AN OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABLE MECHANISMS IN OSUN STATE: THE NESREA APPROACH.

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ABSTRACT

The National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), is an agency of the Federal Ministry of Environment that had been empowered by the NESREA ACT to enforce all environmental laws, guidelines, policies, standards and regulations in Nigeria. The Agency had been saddled with other responsibilities, such as prohibition of processes and the use of equipment or technology that undermine environmental quality; enforce compliance with the provisions of International Agreements or Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), to which Nigeria is a signatory. Environmental challenges and mitigation, requires the collaboration of other bodies like NGOs, and related Federal and State MDAs in Osun state. Such synergies had in the past brought fruitful results that need to be sustained for the benefit of the citizenry. These institutions and their members serve as watch dogs of the Agency wherever they may be. This paper provides an insight into the various processes and programmes of the Agency in protecting the environment in Osun state and environs

INTRODUCTION

The National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), is an agency of the Federal Ministry of Environment that had been empowered by law to enforce all environmental laws, guidelines, policies, standards and regulations in Nigeria. The Agency had been saddled with other responsibilities, such as prohibition of processes and the use of equipment or technology that undermine environmental quality; enforce compliance with the provisions of International Agreements or Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), protocols, conventions and treaties to which Nigeria is a signatory, (Benebo, N.S., 2014.).

The Agency has developed and gazetted 33 Regulations that cover the various sectors of the environment, ranging from Sanitation to Energy Sectors, see appendix II.

The Osun state field office was opened on 30th. July, 2008 in Osogbo, a year after the establishment of the Agency. The birth of the Agency was to fill the vacuum that was created by the defunct FEPA. As is the tradition of the Agency, the field office structure differs from that of the headquarters. While the latter has departments and directorates the Zonal and State field Offices have Units. Osun state field office had four units from inception to handle the various sectors and responsibilities that were required to pilot the affairs of the new agency in the state until 2013, when a little restructuring saw the independence of the Accounts Unit, hitherto under the Administrative Unit. Save the Administrative Unit, the Technical section has sector leaders in addition to Unit Heads. Officers report to the Sector Leaders, who in turn report to the Unit Heads, then to the State Coordinator. The Coordinator vets all reports and forwards same to the DG/CEO for his perusal and further necessary action(s).

Processes and programmes of the Agency in protecting the environment in Osun state and environs.

Environmental challenges and mitigation, is not a mean task or a tea party, hence, the need for collaboration with other related Federal and State MDAs, and NGOs in Osun state. Such synergies had in the past brought fruitful results that need to be sustained for the benefit of the citizenry. Such partnership is exemplified by the NESREA-OWMA, NESREA-State Water Corporation, NESREA-RUWESA, NESREA-Osun Fire Service, NESREA-Osun state Ministry of Environment collaborations, etc. At the federal level, such cooperation was established with Public Complaint Commission, NSCDC, Federal Fire Service, NPF, Federal Ministry of Environment, NEMA, National Human Rights Commission (most recently), amongst others.

To ensure that all nooks and crannies of the state are covered the agency linked up with other stakeholders in environment, such as NGOs, CSOs, CBOs, FBOs, and our NGC was not left out. These organisations and their members serve as watch dogs of the Agency wherever they may be.

Compliance Monitoring And Enforcement.

With the establishment of the field office, the pace for environmental processes was set in motion. This landmark event did not happen without the assistance of the state government. The state government provided the present office space, located at Pepsi Cola area, Ayetoro, along Osogbo-Ilorin Expressway, Osogbo. The takeoff point was the Old Government Office, Osogbo. The Osun State Government also provided the Agency with two (2) operational vehicles- a double cabin Toyota Hilux and a 14-Seater Toyota Hiace Bus to enhance total coverage of the

state and to have a conducive working environment. Kudos to State of Osun, more grease to your elbow.

At this juncture, it was obvious the Agency cannot carry out this onerous task effectively without educating the populace on issues that bordered on the subject matter. So, the Agency initiated public awareness programme, using the media and travelling to the countryside to stage town hall meetings, (see appendix I). Different parts of the state were covered in the process. Official (compliance monitoring) visits were also paid to some industries that are operating in the state, which include Prism Steel, Nigeria Machine Tools, Osogbo Steel Rolling Mills (Dangote Steel Rolling Mill), Rabsih Imec Iwo, Tuns Farms, Ife Iron and Steel, The Telecommunications' Base Transmission Stations (Glo, Airtel, Etisalat, Visafone, etc.), IBL, Imo Hills Farms, etc. Erring firms were made to remediate polluted environment and carry out some form of CSR for the host community..

NYSC and School Programme

Institutions of learning were not left out in the exercise, like the Institute of Ecology, Obafemi Awolowo University, OAU, Ile-Ife. Both private and public secondary schools were visited on awareness campaign. NESREA school club was established in some of them. The field office also organized excursion trips for club members to facilities of environmental interest in the state. The NESREA CDS was also established to enable the Agency carry its message to all and sundry. Today these noble projects are still in place though, with some hitches.

In the recent past, the NESREA-NYSC CDS group was scrapped in the state by the NYSC authority, without taking into consideration its environmental and socio-economic essence. That decision made the Agency a partial stakeholder (or irrelevant) in NYSC scheme. In a like manner, the school outreach was affected by the restructuring that took place in Osun school system, though, the state Ministry of Education has been of assistance in ensuring that the programme comes alive again.

Hazards And Its Prevention

Hazard is a workplace condition which exists or can be caused in combination with other variables, which has the potential for accidents, serious injuries, diseases and/or property damage. Hazard identification analysis is a very careful study of all the components of a work system in order to detect problems, understand the relationship between the system and the problem in order to eliminate the problem and its potential consequences, (R.K. Jain and Sunil S. Rao, 2009).

Prior to the 2010 flood crises in Osun state, the Agency in a series of meeting held with other stakeholders and the state government, advised the then government on the need to dredge all streams/rivers to avert possible flooding of the state; this however, was not heeded to. The result was the flooding of Osogbo and other communities in the state, which led to loss of lives and properties worth millions of naira. Neither precautionary nor remediation measures were taken, until the present government emerged and took over the mantle of leadership in the state.

In that regard, one will commend the effort of the present government in the state. On assumption of governance, it demolished all illegal structures on waterways, dredged all major waterways and reconstructed drainages to allow for free movement of water. Unfortunately, some of those water ways have returned to their former status. Urgent, sustained intervention is required in this respect.

On several occasions in the past, the Agency confronted the problem head-on by forcing residents to dismantle the various rod/wire mesh installed in the drainages; which had caused the drains to be blocked and filled with sandstones and refuse, thereby, making the affected areas flood prone. This exercise will continue in order to have a clean and sustainable environment, with the necessary support from all and sundry, particularly the renewed Osun state Capital Territory Development Authority.

Furthermore, in order to maintain an healthy and safe environment, the Agency has been and will continue to be in constant policing of the facilities, locations and/or sites of environmental concerns. Non-compliant facilities will be sanctioned, while complying ones will be encouraged to do better.

In the state of Osun, Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement actions have resulted in the voluntary establishment of state-of-the art ETP by the International Breweries plc, Ilesa. The first of its kind in the state. The Agency has also ensured the installation of the Secondary Abatement Equipment at Ife Iron and Steel, Ile-Ife, to control Carbon Emission; and a Locally Fabricated Emission Trapping Device (LFETD) at Rabsih Imec Iwo, etc. Of course, this did not happen without some difficulties; however, the Agency's Headquarters has always provided solid supports and guidance.

Environmental Education And Flood Awareness

In her earnest effort to spread the message of safe and sustainable environment, the Agency had taken the message to every part of the state, through the institution of Town hall Meetings/Awareness Campaigns. Instances of these include the palace Environmental Flood Awareness Campaign at Iragbiji, Gbogan, Church and Mosque Awareness, etc; and some local government headquarters in the state.

Basic Essential Technical Training For Environmental Enforcement Officers

This programme was one of the courses designed for NESREA officers across the states of the federation and other stakeholders in the various field offices in 2014. The essence was to empower environmental enforcement officers in all the states, by enhancing their capacities. In Osun state, apart from NESREA staff, staffs of Federal Ministry of Environment, NSCDC, OWMA, RUWESA, etc participated.

Complaints/Conflict Resolutions

With the Public Affairs Unit, the Field Office is well positioned to treat all complaints. Complaints are usually given priority attention. In exercising the mandate of the Agency, the field office had intervened in a number of disputes that would have resulted into full scale community crises. Where complaints do not fall within the agency's purview, it is referred to the appropriate authority.

Examples of complaints brought to the field office include noise complaint by one of the neighbours of a church in Surulere, Oke Baale Area of Osogbo; dispute between Alaafia community, Oke Yidi area Ede and A. L. Gas LPG dispensing station (under construction, complaint has been referred to NOSDRA); complaint of noise/vibration emissions from MTN BTS at Owode Ede Community dispute between Olalokan Street, Isale-Osun Community and Etisalat Telecommunications; dispute Between Oke-Ibukun Community and IHS Telecom Company over IHS BTS Site Under Construction At Oke-Ibukun, Stadium Area, Ilesa; etc.

Several other complaints bordering on BTS issues and sanitary complaints have been amicably resolved by convening a mediation meeting with relevant stake holders in attendance. In some cases, the conflicting parties were asked to sign a peace accord/bond with stake holders as witnesses. Example is a case between MTN and Owode Ede community in which the former was asked to stop the use of generator on site as a result of noise and vibration.

Quarrying And Environmental Degradation

To ensure sustainability of good environment, good health and safety of individuals, the Agency's Headquarters, organized a 3-day training programme for Unskilled (or Artisanal) Miners in 2012. Better mining techniques and mineral beneficiation were elucidated upon. Free PPE were distributed to the miners by the Agency; and on-the-site mining training, such as mine recovery and remediation techniques and essence, were given to the mine owners and their

workers. This training was to enhance safety, efficiency, sustainability of the environment and health of the workers; and to promote maximal extraction through best manual mining methods.

Forest Logging

Following the outcome of the meetings with leaders of wood dealers in Osun state, the Agency (field office) is currently working on how to convert the saw dusts at the various saw mills across the state. One of our accredited consultants and the technical staff are brainstorming on the affordable, sustainable and efficient methods to adopt.

The success of this process will check the carbon emission, and hence control the Ozone layer depletion. This will also serve as an invitation to technical persons here present to come forward with their proposals for this noble project. It is time too, the three tiers of government place high premium on conservation of our forest reserves, to discourage rampant illegal logging, and encourage afforestation, thereby saving the environment. The state government and interested entrepreneurs can harness the abundant saw dusts in different parts of the state as raw materials for furniture industries, thereby creating employment opportunities and revenue source.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

The main objective of occupational safety and health is to protect workers' health, prevent and reduce accidents, injuries, occupational and work-related disease by improving on working conditions and environment as prescribed by International Labour Organization (ILO). This aspect of industrial life is being ignored, most cases by the employers.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

It is obvious that whoever ignores the environment endangers posterity. Therefore, for continuity of life on the earth plane, necessary mechanisms should be put in place to protect the unborn child and other forms of life, by adopting sustainable approach to every process. This may include as it applies in Osun state:

1. Educating the populace on the essence of a clean environment. That is mass education and awareness using every available media;
2. Regular dredging of our waterways by the state government and/or corporate bodies in the state as a form of CSR;
3. Integrating environmental education in our school curricula (i.e. from kindergarten to tertiary);

4. Regular monitoring of our waterways, to ensure that members of the community stop using them as refuse dumps;
5. Prevent poultry farmers from siting poultry farms or practicing animal husbandry along river banks or on wetlands;
6. Impose heavy tax regime on local miners, to discourage land degradation;
7. Employ the polluter-pay-principle in all sectors;
8. Enforce the issuance of permits to compliant facilities;
9. Train environmental enforcement officers and institutions regularly to enhance efficiency;
10. Ensure coordinated synergy amongst related environmental MDAs;
11. Regularly police known sources of pollutants;
12. Ensure the use of appropriate PPE in the various facilities in the state;
13. The state government should as a matter of urgency institute an efficient framework to harness the abundant saw dusts littering most parts of the state, which in most cases were burnt off, leading to the depletion of the Ozone layer;
14. The NESREA-NYSC CDS should as a matter of importance be reinstated;
15. Regulators should ensure that polluters are made to compensate communities when the environment is polluted; and
16. Industries have to take measures to safeguard the health of workers as prescribed by ILO.

Furthermore, this paper will emphasis the need for drafting realistic working documents, with inputs from all relevant stakeholders in environmental-health, to assist policy makers and regulators in the sector, particularly the Osun state government

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Plates 1a-d: Conflict Resolution and Advocacy Meetings at Public Squares, Palaces, and Religious Centres in Osun State.

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