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WATER MADE EASY: THE ROLE OF SACHET WATER INDUSTRIES
IN KWARA STATE 1985-2014

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Introduction

No Nigeria child should in the next few years trek long distance to carry water on their heads before going to school. Our target is to ensure that by the year 2015, 75 per cent of Nigerians will have access to safe drinking water and that by 2025 the figure will rise to over 90 percent (Hellen, 2011). Water is essential for the growth and maintenance of our bodies and it is an important component in the diet. The British Dietetic Association (BDA) guidelines states that an average adult should consume 2.5litres of which 1.8litres or (58330ml cans; 78 250ml glasses) must be in fluid form, the remainder being obtained from other intakes like fruits and foods. For children to maintain the correct water level of 60- 70% body weight they need to consume

up to 2litres of fluid every day. This intakes needs to be increased during period of hot weather or during and after periods of physical activity in other to avoid dehydration (Olotu, 2010).

Several agencies were involved in urban water management and supply from the local government to the Federal government. The state governments however have primary responsibility for urban water. In the 1975-80 plan periods, the Federal government set itself some objectives as regards water supply especially in the urban areas leaving out rural water supply. Given the importance of water to human existence one would expect that serious and sustained efforts would be made to provide this essential need. Unfortunately over the years, there has been a relative

decline in government effort to provide water supplies. During 1955-1960 and the national development plan periods 1962-1968, 1970-1975 and 1975-1980, 1980-1985 and 1985-1990, the capital expenditure on water represented 7.7%, 4%, 5%, 28%, 1.5% and 1.1% of the total expenditure respectively in spite of increase in population of the country (Oyebande, 1990).

The setting up of several organizations and agencies to supply water to urban areas like the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development (WARRD), the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), National Technical Committee on Water Resources (NTCWR), charged with the responsibility of policy objective formulation, data collection, monitoring and coordination of water resources at the federal and state levels, water supply situation remained deplorable across the nation (NTCW, 1990). At the state levels, agencies like water corporations and rural water committees at the local levels which performed the function of supplying water to the big cities and rural areas also did not yield the desired results (Oyebande, 2005).

Also, the nearest the nation has got to having a national water supply policy was the draft proposal submitted by the National Sub-Committee on Water Supply and Sanitation to Nigerians which was divided into four phases: (a) covering of 50% of the population by 1995; (b) extension of supply to 80% of the population by the year 2005; (c) provision of potable water to all by 2015; and (d) improved level of supply from present level of 29 liters per capital per day to 120, 90, and 60 liters per capital per day to urban, semi-urban and rural areas respectively. (Oyebande, 2005). These efforts however proved highly ineffective and thus the need for other sources of water to ever increasing population in the country (Abdullahi, 1992). The option came when

some people started to bag water in nylon bags before they transformed it to what is now called sachet (pure) water across the country (Karebu, 2015).

This paper therefore examines in parts, the efforts made by the producers of sachet water in Kwara state in the realization of making good water available to the people of the State and other contributions of the industries to the economic survival of the state and the nation in general. The year 1985 was chosen as the year of study because sachet water sales began in Nigeria around this time even though there were not many in existence and most were not registered.

Efforts of the Federal Government to Provide portable Water at Independence

Efforts to provide portable water in Nigeria can be traced back to the time of colonialism. The colonial government searched for water in different places in the country and constructed dams in strategic places in order to generate water for the colonial officials and in some cases the communities where such dam was located. At independence, the management and control of such dams became the duty of the Nigerian government under the ministry of works (Olateju, 2004).

The Nigeria government made several efforts to produce water for the entire country at various states levels, for example dams were constructed in different areas within the country. In Kwara State for instance, dams were constructed in some local government areas like Asa, Oyun, Ilorin and Borgu in the 1970s. The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA) was also established across the country to have a framework for the development of the nation's water resources (Ibrahim, 2015). However, many of the dams constructed at huge cost to harness water resources for domestic, agricultural and

industrial purposes were abandoned and the river basins became moribund, hence the search for water continued at the federal, states and even local government levels in the country (NTCWR, 1997).

Water Supply in Kwara State before Satchet Water Production

The people of Kwara State as in all indigenous communities were used to streams, river and or well water before the colonial periods (Ibrahim, 2013). This source of water was seen to be the best in the area that was later named Nigeria at large. The search however for “good” water in what later became Kwara State in particular began in the last century around the 1920s by the colonialist who searched for the source of *Asa* River at Laduba, a village of about twenty kilometers from Ilorin where water was flowing in from to Ilorin Township. The river was then dammed at the outskirts of Ilorin by the colonialist to provide drinkable water to the District Officers' (DO), other residence in the area and officials. Since the first waterworks was built in Ilorin it has since evolved through many stages as indicated later (Sulayman, 2015).

As said, when the country attained independence in 1960, water supply to Nigerians was the responsibility of the federal government, and the main concern of the authority managing water supply to the people was how to increase the supply of water due to the ever increasing population of the nation. In Kwara State therefore, the water supply from Asa River dam in Ilorin was no longer enough to meet the water demands of Ilorin people and no dam has been constructed in other parts of the state. The responsibility of water supply was transferred to the state government when Kwara State was created in 1967 and the construction of another dam was initiated at Agba area in 1972 and completed

in 1977 (Sulayman, 2015). However the Kwara State Water Corporation sapped with the responsibility of making water available throughout the state could not supply enough clean water to people adequately and one major reason given for the poor processing and distribution of water in the state has been inadequate equipments and epileptic power supply from the providers of electric power in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2014). As a result of scarcity of water which resulted in the non-use of water pipelines, it became rusted because of the long period of time in which water has not pass through them. Majority of the Ilorin residents and other areas in the state have had to rely on water from those who had good wells or, and later bore holes in their residential houses (Babatunde, 2015).

Noticing a high demand for water as no human can do without it, those who had well and borehole decided to commercialize them first in Lagos and later in Ibadan and other major cities across the nation, by selling water to those that are seriously hard pressed in cans and pails. Later when the initial methods proved highly to be inadequate across the country, some people went as far as bagging the water in polyethylene bag, iced them and started to sale it at strategic places like markets, schools, motor parks, stadium, mosques and churches at the rate of (N1) one naira from the beginning of 1980s. This method of taken water to the people at their area of needs in popular places increased the water supply situation tremendously (Karebu, 2015).

However, the water supply situation in rural and even urban areas of Kwara State as in most part of the country in the 80s and even to the end of 2000 was a far cry from the standard set by the United Nations International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, that all country should provide good water to her citizen by 1990

(Mustapha, 2008). For example, only three Local Government Headquarters out of twelve had good water supply before 1989 to forty per cent of the inhabitants of these local government headquarters including the one bag (Sulayman, 2015). A study conducted by the rural infrastructural team showed that the population per well in the state at the time ranged from 3, 610 in Borgu L.G.A to 19, 645 in Asa L.G.A, while the walking radius from a well ranged from 2.52km in Oyun L.G.A to 14.41km in Borgu L.G.A. (Kleiner, 1999)

The water supply to 60 towns and villages under the Bi- Water scheme recorded some improvement. However by 1986 only three of the twelve L.G.A headquarters in the state had pipe borne water. The attempt to reduce the problem through the Federal Government National Borehole scheme and Rural Water Supply and sanitation, as well as United Nation Children Education Funds (UNICEF) to provide potable water to rural areas did not produced the expected results as most of the schemes were abandoned due to non released of counterpart fund by the state government (Sulayman, 2015).

The Kwara State Water Corporation was established by Kwara State Water Corporation Edict of 1976 (reviewed by laws of no7 1992), as a parastatal of the state government with the Ministry of Water Resources maintaining a superintendent role over it. The corporation has a statutory responsibility for producing portable water in good and sufficient quantity for industrial and domestic use of the entire citizenry of Kwara State through the dams made constructed. In Kwara State there are about (6) dams located in different areas of the state, and the dams are used for water supply for people (Sulaiman, 2015).

From these dams, water is expected to be generated, treated and sent to booster stations located in different areas of the towns

for distribution (Oyebande, 2005). For example in Ilorin, there are about three booster stations located in Agba, Sobi and Olorunshogo where the water is stored and later sent out for the general populace. However available data shows that in Kwara State, only 20 per cent of residents have access to 20 hours of water supply. Another 30 per cent of residents had water services in their residence for an average of twelve hours a day for five days a week. In the same vein, 20 per cent of other residents in the state had just two days of water supply per week. The remaining 30 per cent of residents in the state that live mainly in poor neighborhoods or urban fringes has no access to piped water supply at all by 1999. Form these statistics, the Kwara State Water Corporation is only able to meet the water demands of just 30 percent of urban residents and zero per cent of those in the rural areas.

In spite of the benefits of adequate water supply to economic wellbeing, Nigeria like other developing countries struggle to improve on the provision and distribution of good and save water to its urban citizens not to talk of making adequate water supply to the majority people in the rural areas (Olaoye, 2000). At present many areas within the state do not have access to portable water from the state grid, and in areas served by the approved utility company, water services is mostly erratic and increasing unreliable. Available evidence indicates that as at the end of 2013 and the middle of 2014 when statistics was conducted, only 25 per cent, a drop of what it was in 1999 of urban residents has access to improved drinking water from the state grid (Sulaiman, 2015).

The problems that accounted for urban water supply shortage in Nigeria and indeed Kwara state are enormous and very complex in nature. These problems ranged from institutional bottlenecks like poor water

utility management capacity and weak regulatory mechanism to infrastructure problems such as poor urban planning, rapid growth of squatter communities and insufficient financial resources.

According to the United Nation Organization (UNO), the urban population in Nigeria continues to grow at a faster pace than any of the West African country. With an urban population of 13 percent in the 1950s, the urban population in Nigeria had increased to 43 percent by 2002. The U.N.O. further states that by the year 2030 one in two Nigerian will be living in urban areas (UNO). From this index, the growth in urban sector will outpace the infrastructures development and therefore limits the ability of governments to provide adequate utility services to all urban dwellers. In the words of Jacques Diouf, the director general of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), he traced the decline of portable water situation to population growth, urbanization and the increase in industrial and domestic use. He said that the population growth and development needs call for increased allocation of water for cities, agriculture, and industries, the pressure on water resources intensifiers, leading to tension, and conflict among uses and excessive strain on the environment (Kleiner, 1999).

The public water sector in the state again woefully failed in its responsibility at providing clean and affordable water to the citizens. Instead the network of water distribution system in most cities were abandoned and allowed to decay. In some places surveys shows that the iron pipes being used in those places are as old as 35-40 years which compromises purity of water as well as the health of the people in that area. In some other places pipes are not properly connected and most of these pipes are connected through the gutters (Babatunde (2015). As a result of

the failure of both federal and state governments to provide clean portable water for the general populace, individual persons and corporate business quickly seized the opportunity to provide water for the use of the people and later decided to commercialize it, which later resulted into sachet water production (Ajimati, 2015)..

The Impact of Sachet Water Production

The genesis of the production of sachet water in Nigeria cannot be ascertained as said above and no one person can claim to be the first person to start the business. What can only be said of it is that the sale of water business kicked off in certain areas earlier than other places (Abdullah, 1992). The sachet water production in Nigeria had passed through certain stages before it arrived at what is obtainable now. The production of sachet water in Nigeria started in certain areas like Lagos, Ibadan and Binni Portharcourt and some major places as a small enterprise when water was put into a hand knotted polythene bag as enunciated. The water would be iced in a refrigerator and sold at marketable areas like bus-stops, markets, schools churches, mosques, and it is popularly known as 'iced water' (*Omi tutu* in yoruba) (Karebu 2015).

Prior to its debut, the drinking water market was dominated by 0.75litre and 1.5litre bottled types of drinking water which was imported into the country (Mustapha). In 1996, with the establishment of National Agency for Food Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), it embarked on the registration of companies engaged in the production of processed foods, drugs, cosmetics, and also in charge of issuing license to companies which imported such items into the country (Dada, 2009). As a result of this, NAFDAC encouraged the local producers and particularly sachet water producers to have their products registered

with the agency and try to meet up with the World Health Organization (WHO) standard. Having been registered, the sachet water producers were issued with NAFDAC registration number. During this process of registration with NAFDAC, the agency encouraged the sachet water producers to package their water in a more hygienic condition and environment (Olateju, 2004). As a result of all these, the sachet water production in Nigeria entered into the next phase when the water had to be properly treated, filled into a polythene bag through a tap and sealed with a manual sealer. However manual sealer varied from place to place and even time to time (Olaoye, 2004). Noticeably around this time, the price of sachet water had rose from N1 (one naira) to N5 (five naira) (James, 2011). This was as a result of the standard and price of the polythene bag. The name of the producer and NAFDAC had inscribed with ink on the back of the polythene bag (NAFDAC, 2013).

By the year 1999, the developmental stage of sachet water production reached its apogee with the invention of an automatic packaging machine which is capable of filling the water into a polythene bag and at the same seal the water in a hygienic way (Ogundina, 2008). This machine is capable of producing about 2000 sachets within one hour, thus enhancing fast and increase rate of production. Gradually the sachet water producers changed from the use of manual way of packaging and sealing the water to the use of an Automatic Packaging Machine (SON, 2003).

With this, the industry has been able to make drinkable water available to all and sundry at avoidable prices (Adekunle, 2004). The availability of water even transcends the urban areas to the most rural areas of the State. Today, people hardly notice that there is no pipe born water in their domain to the extent

that ceremonies are held with either sachet or bottle water. This development has greatly reduced the report of water diseases across the state and the country at large (Omalu, 2010).

In addition, the coming of sachet water industry in the State has reduced cases of unemployment. Many youths has either been employed as packers, machine operators, drivers, distributors and even as hawkers. In Ilorin alone, about five thousand youths were said to be under one water industry or another by 2014 (Karebu, 2015). Some of them were even trained to become professionals in the handling of heavy machines which they never thought they could handle. With this, unemployed youths became professionals in the area of water production across the state, and some of them have even found their ways to other states within the federation and outside the country to start their water business.

Government of Kwara State equally have been benefitting from the activities of the water industries located across the state in the area of revenue generation, through various forms of taxes collected from them and their workers. (Ibrahim, 2013) The industries have been paying company tax which was based on the profits made by the industries annually. Secondly, the state government has also realized personal income tax in the form of Pay as You Earn (PAYE), Capital Gain Tax (CGT) Sales Tax (ST) and Property Tax (PT) from the industries, beside other miscellaneous taxes collected by the Local Government Area that housed these industries (Ibrahim, 2013).

Conclusion

This paper highlights that shortage of good drinkable water across the nation brought about the introduction of sachet water production in Nigeria and indeed Kwara State. It shows that the introduction of sachet

water by their producers satisfied by a regulatory agency, (NAFDAC) has contributed in alleviating the problem created by the inability of the public water producers to make water available to ordinary Kwarans. We also highlighted other notable impacts of the water industries that were located across the state in the area of revenue generation, employment opportunities and training of human resources.

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