1st lsf National Conference on Environment and Health

Organized by the LivingScience Foundation, Ile-Ife www.lsfnigeria.org







COMMUNIQUE

HELD AT THE REDEEMER'S UNIVERSITY, EDE, OSUN STATE.
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I. INTRODUCTION

The first National Conference on Environment and Health organized by the LivingScience Foundation, Ile-Ife held at the Redeemer's University, Ede between 17th-18th May, 2016. The theme was: Prevention is better than Cure.

The main objective of the Conference was to bring together relevant stakeholders from various sectors of the Nigerian society to discuss peculiar environmental health hazards in Nigeria, and brainstorm on customized solutions that would enable sustainable development via appropriate balancing of the Environment, Economy and Social dimensions in the country.

The Conference activities comprised of Special Addresses, Special Lectures, a Symposium, and four Technical (two Plenary and two Parallel) Sessions.

In all, the Conference featured 12 Lead speakers and over 100 other participants. The keynote address by Dr Lawrence Anukam (DG NESREA) was delivered by Mr Adeleke Ajani (SW Zonal Director, NESREA). The Lead plenary speakers included: Ambassador Ayo Olukanni (retired Ambassador of Nigeria to Australia and the Pacifics, and Vice President of Fight Against Desert Encroachment, FADE), Prof Francis Bode Asubiojo (Professor of Chemistry at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti), Rev Tony Akinyemi (Founder of Rapha Healthy Living Institute, and the Senior Pastor of The Shepherd's Flock, Ikeja), Prof Duro Oyedele (Professor of Soil Science and Land Resources Management at the OAU, Ile-Ife), Prof Joshua Ojo (Professor of Health Physics and Environment at the OAU, Ile-Ife, and the Redeemer's University, Ede), and Mr Ahmad Shukwunweizu Maike (Osun State Coordinator, NESREA). Speakers at the Symposium included Prof Olayinka Ogunkoya (Professor of Geography), Prof Fatai Balogun (Professor of Medical and Health Physics), Prof A. Onayade (Professor of Community Medicine), Mr Taiwo Oki (Senior Chemist at a Paint Manufacturing Industry), and Dr John Ayoola (Chartered Accountant and Lecturer in Management and Accounting).

The Opening Plenary Session was co-chaired by Prof L.B. Kolawole (former Vice Chancellor, Federal University of Technology, Akure, and current member of the Governing Council, Redeemer's University, Ede) and Pastor (Dr) Odun Orioke (General Overseer, Christway Ministries, Nigeria). The duo stood in for Prof A.F. Oluwole (one of Nigeria's pioneers and doyens in environment and health) who was unavoidably absent. The Symposium was chaired by Prof Timothy A. Bamiduro, Dean, College of Natural Sciences, the Redeemer's University, Ede. At the Opening Ceremony, Special addresses were delivered by dignitaries including Prof Kayode Adekeye (Deputy Vice Chancellor, RUN, Ede), Prof Kayode Ijadunola (Director, Institute of Public Health, OAU, Ile-Ife), and Dr Fritz Olaoye, Provost of Osun State College of Health Technology, Ilesa, who represented the Permanent Secretary, Osun State Ministry of Health, Dr Akinyinka Esho.

The Plenary Session on Day 2 was chaired by Dr Omolaja Osoniyi (Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife), while the two Parallel Sessions were chaired by Prof O.G. Adeyemi (Head, Department of Chemical Sciences, the Redeemer's University, Ede) and Dr Adeniyi S. Oginni (Osun State Ministry of Health, Osogbo). Dignitaries

present at the Plenary on Day 2 included the University Registrar, Mrs Bolatito Oloketuyi, and the Dean of College of Management Sciences, Prof Ebenezer Akinnawo.

II. THE CONFERENCE RECOGNIZED AND NOTED THE CRITICAL IMPACT OF THE ENVIRONMENT ON HEALTH AND DISEASES.

The Conference noted a WHO estimate that environment-related factors account for up to a quarter of illnesses and deaths globally. For developing countries, the figure for environment-related morbidity and mortality is one-third. It is feared that the situation might even be worse still in Nigeria. The Conference further noted that a large percentage of such adverse health effects attributed to other factors are still linked to the environment. Even genetic diseases only represent a loaded gun which most of the time require the trigger of appropriate environmental inputs to be fired.

III. THE CONFERENCE IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING MAJOR HAZARDS TO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN NIGERIA, ARISING FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENT-HEALTH POLICIES IN THE COUNTRY

1. Chemicals (particularly pesticides, mercury, lead, benzene, and volatile organic carbon)

i. There is widespread use of dangerous chemicals particularly in Nigeria's agro-business (as pesticides, herbicides, etc). Though most of these chemicals are proscribed in the country, they continue to be freely available in our markets, and are widely used by citizens who are totally oblivious of the inherent dangers. Several of the non-proscribed chemicals are not used according to required specifications, thereby posing serious threat to the health of the people of Nigeria across all socio-economic strata.

ii. Continued use of thimerosal-containing vaccines for our children in Nigeria. Thimerosal is 49.6% ethyl-mercury, a well-established neurotoxin capable of impairing normal neurodevelopment in children and possibly playing critical role in autism. Use of this product in vaccines has been banned since 2001 in the USA, and even much longer in Europe and other developed countries; yet these countries continue to use them in vaccines specifically sent to developing countries like Nigeria - at supposedly "highly subsidized" prices. Vaccines still being manufactured for Nigeria in this so-called multi-dose format include important vaccines such as Hepatitis B, Tetanus toxoid, and Influenza vaccines.

iii. Lead contents of paints produced in Nigeria, at about 5,000ppm (conservatively), are outrageously high. This can be compared for instance with the maximum approved limit of 90 ppm in the USA. Decrease intelligence among children, infertility, or adverse outcomes of pregnancies are few of well-established impacts of lead. Children suffering from sickle cell anaemia (of which Nigeria contributes the vast majority) are especially vulnerable. In Nigeria, lead from peeling painted surfaces in schools and homes is thus a major health hazard which must be urgently addressed. Concerted efforts should be made to reduce the lead content of paints used in Nigeria as the technology to achieve this is already available and affordable. The Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead in Paint (GAELP) is currently spearheading such a move all across the world.

iv. Though the use of leaded petrol has been totally phased-out from the country for about 13 years, the half-life of lead in its main storage site in the human body (bones) is about 30 years. Hence there is need to recognize that due to previous extensive release of lead into the Nigerian biosphere, foetuses in the womb as well as breast-fed babies could be exposed to dangerous levels of lead mobilized from their mothers' bones during pregnancy and lactation. The strategic use of calcium and selenium supplements can effectively deal with this dangerous situation.

v. Finally on chemicals, it is necessary that abandoned factories and chemical dump sites across the countries be identified for possible remediation work possibly within the framework of the Strategic International Agreement on Chemical Management (SIACM).

2. General poor sanitation and lack of clean water.

Water is recognized as the ultimate environmental sink, receiving the most environmental abuse from all sectors. The major source of health impairment from water pollution is via contaminated drinking water and some of the diseases resulting therefrom are malaria, dengue haemorrhagic fever, cholera, bacterial and amoebic dysentery, typhoid fever, neurological impairment, cancer, brain damage, kidney damage, polio, infectious hepatitis, and schistosomiasis. The Conference was of the belief that provision of clean water should not be seen just as a social service alone, but even more as a health service. Consequently, a good portion of the nation's health budget ought to be allocated for the provision of clean water.

3. Urban Planning and Downstream petroleum industry

Indiscriminate citing of petrol station in residential areas, not only heightens possibility of fire hazards, but more seriously constitutes a steady source of volatile organic carbons and benzene into the air. In the same vein, leakages from underground tanks at these indiscriminately cited petrol stations pollute ground water aquifers with these same products. It was noted that exposure to volatile organic compounds promotes adverse health effects including asthma, headaches, mucosal symptoms, and in the case of benzene, increased risk of cancer - mainly aplastic anaemia, acute leukaemia, and bone marrow abnormalities. It was also noted that some women who inhaled high levels of benzene for many months had irregular menstrual periods and a decrease in the size of their ovaries. Benzene exposure has been linked directly to the neural birth defects - spina bifida and anencephaly. Men exposed to high levels of benzene are more likely to have an abnormal amount of chromosomes in their sperm, which impacts fertility and foetal development

4. Municipal Solid Waste and e-Waste

Solid Waste is the most visible (as displayed on our streets) demonstration of our environmental crisis. There is hardly any structure in place to effectively deal with solid municipal waste, from collection sites where they are generated to final disposal. Of particular concern are the imported

electronic wastes. Despite our spirited efforts since the days of the Koko wastes, Nigeria has remained a digital dump, with over 500 containers of electronic wastes: used computers, TV, refrigerators, mobile handsets, microwave ovens, etc dumped in Nigeria almost on a monthly basis. Apart from aesthetics considerations, several of these products contain highly toxic chemicals (such as lead, cadmium, mercury, etc) which are eventually released into our environment one way or the other.

5. Ionizing radiation:

Ionizing radiation, largely from medical practices (both diagnostic and therapeutic) remains a serious problem in Nigeria, mainly due to lack of adequately-trained manpower, and ineffective enforcements of extant standards. Mining in places like the Jos plateau also bring to the surface technologically-enhanced naturally-occurring radionuclides, which invariably find their way into people (e.g when used as for agriculture, or as building material for homes and schools) with consequent adverse impacts on their health. Geographical areas with elevated naturally-occurring radioactivity levels should be noted, so that special schemes could be put in place to either reduce the exposure of residents to the radioactivity, or fortify them nutritionally to make them less susceptible to its impacts.

6. Air Pollution:

Population growth, urbanization, and the crisis of the energy sector, our electric power generators, *okadas*, and other two stroke engines are huge sources of air pollution. Though the importation of two-stroke engines is now proscribed in the country, the enforcement is difficult. Moreover the engines continue to be widely used in the country. The poor air quality (both outdoors and in-doors) is impacting negatively on our environment and health; and we need to do something about them urgently.

7. Non-ionizing radiation:

The indiscriminate citing of GSM towers and masts in residential areas expose large portion of the citizenry to microwave radiation levels reported to have produced adverse health outcomes in other countries. The Conference believes that at least in the spirit of the precautionary principle, results from well-conducted scientific research showing adverse impacts of microwave radiation, contrary to the position of such non-governmental bodies as ICNIRP currently widely in use, should be carefully studied and respected. (Reference: www.mast-victims.org)

IV. THE CONFERENCE FROWNED AT THE ABSENCE OF A STANDARDISED GUIDELINE AND A LACK OF COMMITMENT TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING SYSTEM BY COMPANIES AND INDUSTRIES IN NIGERIA

Information on impacts of businesses on the environment in Nigeria are fragmented, cosmetic, and disconnected from business strategy. There is an absence of a standardized guideline and a lack of commitment towards environmental accounting and reporting among business organisations which has resulted in haphazard disclosure of environmental data; a deficient corporate environmental reporting that is not of international standard to satisfy the information needs of various classes of shareholders; and a failure of organisations to recognise the economic value of natural resources as assets, as well as the business and financial value of good environmental reporting. Most of the interests to date have been focused on the oil and gas sector to the neglect of other industries. Mandatory environmental disclosure is strongly recommended in this regard.

V. THE FOLLOWING GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS, WERE AGREED UPON AT THE CONFERENCE, AS CAPABLE OF REMEDIATING THE SITUATION BOTH IN THE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM

1. Environmental education should be incorporated in school curriculum at all levels, from nursery to tertiary education. Environmental studies departments in our Universities should have linkage with the relevant ministries and agencies, both at state and federal levels for relevance and better local impacts.

2. There is need to strengthen our Environment and Health- related institutions at Federal and State Levels. Agencies like NESREA, NOSREA, NNRA need real empowerment and independence, much like the EFCC on the economic level, to perform their very crucial functions. More personnel, regular training and retraining, and collaborations with Universities and NGOs with proven technical capabilities in environment and health would prove beneficial. In general, a Community participatory approach should be encouraged for the management of the environment. Environmental Health Officers are critical in this regard. This cadre of workers needs sound training and should be empowered with requisite tools, and good remuneration.

3. Companies and businesses in Nigeria should be required to provide accounts of their social and environmental performance in addition to financial performance. A measurement system that will assess industries' impact on the environment should be put in place. Organisations should be required to disclose their environmental performance to stakeholders as part of the discharge of their stewardship function. Such mandatory environmental reporting, auditing, and accounting must be independently conducted by recognized professional organizations as is done for financial reporting and accounting.

4. Serious attention should be paid to the issue of Solid wastes by emphasizing the 3 R principles of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. The Federal Ministry of Environment needs to ensure that the National E-Waste Policy is given the required backing.

5. Urgent efforts should be made to develop indigenous technology/capacity for vaccine production and other similar products. The use of multi-dose packaging for vaccines, which require the addition of ethyl mercury should be immediately proscribed in the country, as is already the case in several other countries in the world where the quality of life of the next generation is held in high esteem.

6. Food labelling to identify genetically modified, organic, and other classes of foods should be promoted, first to draw attention to the issues involved, and to help the general public in making informed decisions. This will also eventually help in making the production of organic and healthy food more commercially viable.

7. Pesticides outlawed should not be allowed into the country; and those not banned in Nigeria but banned elsewhere should be noted and listed. Education of farmers on the hazardous pesticides and correct mode of application should be stepped up. Outlawed pesticides and other chemical should be clearly brought to the awareness of the citizenry. Information should be given on alternative products or methodologies available.

8. Information on gazetted regulatory standards should be made available online, on the websites of the regulatory agencies involved. This will permit easy access to them and enhance compliance.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The Conference commends the LivingScience Foundation for the initiative in convening such an inclusive conference directed squarely at the nation's vital needs. The Foundation is enjoined to build on the unique opportunities opened up by this Conference to urgently mobilize all relevant agencies of government, Federal and State Ministries of Environment, and of Health, NESREA, and including Environmental Health Officers, to develop a Comprehensive Environment Health Action Plan which will include a more aggressive public education and awareness for implementation. This position is already advocated by the National Council on Environment. Further, in the spirit of "thinking global and acting local", global bodies such as the WHO and other UN Agencies can be engaged as partners, provided the priorities to be followed are those set and identified by Nigeria, based on our local values and needs.

VII. APPRECIATION

The Conference appreciates the invaluable collaborations and supports from the Redeemer's University, Ede. This included provision of facilities, funds, and personnel. Likewise other collaborators, the Institute for Public Health of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; the Nigeria Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Programme, Abuja; and the Nigerian Television Authority, Osogbo provided various critical supports at crucial times before and during the Conference.



Prof. Joshua O. Ojo
Chairman, Organizing Committee