

Corporation, others explore effective water management

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STAKEHOLDERS in the water resources sector in Lagos State are pushing for a policy frame work that will drive efficient water supply and controlled sanitary condition in the state.

They made known their position at a one-day seminar on "Lagos State water Supply and Sanitation Policy" organised by the Lagos Water Corporation (LWC).

Their recommendations at the end of the forum include the call for the form the; creation of ministry of water resources that would effectively coordinate and act as a body for the water supply in Lagos; creation of Lagos Water Supply Regulatory Commission to regulate provision of water supply and sanitation services; and creation of Lagos State Rural Water Supply and Sanitation in the Ministry of Rural Development.

Other recommendations include the creation of a state steering committee on water sanitation to coordinate efforts of state agencies on basic sanitation policy formulation and programming; that the Ministry of Health should be responsible for drinking water quality surveillance and should lead institutions in enforcing standard for drinking quality water; creation of a desk office on climate change in the proposed ministry of water resources to study the likely effects of climate change on water supply and come up with mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Besides, new institutional arrangements were also suggested for service providers, policy formulations, consumers and support service bodies.

Speaking on the ideals of these institutions, a Consultant in the water sector, Mr Babatope Babalobi, listed the service providers to include the Lagos Water Corporation, Lagos Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency, Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board, Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Local Government Development Areas and Private Water Service Providers and Wastewater Managers as the service providers that must have statutory roles to play if the new policy is adopted.

Besides, he also listed Ministry of the Environment, the proposed Ministry of Water Resources and LGDAs as policy formulation bodies, while support services institutions are to include the Ministries of Health, Education, Women Affairs, Physical Planning and Urban Development and NGOs, among others.

According to Babalobi, while LWC is to manage the provision of water supply services as well as wastewater in the metropolis as "autonomous and quasi-commercial body," the new Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency (RWSSA) is to handle service provisions in the rural areas, based on community management and demand responsive approach.

The organised private sector service providers and informal providers for public places and other areas not covered by these bodies should also be encouraged. He criticised the absence of a specific ministry in charge of water resources for a state like Lagos and wondered how effective the government would be in water management.

Chairman, Technical Committee, West Africa Water Partnership, Prof. Lekan Oyebande, who spoke on Essence of Water Supply and Sanitation Policy, regretted the lack of water for various uses.

He said: "Nationwide, we are using less than 10 per cent of resources because we have not been able to develop and manage them properly.

A new approach to water supply is necessary if the dream of quality and quantity of water needs of the people would be materialised."

He criticised the water supply oriented, approach policy of the country which he argued cannot possibly meet the target, except there is a change to "demand oriented approach".

The professor observed that, regrettably, there are almost about 50 per cent unaccounted for water even after treatment. According to him, if you can bring it back, it will be like new water source that we direly need. He encouraged the government to change their supply functions to find out first what the people need and also involve them in decision making.

If people are consulted and have a say in the demand and supply, "there is the likelihood of protecting the supply."

"Since 1989, things have gone bad but in the recent times, Lagos has taken a proactive measure to improve on the supply of the commodity".

While addressing the gathering on the "*Overview of the Process of Developing the Lagos Water Supply and Sanitation Policy*," Mrs. Abiola.K. Aina, Reform Officer, Lagos Water Corporation, reeled out reforms that have taken place in the water sector. These include the policy, legal and regulatory on environments, formation of water supply and sanitation policy committee and the different drafts put forward by these committees.

Aina said the first draft was put in place after three separate meetings were conveyed in September 29, 2010 and October 11 and 26, with the various groups that included representatives of Ogun-Osun River Basin Authority, Civil Society Organisations, LWC officials, and others.

"Whatever may be the outcome of today's gathering would form the second draft that would eventually become a policy recommendation that would be sent to the Lagos State Executive Council (EXCO)."

Earlier in his opening remarks, the Group Managing Director, LWC, Mr Shayo Holloway, noted that there is need for new policy that would act as a compass that would direct the sector for efficient performance.

According to Holloway, government-owned companies are short of working capitals. "Opportunity to become viable corporate entities capable of meeting very high demand growth, large financial obligations, satisfying legitimate concerns from labour unions, protecting the poor from dramatic price rise, he said.

He added that the overall objective of the policy framework is to develop appropriate water supply and sanitation legal instruments that would enhance sustainable water supply and sanitation services in the state, including the establishment of State Regulatory Authority.