

## Strategies for Promoting Lifestyles in Families and Communities

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### Abstract

Lifestyles include everything individuals and families do. These include the food, clothing, goods and services they consume, even their patterns of interaction, and so on. Lifestyles are part of each individual's identity and a major concern for health and wellbeing. This paper focuses on the concept of lifestyle, changing lifestyles, and sustainable lifestyles. It also reviews the strategies for achieving sustainable lifestyles. The vital role of government in promoting sustainable lifestyles among individuals, families and communities is also explored.

**Key words:** Lifestyles, family, change, sustainable, strategies, health.

### Introduction

Individuals and families have needs. Such needs include: feeding, clothing housing and good health among others. In order to meet these needs, people develop lifestyles. According to Jackson (2008) lifestyles can be seen as "social conversations", in which people differentiate themselves from other people, signal their social position and psychological aspirations. Since many of the signals are mediated by goods, lifestyles are closely linked to resource flows in the society. Lifestyles have been formed for centuries by civilization and are driven by economic forces, technological progress, political settings, environmental issues, sociological and cultural contexts and psychological determinants. Lifestyles define and differentiate people (Rowley *et al* (2000). Lifestyles are the different ways people live their lives. These include these things they do, with whom they do the thing, as well as where, how and what they

use to do their things it. Lifestyles are part of each person's identity. Thus people express their social position, political preferences and psychological aspirations to others through lifestyles. Lifestyle will usually reflect an individual's culture and socio-economic conditions. These range from physical and material needs (the state of local environment, sufficient food, clothing and shelter), through to social and psychological needs (including strength of relationships, depth of social interactions, level of education, sense of control over lives, etc. (Anand *et al* 2007). The lifestyle of an individual's is a product of the families and communities they come from. The lifestyles may actually not be by choice but as a result of background. Hedlund-de Witt (2012) noted that framing lifestyle as a function of choice, inadvertently discriminates against individuals whose choices are limited. For example low socio-economic groups have an increased risk of becoming obese for several reasons

ranging from the quality of food they can afford to the type of environment they live in (Jackson 2008). In many urban cities all over the globe the type of lifestyle have resulted in increased energy and resource intensity of meeting needs through material consumption. This can be seen in the rising number of cars on the roads, the growing frequency and distance of leisure and business trips, the escalating ownerships of household appliances and the increasing size of housing.

This paper focuses on:

- Changing lifestyles
- Sustainable lifestyles
- Strategies for achieving sustainable lifestyles

### **Changing Lifestyles**

Rapid changes in lifestyles that have occurred with industrialization, urbanization, economic development and market globalization, have accelerated over the past decade. This, according to Goran and Whitehead (2007) is having a significant impact on the health and nutritional status of populations, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. Although quality of life has improved, food availability has expanded and become more diversified, and access to services has increased, there have also been significant negative consequences in terms of inappropriate dietary patterns, decreased physical activities, increased tobacco use, and a corresponding increase in diet-related chronic diseases, especially among poor people. Today, changes in the world food economy are reflected in shifting dietary patterns. For example, Lakin and Littledyke (2008) stated that there is now increased consumption of energy-dense diets high in fat, particularly saturated fat, and low in unrefined

carbohydrates. These patterns are combined with a decline in energy expenditure that is associated with a sedentary lifestyle motorized transport, labour-saving devices in the home, the phasing out of physically demanding manual tasks in the workplace, and leisure time that is preponderantly devoted to physically undemanding pastimes.

Based on all these, the world today is facing complex and interlinked development and lifestyle challenges. The world is interconnected. Lifestyles are influenced by the desires of people in other countries, foreign and domestic government policies, etc. Today climatic conditions in different parts of the world impact on the food people eat, the prices they pay, and the cultural movements they are swept along by. The recent global financial crisis demonstrates just how quickly the effects of events in one part of the world can spread to other parts.

Lifestyles can be good or bad depending on the effect such lifestyles have on individuals and the environment. For instance, obesity according to Jackson (2008) is rooted primarily in lifestyle. Refined foods, snacking, sugary drinks, meals away from home, increased consumption of saturated fats and exaggerated portion sizes, combine with alongside motorized transportation and increasingly sedentary work to promote obesity. Hence, obesity reflects an unhealthy lifestyle. Other related health challenges are diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease (CVD), hypertension and stroke, and some types of cancer. These according to Kranzler, *et al.* (2013) are becoming increasingly significant causes of disability and premature death in both developing and developed countries. Timmerman (1999)

opined that because these lifestyle diseases are the primary causes of death, their prevention requires long-term lifestyle changes which oftentimes are quite difficult for the vast majority of individuals. For example, Timmerman (1999) reported that efforts to lose weight are generally unsuccessful, as 95 percent or more of those entering weight loss programs return to their starting weight within five years. High relapse rates are also found for individuals initiating exercise programs. Fifty percent (50%) of those who start exercising drop out within six months. Lifestyle change is therefore not very easy. Researchers such as Anand *et al.* (2007), Rowley, (2000) and Jackson (2008), have found self monitoring, goal setting, manipulation of environmental cues, and reinforcements or incentives to be helpful in facilitating lifestyle change.

### **Sustainable Lifestyles**

#### ***Concept of Sustainable Lifestyles:***

Sustainable lifestyles therefore are patterns of action and consumption, used by people to affiliate and differentiate themselves from others. Such lifestyles meet basic needs, provide a better quality of life, minimize the use of natural resources and emissions of waste and pollutants over the lifecycle, and do not jeopardize the needs of future generations (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992). Sustainability is about living, within certain limits. It is about altering how people live, consume, socialize, exchange, share, educate and build identities. It means transforming societies and living in harmony with natural environment. Sustainability relies crucially on being able to make prudent choices, at the individual and the social level, between the present and the future

(Jackson, 2008) Rampant individualistic behavior that seeks short-term gratification ends up undermining well-being not just for the individual but for society as a whole. So the task for sustainability is to devise mechanisms that prevent this “undermining of well-being” and preserve the balance between present desires and future needs.

Sustainable lifestyles however should reflect specific cultural, natural, economic and social heritage of each society. Sustainable lifestyles are shaped by a whole host of factors such as culture, politics, economics and social norms. For sustainable lifestyles to enter families and communities, to become part of everyday life, they must develop at all levels. They need to be helped and supported by the social and technical systems and institutions that surround individuals and groups (Center for Sustainable Development, 2004).

#### ***Importance of Sustainable Lifestyle:***

Rowley *et al* (2000) opined that sustainable lifestyles have a role to play in the opportunity for developing countries to “leapfrog”, a term used to describe the possibility to bypass inefficient, polluting, and ultimately costly phases of development. Leapfrogging offers developing countries like Nigeria the opportunity to jump straight onto a resource efficient sustainable development path rather than going through what other developed countries did. Leapfrogging might for example, involve the use of sustainable or solar energy in rural areas where unreliable or limited sources of energy exist. The objective is not only resource efficiency but also the creation of new business models, new social aspirations, initiatives which demonstrate

that sustainable lifestyles is part of the solution and is feasible. This then becomes a way of life. Jackson (2008) believes that sustainable lifestyles can become instruments for development that will have positive impacts on the environment, societies and communities while advancing us towards the UN Millennium Development Goals and universal human rights.

Majority of the environmental problems occurring today result from lifestyles. Many of the problems are not solely technical problems, requiring simply engineering, physics, and chemistry for their solution (Oskamp 2000). The problems can be reversed by human behavior. That is change in lifestyle. Most of these environmental and health problems are getting more serious each year, so it is urgent that something is done to reduce or even reverse them. A change of lifestyle in a more sustainable direction is urgently needed in the society Cooper, include being environmental Ryley, & Smyth, 2001). Sustainable behaviors include being environmental friendly (e.g. not burning tyres), being frugal (putting off light when not in the room), and exhibiting equitable behaviors. All e.g. the behaviours involve aspects of individual lifestyles that include: dietary choices, use of energy and transportation, political priorities, support for policy measures, and contributions to societal change. Everyday choices, which can be seen as important drivers in maintaining a sustainable society, are however, generally understood to be difficult to alter (Svensson, 2012).

Generally major lifestyle changes according to Hedlund-de Witt, (2012) is not easy and most often typically occur only in response to major crises. (For instance, even the great behavioral changes

produced by the AIDS epidemic have still not been enough to make most people's sexual behavior safe. Minkler *et al* (2008) are of the view that despite the drag of inertia, the motive of self-interest is a powerful one that can be appealed to in trying to create a healthier, less-polluted, sustainable society. Not only are there many structural (e.g. economical, infrastructural, institutional, social-practical) barriers for changing behaviors and lifestyles, they also tend to be deeply embedded in worldviews, values, and cultural associations and habits.

### **Strategies for Achieving Sustainable Lifestyles**

Achieving sustainable lifestyle requires well thought out strategies and processes. These strategies which aim at improving lifestyles need to be based on an understanding of the restrictions on choice of people in difficult circumstances, so that realistic, credible advice and help can be given. Jacksons (2008), Simon-Brown, (2000) and Economos and Tovar (2012) suggest that attention should be given to interventions that employ multiple strategies across multiple settings involving whole communities. Some of these strategies include the following:

**Education:** This is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. It is a key to moving society toward sustainable lifestyles. Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues (Hopkins & McKeown, 2002).

Education can also target the young especially through curriculum change. Lakin and Littleddyke (2008) believe that creating sustainable lifestyles will not be

possible without the participation of future business leaders and entrepreneurs that is, the youths. According to Wycherley *et al* (2011) engaging people in sustainable lifestyles early in their lives through targeted and participatory education makes a lasting impression. It is therefore a crucial step to building a more sustainable future led by a new global generation of responsible individuals. Hopkins and McKeown (2002) noted that young people have become distanced from nature and that the distance has increased in recent years, with many not making the connection between the food they see in supermarkets and the land that produces it. Therefore there is need for them to be educated on all these and more.

A new approach to communications, using positive messages and more creativity, should be used to engage young in discussions about sustainability. It has also been suggested by Rowley *et al* (2008) that the use of social media like *Face book* and *Twitter* can help create awareness on what to do in order to live sustainable lifestyles. With global efforts to reduce the digital divide, more and more young people all over the world will be connected and able to share their ideas and initiatives. Public communications according to Svensson (2012) has a key role to play in making sustainable lifestyles understandable, approachable and most importantly, desirable by young people especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

Rowley *et al* (2000), Anand *et al* (2007) and Svensson (2012) suggest campaigns aimed at making people aware of the need to adopt sustainable life styles may be less than effective in local communities if appropriate language and messages are not used. Therefore there is need to involve

local communities in the development of the campaigns to make them more effective. Minkler *et al* (2008) reports that public health initiatives arising from and directed by local communities offer a potentially more effective means of reducing disease risk than any other method.

***Change in Value System:*** Values play an important role in the inescapable frameworks of meaning and meaning making that profoundly inform people's understanding and enactment of reality. According to Hedland-de Witt (2012), values not only tend to shape how individuals perceive particular (ecological) issues and their potential solutions, they also tend to influence their willingness to partake in such solutions themselves, as well as their support for addressing the issue. Hopkins and McKeown (2002) report that there is compelling evidence to suggest that high levels of environmental activism were strongly linked to values that considered the natural environment to be of great importance in someone's life. According to Simon-Brown (2000), sustaining the environment that sustains humanity will require that individuals change their values. Change of values will have to start from families and communities.

***Increased Physical Activity:*** Scholars have shown ample evidence that regular participation in moderate-intensity physical activity reduces the risks of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, breast and colon cancers, several other chronic illnesses, and mental illness (Economic & Tovar, 2012; Rowley *et al* 2000; Minkler, 2008). Despite the known benefits of physical activity and public

health efforts to promote activity, the proportion of people who meet the current guideline of physical activity is low around the world (Kanzler *et al* 2013).

Lifestyles are becoming increasingly dominated by sedentary behaviors, due in no small part to the advent of technologies that allow or force people to sit, including automobiles, television sets, computers, and the internet. Sugiyana (2008) reports that leisure-time sedentary behavior, typically TV viewing time, is associated with metabolic biomarkers (elevated blood glucose levels, triglycerides, and waist circumference) that are significantly related to the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Driving for commuting is another common sedentary behavior that is shown to have a negative impact on health (Cooper, Ryley, & Smyth, 2001). It has to be noted here that physical activity and sedentary behavior are independently associated with health outcome. Thus, prolonged sitting time contributes to poor health, regardless of leisure-time and physical activity levels.

Increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour are therefore, each distinct and important strategies for achieving active lifestyles and associated health benefits.. Sugiyama (2008) noted that physical activity does not have to be structured, planned exercise. It can be incidental activity such as brisk walking for transport or for recreation. Although structured vigorous exercising does have additional health benefits, moderate-intensity activity happening daily in a community environment is considered to be important because such activity can be easily embedded into one's everyday life patterns, and thus more likely to be maintained in the longer term.

**Nutrition:** Scientific evidence is increasingly supporting the view that alterations in diet have strong effects, both positive and negative, on health throughout life (WHO, 2003). Lakin and Littleddyke (2008) noted that dietary adjustments may not only influence present health, but may determine whether or not an individual will develop such diseases as cancer, cardiovascular disease and much later in life. It has been recognized by WHO (2003) that the food choices are influenced by a variety of conflicting factors such as peer and parental pressure, finance, socio-demographic standing, taste, mood and other variables. should be taken in to consideration in any health education programmes.

**Motivation/Incentives:** There may be need to introduce some incentive to encourage people who engage in behaviours that lead to sustainable life styles. Jackson (2008) recommended actions which encourage motives that are both reliable and durable in their effects on behavior.

**Provision of Basic Infrastructure:** Providing information to individuals is not sufficient in absence of enabling infrastructure that are needed in any community (Svensson 2012). For example, encouraging people to reduce their car personal dependency without providing high quality convenient alternatives (public transport, delivery services, car sharing and rental services, good bicycle paths, etc.), will not yield the desired result. Sugiyama (2008) suggested that proper planning of urban areas (achieved by high residential density and mixed land use) and public transport would reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas

emission mainly by minimizing the trips made by private vehicles.

In addition Center for Sustainable Development (2014) observed that greater compactness of residential developments would help preserve surrounding areas, which provide people with fundamental ecosystem services such as water and food. Suguyama (2008) is of the view that neighbourhood green spaces also have a number of environmental benefits such as lowering ground temperature during hot weather, filtering airborne contaminants, and decreasing rain-water run-off. Good pedestrian infrastructure and green environments would also contribute to lower vehicle use by making active travel choices (like walking) easier and attractive. Recreational green spaces in urban neighbourhoods (such as parks) is also important. In addition to providing opportunities for physical activity, such spaces enable people to have contact with nature (Sugiyama, 2008). In Nigeria for example, provision of basic infrastructure like electricity and security, is of utmost importance.

***The Role of Government:*** All these strategies may not see the light of the day if the government is not involved. This is because the influence of government on social norms and expectations is paramount (Jackson, 2008). Policymakers influence people's values in a very subtle manner. For instance, governments intervene constantly in the social context during which countless different signals are sent out, for example, by the way the education system is structured, by the importance accorded to economic indicators, and so on.

Government policies shape and help create the social world. All these influence

life styles. For example, it is only government intervention only that will make possible the implementation of such projects/programmes as:

- High residential density and mixed land use, which make various destinations such as shops and services close enough for walking or bicycling.
- Accessible public transportation systems that help reduce private vehicle use, and encourage activity for transport.
- Availability of recreational spaces, such as parks, community gardens, play grounds, and river banks, which entice recreational physical activities.
- Good walking and cycling infrastructure with attractive surroundings.

Government policies can influence lifestyles with proper regulatory tools such as bans and rules; fiscal measure, e.g. taxes, or information provision. In Nigerian, however, basic policies on health and safety are often lacking. Government at all levels in the country can facilitate the change towards sustainable lifestyles by supporting and enabling the development of a new vision for sustainable societies and by setting the regulatory, economic and institutional frameworks that encourage and enable sustainable lifestyles.

### **Conclusion**

The sustainability challenge can be tackled by behavioural changes, which shape lifestyles. The choices which individuals and families make on energy use, transport, food, waste, communication and solidarity - contribute towards building sustainable lifestyles. Every sector of society has something to contribute. Governments have a key role to play by creating the appropriate frameworks and

infrastructures (regulatory instruments, technological innovations, new public services) to enable citizens to change. In order to make sustainable lifestyles an easy choice, all stakeholders need to facilitate the integration of “sustainability” into existing socio-economic and value structures. The business sector can develop innovative solutions for sustainable lifestyles. Information and education are essential, as well as the full participation of civil society in the movement.

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