

# **LESSONS ON OHS COMPLIANCE IN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN NIGERIA**

A paper presented at the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) Annual Conference, 2021, held at Seville, Spain (May 18-21, 2021)

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## **ABSTRACT**

Infrastructure projects are usually meant to improve the life and livelihood of hosts/beneficiary communities. However, the benefits derivable can very easily be obliterated if adequate provisions are not made for Occupational and Community Health and Safety. This paper presents an overview of the lessons learnt from implementing World Bank Assisted infrastructure projects in Ibadan, Nigeria. It highlights the pains associated with inadequate OHS compliance and the various issues arising therefrom. It concludes with recommendations on best practices that are being developed and replicated across other development projects in Nigeria, for optimal sustainability of infrastructure projects.

### **KEY WORDS**

Infrastructure Projects, occupational and community health and safety, OHS Compliance, sustainability.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure projects are meant to bring about development and better life for beneficiary communities. However, if not properly managed, the Health and Safety (Occupational and Community) issues associated with such developments can bring about such issues that could completely obliterate all the anticipated benefits of such projects. Therefore, attention to all Health and Safety issues in infrastructure development projects cannot be over-emphasized.

There are two perspectives to health and safety issues on a site: Occupational perspective, and community perspectives. These two perspectives are so interwoven that they cannot be separated, and thus a global approach to health and safety management must incorporate both these perspectives, for optimal performance

In this paper, an overview of health and safety lessons from projects in Nigeria is presented, along with recommendations on actions to take, going forward, to ensure optimization of health and safety performance in infrastructure projects in Nigeria.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Two short, real-life stories are presented here, to illustrate the difference between occupational health and safety issues, on the one hand, and community health and safety issues, on the other hand. The stories have been slightly modified, to protect the identities of the affected people.

### STORY 1:

- Olalekan Sule was a casual worker on a construction site. He had a very brilliant 16-year-old daughter who had just gained promotion to SSS 3. She needed to pay N10,000 for WAEC registration – to write the 2<sup>o</sup> School Certificate Exam. Sule promised her: I get paid N2,500 per day. I will give you N2,000 of it for the next 5 days, so you can pay for the exam
- That day, on getting to the site, he was required to climb a scaffold, to work at height, but was not given a safety harness, even though he asked for it. He climbed the scaffold, but then experienced a dizzy spell, and fell to his death.
- Since his daughter had no one else to support her, she dropped out of school,

and took to prostitution.

- And thus ended what could have been a brilliant future, because of occupational health and safety issues

#### STORY 2:

- Mutiyu Abanikanda was a motorcyclist called Okada. He rode from Igboloyin, where he lived, to Mokola (all in Ibadan, Oyo State), early in the morning, and operated his bike around Mokola, till evening. Sometime in 2019, a road construction work was taking place around his house in Igboloyin. Having stayed at Mokola, squatting with a friend for some days, he was unaware that an excavation had opened up on his route home. The excavation was neither barricaded, nor was a sign or flashing lights put around the excavation
- Coming back late in the night, Mutiyu had no idea that there was an excavation along his usual route. He was in a hurry to go and meet his 23 year old wife and 4 year old son. Sadly, he fell into the ditch and died.
- This is a Community H & S issue

### **3.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES ACROSS INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN NIGERIA**

H & S issues are intertwined, and so, what affect workers may inevitably affect the communities and vice versa. In addition however, what may be seen as health and safety issues may also have environmental and even social implications and/or connotations. By the same token, issues that are primarily regarded as environmental, or social, could have health and safety connotations. Therefore, an effective plan to manage health and safety issues must also have due cognizance for the environmental and social hues to such issues. So, the way to go, is to look at Environmental, Social, Health and Safety (ESHS) perspectives to construction work on sites

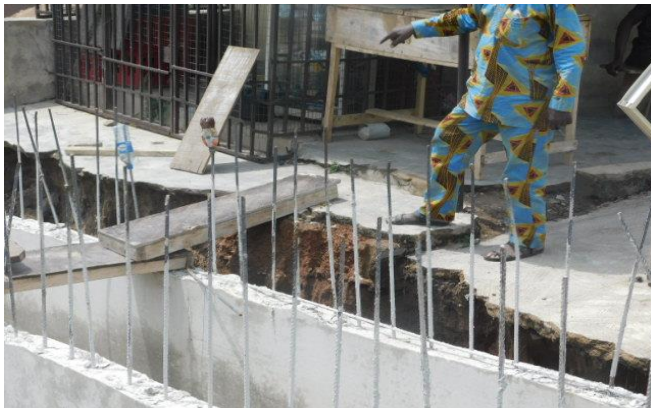
In the next few paragraphs, an overview of key health and safety issues across infrastructure projects in Nigeria, and the lessons learnt from them are presented. Pictorial presentations are copiously used to effectively present these issues:

### 3.1: Provision of safe temporary access and covering manholes Road Projects

Across several road projects in Nigeria, it is observed that hardly any consideration is given to the communities around construction sites. As a result, project sites are not configured to accommodate communities, thus leaving them vulnerable to injuries, and sometimes, even deaths. Plates 1.4 show examples of such sites across Nigeria.



Plates 1 and 2: Poor temporary access provision around road construction sites in Nigeria



Plates 3 and 4: Protruding reinforcements and Open manholes along drains for road construction projects

As will be seen from the plates above, in plates 1 and 2, there is no provision of temporary access for projects around a school, where children mill around and engage in horseplay. This is a major health and safety risk, as school children could fall into these excavations and sustain grievous injuries, or even death. Similarly, in Plates 3 and 4, protruding reinforcements and open manholes along lined rains are seen, The situation is worsened by the fact that vulnerable people use these areas (elderly people, as seen in plate 3, and school children in plate 4).

### **3.2 Provision of PPEs for Workers**

On another site in Nigeria, the use of PPEs by project workers is neither adequate, nor monitored or enforced. As will be seen in Plates 5 and 6 below, workers on site are either working almost barefoot or using inappropriate tools for their work, running the risk of sustaining serious occupational injuries



Plates 5 and 6: Workers on a Construction site without appropriate PPEs

### **3.3 Traffic Management and Dust Control**

As will be seen in Plates 7 and 8, traffic management is a major issue arising from construction sites, and apart from the risk of accidents due to this, there is also the issue of physiological stress on community inhabitants and other road users. While this is primarily a community health and safety issue, there are associated issues including release of air pollutants from vehicular emissions around construction sites. Another issue associated with construction sites is poor dust control as will be seen in plate 8. The poor dust control can result in accidents because of overspeeding in poor visibility. In addition however, there are health risks due to the excessive dust,

as respiratory tract infections could result from inhaling so much dust, both for workers and other road users. Added to this is the adverse effect of dust settling on plant leaves on primary productivity, including reduction in available photosynthetic surfaces, as well as mechanical damage to leaf surfaces and blocking of stomatal pores.



**Plate 7: Poor Traffic Management around a construction site in Nigeria**



**Plate 8: Poor dust control around a construction site in Nigeria**

## **4.0 LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON CORRECTIVE ACTIONS**

An investigation of the main problems from the various sites revealed the following:

- A lot of project teams do not even have provisions for environmental and social experts on project teams
- Where they have, they are regarded as NON-KEY experts, and so do not

have a voice on site

- Another lesson learnt is that most engineers operating in Nigeria do not believe in HSE issues and therefore do not take them into cognizance. For example, sprinkling water on open road surfaces hastens compaction and controls dust emission. However, the sprinkling regime for compaction is less than what is required for dust control. Most engineers prefer the first option, for cost savings
- Although Donor projects like those involving the World Bank, AfDB, etc. insist on a high level of safeguards management and compliance on project sites, because the engineers on the PIUs of such projects do not believe in HSE management, they are not able to enforce it appropriately.
- Another lesson learnt is that the absence of a strong, culturally-compatible *Grievance Redress Mechanism* (GRM) makes reportage & ability to express complaints a herculean task
- Most project teams feel that they are doing the people a favour by implementing projects and so expect them to tolerate/endure the associated hardships. They do not realize that projects will not take place if the people are not there, and so, they must be taken into due cognizance in project implementation
- Very clearly therefore, pre-planning is more critical for successful project implementation, with adequate consideration for health and safety, than the actual project implementation
- Therefore, for sustainable development, and avoidance of H&S issues, the following needs to be done in Nigeria:
  - **CONDUCT RISK ASSESSMENT AND HAZARD ANALYSES**
    - Identify the key activities that will be undertaken as part of the project, define the associated risks and hazards, and their likelihood of occurrence,. Based on this, prepare action plan to mitigate/ameliorate these risks, following the hierarchy of control:
      - Avoid,
      - Reduce
      - Mitigate



- Evaluate residual risks.
- **PREPARE EMERGENCY RESPONSE & CONTINGENCY PLAN**
  - In case of accidents, there must be a plan in place for prompt response, to minimize associated damage.
- **INCIDENT INVESTIGATION AND REPORTING**
  - It is important to have a procedure in place for investigating and reporting incidents. This is not with the intention to find fault but to identify causes of accidents/incidents, with a view to planning to avoid reoccurrence
- **CARRY OUT PERIODIC HEALTH & SAFETY AUDITS**
  - On a needs basis, periodic health and safety audits should be carried out. This will help to identify new hazards that may not have been captured in the earlier risk assessment. It will also help to plan to avoid and/or mitigate risks

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Generally, there is no activity without its hazards and risks. People have been known to die taking a bath. The onus is therefore on project managers to:

- ✓ Plan projects properly, so they identify the risks
- ✓ Introduce measures to eliminate risks
- ✓ Where they cannot be eliminated, reduce them
- ✓ Provide mitigation for residual risks
- ✓ Ensure that project implementation is people oriented. Take their wellbeing into due cognizance
- ✓ Have a comprehensive emergency response plan in place, in case of accidents
- Occupational and community H & S issues are intertwined and so, a holistic approach aimed at tackling both, along with environmental and social perspectives is the best

*This is the concept of ESHS Management*