

World Water Day in Nigeria: Media Project visit and concert

By Bankole Ebisemiju

The World Water Day in Nigeria was celebrated through a project visit by journalists under the auspices of the Watsan Media Network. The 9 member team visited WaterAid project sites as well as abandoned Federal Government water projects in two local governments. The objective of the visit was to create awareness over the implication of the Federal Government recent decision to abdicate its responsibility under the National Water Policy.

At the last National Council on Water Resources (NCWR) meeting held in Lagos in August 2008, the Minister of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources informed Council members of the “new policy thrust of the federal government”. In summary the policy thrust was that the President needs all the water resources in the country for food product to achieve one of his seven point agenda on food sufficiency and therefore will no longer fund water supply.

On March 12th, 2009 the Minister through the Minister of State conveyed a meeting with Commissioners responsible for water resources in the states in Abuja. At the meeting, the Commissioners were briefed on the declining access to water supply in the country which was blamed on the dysfunctional facilities. They were informed that given the economic meltdown and dwindling revenue from oil, the federal government will no longer fund water supply projects in the country. The federal government will rather fund large dams for multipurpose uses especially for irrigation. The federal government went ahead and unilaterally changed the cost sharing formula agreed in the National Water Supply and Sanitation Policy 2000 without consultation with all relevant stakeholders. The cost sharing formula in the 2000 policy gave federal government 50% for capital projects in rural and small towns and 30% in urban. In the revised policy the federal government with its lion share of resources from the federation account will have 0% contribution in capital projects and operation and maintenance of water supply and sanitation projects in urban, small towns and rural.

The implication of this decision was very glaring at the abandoned projects visited as the people complained that all the projects never worked. According to the His Royal Highness, Julius Oladipo Awolola, traditional ruler of Eda Oniyo community in Ilejemeje Local Government “We never used it for a day. I complained to the officer in charge and even forced the contractor to fill the tank for two weeks. He could not fill the tank but he was paid. To us, the project is uncompleted but to the contractor and the government it has been completed. If completed it would have helped the community because we don’t have any other reliable source of water. If the government can help us repair the uncompleted one, it will help us. We also appeal to the Federal Government not to leave funding of water projects to state and local government because the allocation to states and local governments cannot take care of this kind of project”.



An abandoned water project in Ilejemeje LGA of Ekiti State

The journalists used the opportunity of the visit to talk with local government chairmen and officials on their views on the Federal Government's decision. Honourable Wole Ayeni, chairman, Ilejemeje Local Government reiterated the importance of Federal government support to achieve effective water and sanitation project delivery at the state and local government levels. "There is need for the Federal Government to continue to support states and Local governments to provide safe water to the people".

The outcome of the visit was the media reports of the implication of the Federal Government decision on the rural populace. This was reported in newspapers and broadcast by radio and television stations on World Water Day.



A musician performing at the WWD Concert

On Sunday, a concert was organized under the auspices of the End Water Poverty campaign in Abuja. It was packaged by The Municipal Youth Vanguard with support from WaterAid Nigeria, WATSAN Media Network and Society for Family Health (SFH). The event witnessed musical performances, talk and media chat. It held at the Millennium Park and drew a large crowd of about 1500 youth, men and women with the message of better funding for water and sanitation by the government.



The World Water Day commemoration continued on Monday 23rd March 2009 with an interactive session among stakeholders. Organised under the auspices of the Nigeria Water and Sanitation Association (NIWASA), the event featured discussion around WaterAid Nigeria's presentation on "Meeting the MDGs: Issues and challenges". Participants were drawn from the National Assembly, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, National Environmental Regulatory Agency, WaterAid Nigeria and the private sector among others. It served as an auspicious occasion to advocate for better funding for water and sanitation and especially the Federal Government's decision to no longer fund water projects. Senator Bassey Ewa-Henshaw, Chairman Senate Committee on Water Resources said the answer to the problem is "for the Federal Government to reallocate resources to the state and local governments so that they can effectively deal with the water crisis situations in their communities".



Senator Ewa-Henshaw with Joe Lo Acting CR WaterAid Nigeria and Apollos Nwafor, Policy Research Coordinator at the WWD talkshop