

Communique

OF THE

4th National Conference on Environment & Health

Theme:

"Managing the Environment - Nutrition Nexus for optimal Public Health"

An Initiative of the

LivingScience Foundation, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

COMMUNIQUE OF THE 4TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

The fourth National Conference on Environment and Health organized by the LivingScience Foundation, Ile-Ife held at the Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State between 9th - 10th April, 2019. The theme of the Conference was: *MANAGING THE ENVIRONMENT-NUTRITION NEXUS FOR OPTIMAL PUBLIC HEALTH.* The Conference had representations from various Sectors of the Nigerian society, including the Academia, Government, Civil Service, Regulators, Practitioners, NGOs, and the Media. Principal collaborators were the Redeemer's University, Ede; Osun Health Insurance Agency, Osogbo; the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency, South West Zone; and the Environmental Health Officers Association of Nigeria, Osun State Chapter. The official Media Partners were the Nigerian Television Authority, Osogbo, and Crown 101.5 FM Radio, Ile-Ife.

The Opening Session was chaired by Prof Ademola Omishakin and Honourable Ajibola Akinloye. Prof Omishakin had served as Professor and Director at the Department of Natural Sciences and Environmental Health, Mississipi Valley State University, Itta Bena, Mississippi, USA and as Fullbright fellow at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, before his current engagement as Dean of the Faculty of Public Health at the Adeleke University Ede. Honourable Akinloye is a foremost politician and currently chairs the Committee on Environment at the Osun State House of Assembly. The Keynote address was presented by Dr Gafar Alawode, Programme Director at the Development Governance International Consult, Abuja. Dr Alawode is also a social entrepreneur and he chairs the Board of Trustees of Network of Social Entrepreneurs (NOSE), an organization that is committed to peaceful and prosperous Africa. He is a member, through distinction, of the United Kingdom Faculty of Public Health. Over 200 participants attended the two-day event.

The technical business was conducted in four plenary and two parallel sessions. Other highlights included a pre-Conference Educative Quiz for secondary school students; and the award of the A.F. Oluwole Prize. For the Quiz, representatives from twelve invited secondary schools in Osun and Oyo states were first exposed to key contemporary issues in Environment-Health, and thereafter participated in a two-stage Quiz competition. The AF Oluwole Prize for Environment-Health recognizes and honours individuals or corporate organizations who have made top sacrificial contributions in the environment-health sector towards the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria. By a joint decision of the Management of the LivingScience Foundation, and the Steering Committee independently managing the National Conference on Environment and Health series, the Year 2019 Edition of

the AF Oluwole Prize was awarded to WasteSmart Foundation (www.WasteSmart.org).

At the end of the Conference, the following key observations were made, and appropriate actions needed in the environment-health sector identified, to enhance public health and ensure sustainable development in Nigeria. The Conference;

1. Noted that a considerable fraction of Environment-Health hazards could be mitigated by appropriate foods and good nutrition in general, as body defences are primed for optimal performance. However if the environment-nutrition nexus is not well managed, food itself could very well become the major pathway for environmental toxins into the people. This could happen on the field (e.g. with application of herbicides), during storage and preservation, or during preparation. Furthermore, on another level, it was noted that about one-third of greenhouse gases generated in Nigeria are connected with food production and supplies, again underscoring the need to pay attention to the nexus between food and environment.

   The Conference therefore called for massive enlightenment campaigns for the general public in the immediate term; and significant investment into research that could shift practice away from the current heavy-dependence on monocropping and heavy use of agrochemicals, on the long run. Green initiatives, such as use of Urine as organic fertilizers should be given due considerations and widely promoted after appropriate standardization.

2. Emphatically rejected the cultivation of Genetically-Modified Organism (GMO)-based foods in Nigeria. The Conference affirmed that while research into Biotechnology must be embraced for the development of scientific capability and for the attendant spin-offs which would promote national development; incorporation of GMOs into foods is unacceptable for economic, environmental, and health reasons. It was particularly noted that the introduction of GMO foods into Nigeria is coming at a time the product is being rejected wholesale in the developed nations of the world, and the process has so far involved considerable flagrant breach of extant rules governing safety of biotechnology products in the country.

   The Conference enjoined that the public should be educated on the difference between hybrid crops (from "natural" processes) and GM crops (by WHO definition, involving "unnatural" processes). It recommends that, at the least, GM foods must be appropriately labelled so no one is compelled to consume them against their wish.

3. Re-affirmed exclusive breastfeeding as an important way of providing adequate and perfect nutrition to the most vulnerable segment of our

population at a time of critical need. Conference called for government to muster requisite political will and commitment in order to promote, protect, and support breastfeeding as an environment-friendly nutrition for infants at the levels of family, community and workplace. Conference particularly frowned at the aggressive marketing of infant formula and called for diligent enforcement of extant regulations controlling advertisement and sales of such products.

4. Underscored the need for government, experts, and policy-makers to humbly and constructively engage local communities to determine their actual environment-health needs, rather than presume them totally clueless on the subject matter. Conference believed this approach is more likely to yield the needed cooperation and collaborations that would result in customized solutions that would eventually lead to sustainable development in the country. Conference held that, as much as experts have benefits to impart on the local communities, they should accept that there are also certain areas where they too could learn from the locals. The Conference sees this as the currently missing key to devising of more effective policies and actions in the country.

5. Emphasized the need to encourage and promote the valuation of economic impacts (both positive and negative) of environment-health actions as a key step towards achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. Conference recommended the subject of Environmental Accounting to be developed and incorporated into accounting curricula at our Universities and related Institutions of learning.

6. Heartily endorsed the Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF) and lauded it as an idea, which if diligently implemented, would ensure that health is not limited only to the wealthy. Commended, in particular, the operations of the Osun Health Insurance Scheme to date, and enjoined the Agency implementing it to collaborate and share expertise with similar Agencies all across the nation. Emphasised the need to plan ahead for the mitigation of the negative environment-health impacts that would necessarily follow a successful implementation of the BHCPF.

7. Recommended more active participation from qualified local stakeholders across various relevant sectors in the crucial task of setting effective and realistic regulatory standards for the environment in Nigeria. Of particular concerns are the current standards for vehicular emissions pollutants, and those for microwave radiation emissions from GSM telecommunication base stations which are adjudged inadequate.

8. Lauded the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) strategy in Nigeria, as a means of entrenching sustainable use of natural resources, effective waste management, and circular economy. It called for more concerted implementation nationwide. The Conference however noted the considerable technical challenges involved in recycling plastics, and called for more dedicated funding for local research on the subject matter.

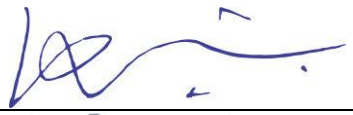
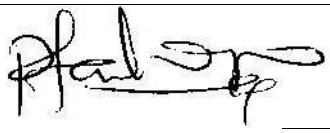
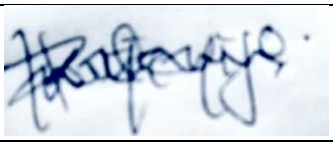
9. Noted the influence of environmental variables and geographical coordinates on public health, and recommended the establishment of an elaborate national database linking medical health records (computerized) at local health facilities with key environmental variables – including levels of environmental radioactivity, pesticides use, population of GSM masts, etc. This approach which has been established for Communicable Diseases (as epidemiology) could also be very helpful in prediction and early identification of Non-Communicable Diseases among vulnerable populations in the country.

10. Called for "Catch them Young" campaigns to inculcate positive environment-health values in the population, right from the primary and secondary school levels. Commended the efforts of the LivingScience Foundation, Ile-Ife in this respect and urged Government and other non-governmental stakeholders to support the initiative.

CONFERENCE PICTURES GALLERY



Signed by members of the Steering Committee

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Dr Adeniyi Oginni, Executive Secretary, Osun Health Insurance Agency, Osogbo [Secretary]	
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