of Pretoria in 2015, I found that there was a provision for students to hire bicycles which they use to attend lectures. You find out that they either walk, or ride on their bicycles. You hardly see Green shuttles like we have here, honking their horns and burning energy here and there.
4. Turn off the tap after use
5. Turn off the burner after boiling water
6. Unplug all electrical appliances after use
7. Use of energy bulbs to reduce emission of heat
8. Avoid hibernating our laptops at night.
9. Switch off all electric bulbs at night
10. Learn to use less paper. Manufacturing them uses loads of electricity and natural resources
11. Unplug the charger
12. Plant a tree

Actions we took

1. At the two separate events, the participants brainstormed and came up with a presentation on causes of climate change and how to combat it
2. The kids took a climate action pledge with their parents
3. We planted a tree at the children centre library, UNN.

Actions to take

By God's grace, I have been selected as an [UNLEASH](#) SDG Talent to participate in the upcoming UNLEASH LAB Event taking place in Denmark, August 2017. Out of over 3, 600 applicants, I was among the 1000 talents selected to participate in the event. People from over 150 countries are expected to attend the event. I will be unveiling my solution at the event, in relation with achieving SDG 13 in Nigeria. That is the starting point of **actions to take**.

The time has really come for us to engage our kids, our youths in taking climate action, and librarians are central to achieving this.

I have just started, and hope others join.

Thank you very much.

Helen Nneka Okpala (CLN;MLS;SAP)

UNLEASH SDG Talent, 2017

The Climate Action report is on my blog: www.helenokpala.com