

Nigeria: Water Provision - Crucial Private Sector Interventions

Abimbola Akosile

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Lagos — *One of the greatest challenges facing Africa today is the poor level of citizens' access to safe water, which is one of the United Nations global Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, African businesses are proffering measures to address the water situation on the continent through roundtables held in various countries, titled 'Water: A Business Imperative'. **Abimbola Akosile** examines the outcomes of a recent roundtable of key stakeholders organised by Guinness Nigeria Plc in Lagos.*

Stakeholders' Forum

To highlight the potential positive impact of the private sector in addressing the water issue, Guinness Nigeria Plc has provided leadership for the Nigerian leg of the continental effort. The brewing giant recently hosted other corporate peers operating in Nigeria including Coca Cola, Cadbury, Unilever, Air Services Limited, UBA Foundation, Safe Water Network, Water Monitoring and Evaluation Project, Africa Safe Water Foundation, Bread of Life Foundation, British American Tobacco (BAT), Friesland Campina Wamco Nigeria Plc, National Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation Nigeria (NEWSAN), Nestle Plc, Oando Plc, Pan African Vision for Environment (PAVE), and WaterAid.

Vital Focal Areas

The roundtable provided a platform to identify operational pathways through which companies can contribute to water policy goals, highlighting which methods of engagement have proved effective and equitable, and describing some of the common pitfalls of engagement.

The dialogue also provided the basis for general strategies to address shared risks and principles that can be applied to all types of engagement. The ultimate objective of this initiative was to facilitate responsible corporate engagement with water policy in a manner that reduces business risks while simultaneously advancing policy goals and positively impacting nearby communities and ecosystems.

A white paper, which formed part of the outcome of the roundtable, documented and analysed the concepts, practical steps, and case studies discussed during the meeting.

According to the document, in the long term, policy engagement can help create an enabling business environment, especially in the context of increased consumer awareness, climate change concerns and the intensification of water scarcity and quality issues. A constant and reliable supply of water is equally important to industry as it is to consumers and communities.

Leading by Example

Guinness Nigeria Plc's leadership drive is demonstrated by its interest and commitment to the provision of safe and clean water to communities in Nigeria, which remains a major inspiration to other corporate organisations in the country.

Declaring the event open, the Managing Director of Guinness Nigeria, Mr. Devin Hainsworth, had informed the meeting that the roundtable was organised in recognition of the United Nations World Water day 22 March and it is part of a series of events across Africa called 'Water: A Business Imperative'.

This was the first time that the private sector would converge to discuss issues relating to water in Nigeria. For the host, the main objective of the roundtable was to facilitate a responsible engagement of the private sector with public water policy as a strategy to reduce business risks and advance national policy goals, which positively impact communities and ecosystems.

Many countries in Africa are described as water-stressed or water-scarce by United Nation with an estimated loss of about US\$ 28.4 billion due lack of access to safe water and basic sanitation.

Stakeholders believe improving access to water and sanitation should be part of the concerns of the private sector and businesses in Africa, and that the private sector needs to be on the driver seat in ensuring that water resources in sub-Saharan African countries are efficiently managed in a manner that promotes sustainability and risk mitigation.

Guinness Nigeria Plc, a member company of Diageo Plc, through the Water of Life Project has provided clean drinking water to over 800,000 people in ten different states and hopes to increase this to extend to 4 more states in the country before the end of 2010.

The importance of the roundtable to Guinness Nigeria Plc therefore stemmed from the need to leverage the achievements and credibility of the Water of Life initiative to engage corporate and civil society actors at local level and catalyze collective action for improved drinking water supplies.

The outcome of the roundtable in form of a white paper and a call for action is to be presented at the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit. It will provide African perspective to the UN CEO Mandate on Water and will represent a significant contribution to the implementation of the MDG in Africa.

Overview of National Water Issues

A lead paper at the roundtable set the tone for an overview of the water issues in Nigeria and engagement opportunities for businesses. The paper summarised the policy thrust, objectives and goals of the four major initiatives of Nigerian Government on water supply and management since 2000.

These are the National Policy on Water Supply and Sanitation (2000), the Presidential Water Initiative (2003), the National Water Policy (2004), and the Draft Bill of National Water Resources (2007).

In spite of these initiatives, programmes and policies, the Nigerian water situation, characterised by inadequate access to safe drinking water, is still a major challenge both in the urban and rural areas though with varying degree of severity. Only one third of the rural population and about half of the urban population has access to safe and clean water as at 2009.

Nigeria is not on track in meeting the MDG target of 75 per cent coverage for improved drinking water by 2015; Information and statistical data on water situation are generally lacking, fragmented and conflicting when they are available.

The legal framework for water management is yet to take a shape in spite of the existence of two national water related policies. The draft national water resources bill is still with the national assembly thus stalling effective implementation of programmes required for the development of the water resources and delivery system. The delay in passage after three years is an indication of low priority accorded water issues in Nigeria.

Challenges of Business

These include inability of businesses to engaged government in ensuring attainment of water policy goals. The space needs further liberalisation for effective engagement; dearth of quality data and lack of planning on the part of government, which hinders investment decisions and eventually constrain the operations of businesses;

There is also lack of understanding of the PPP framework and ethos on the part of government officials that manage the national water resources; lack of transparency and accountability which often aggravate risks and scramble the operational activities of local business entities; restricted access to public water supply and insensitive water pricing regimes; inadequate water infrastructures in terms of usage, recycling and disposal of waste water.

Vista of Opportunities

Relevant Links

- [West Africa](#)
- [Nigeria](#)
- [Water](#)
- [International Organisations](#)
- [Sustainable Development](#)
- [Sustainable Development](#)

The paper also pointed out vista of opportunities open to business in ensuring the water policy goals are achieved especially in relation to the MDG7. These activities include: research into equitable use of water as a way of providing better and alternative options and programmes in the implementation of water policy; evidence-based Policy Advocacy at all levels of government;

There is also public awareness campaign in responsible and sustainable use of water; investment in training and capacity building public water supply managers and decision makers; and finalisation and introduction of a new legal/statutory framework for dealing with water related issues. The paper concluded that businesses can do more, working with all the stakeholders to create a new pathway to accelerate delivery of water to Nigerians

Experience of Businesses

The major companies and non-governmental organisations present at the roundtable shared their experience in addressing challenges around water and the motives behind their involvement.