

Lack of Access to Potable Water Threatens Livelihood in Delta Community

The use of contaminated drinking water and poor sanitary conditions result in increased vulnerability to water-borne diseases. Only 26.5 per cent of the Nigerian population use improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities.

- UNICEF

Introduction

Water is an indispensable element for life. Water-related diseases, caused by unsafe drinking water and the absence of proper sanitation facilities, are among the leading causes of death in the developing world. Lack of access to good drinking water source has led to the proliferation and consumption of different water sources with attendant health burden. Toxic metals like lead, mercury, cadmium, zinc and copper are often discharged into receiving waters from industries. High concentration of these chemicals impairs the human body system. Poor access to improved water and sanitation in Nigeria remains a major contributing factor to high morbidity and mortality rates among children under five. The use of contaminated drinking water and poor sanitary conditions has resulted in increased vulnerability to water-borne diseases, including diarrhea which leads to deaths of more than 70,000 children under five annually.

According to UNICEF, seventy-three per cent of the diarrheal and enteric disease burden is associated with poor access to adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and is disproportionately borne by poorer children. Frequent episodes of WASH related ill-health in children, contribute to absenteeism in school, and malnutrition.



The country faces significant water challenges, which vary greatly from one region to another. In a vicious cycle, weak governance exacerbates these water challenges. The availability of safe drinking water is very limited in Nigeria, and supplying sufficient water grows increasingly challenging as urban populations grow. Poor sanitation and hygiene lead to high rates of diseases like diarrhea,

pneumonia, trachoma, and worm-related illnesses, with diarrhea as the second largest direct cause of child mortality. Water allocation is also a significant problem. Water governance is very fragmented, and the Nigerian government generally lacks the resources and expertise to operate effectively. Existing infrastructure is not only insufficient, but also poorly maintained.

Contract Inflation and Overpayment

Analysis of 2017 Audit Report of the Federation revealed the contract for water supply and distribution network was awarded to a company in the sum of ₦81.6 million inclusive of 5 % VAT and 5% WHT vide award letter dated 1st November 2010, Ref No: FUPRE/REG/CONTRACTS /VOL.2/149 with a completion period of 6 Months. The Governing Council of Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun (FUPRE) terminated the contract on the ground of non-performance, after the job had reached 90% completion and a sum of ₦78.8 million had been paid to the contractor.

The Audit Report further revealed that the abandoned water supply and distribution project was to be completed through direct labour at a sum of ₦45 million where the sum of ₦40.4 million had already been paid vide voucher number 002, dated 18/5/15 and mandate number: GTB/IGR/MAY/001. It was noted that the same contract was awarded to another contractor through award letters reference numbers FUPRE/CONT./2015/VOL.89 dated 29/9/2015 and FUPRE/REG/COUNCIL/CONTRACTS/84 dated 18/8/2016 at a sum of ₦29.9 million and ₦5,061,284.00 respectively. Hence the contract originally awarded at the cost ₦81.6 million was craftily varied upward and the total of ₦154.1 million was expended thus resulting in overpayment of ₦72.5 million.

Value for Money reporters who visited the project site on the 26th of March 2020 to ascertain the implementation status of the project realized that the project was ongoing. The powerhouse for the water distribution network had been constructed and the engine or generator had been delivered while the storage tank had also been installed. Although, the project in general was near completion, the objective to provide constant water supply to the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun (FUPRE) residents, students, and staff, had not been achieved.

The importance of water and its effective management cannot be overemphasized. Well-designed and operated water systems are important for maintaining public health. The water project had since been abandoned and has made access to potable water difficult for the University community since 2016 considering despite the completion period of 6 months provided for in the contract award document.

Recommendations

- The Vice Chancellor of the University should see to prioritizing and accelerating the completion of the water project to ease the difficulty of accessing potable water by the University community.
- The University should follow existing legal framework such as the Financial Regulations for effective and efficient use of fiscal resources to discourage contract inflation and overpayments.
- Anti-corruption Agencies should wade in recover the sum of ₦72.5 million overpaid to the contractor and prosecute those responsible for contract variation.

Images of ongoing Water Supply and Distribution Network

