
Occupational Health and Safety Management Issues in Nigeria: Challenges and Strategies for National Development

Madike Hope Chinelo

Department of Public Administration,

Federal Polytechnic Oko, Anambra State, Nigeria.

madikehope@gmail.com

Abstract: *Health and safety of workers are inseparable and a necessity for national development in Nigeria. All organizations have a duty therefore to secure their health and safety at all times. This is because it has been estimated that more than two million people die each year from work-related accidents and diseases. Using secondary data, this paper explores occupational health and safety management issues, challenges, and legislations. It then tries to proffer strategies for mitigating these challenges. It reveals that a lot of challenges exist in the way of realizing the health and safety of Nigerian workers. The paper among other solutions recommend that Government and employers must pull resources together in order to ensure the safety of workers.*

Keywords: Occupational Health and Safety, National Development.

1.1 Introduction

Occupational health and safety (OHS) according to the joint ILO/WHO Committee (1950) is the adaptation of work to man and of each man to his job. It has the following components: promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental, emotional and social well-being of workers, prevention among workers of departures from health issues caused by working conditions, protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health and placing and maintenance of a worker in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological and psychological equipment. For majority of people, most of their precious active life is spent at work, hence the need to work in a safe and healthy environment. Employers owe a fundamental duty to provide a safe and healthy work place for their employees; workers also have a fundamental right to work under safe and healthy conditions. In return, safe and healthy workforce will become productive in order to enhance national development of every nation.

The health status of the workforce in every country has an unmediated and direct impact on national development. Total economic losses due to occupational illnesses and injuries are enormous (WHO, 1999). Workforce is a borne of a country's development. A healthy, well trained and motivated workforce increase productivity and generates wealth that is necessary for the development of a nation at large (USAID 2006). Studies reveal that Nigerian economy is already diversified, with the service sector already playing a significant role in Nigeria's developmental process. As of 2015, workers contribution to GDP stood at 60%, with an average of about 33% of employment share compared to 7% for industry (Ehigiator, 2017); the informal sector workers in 2017 accounted for 65% of the Nigeria's GDP, (Bank of Industry, 2017). Hence, workers contribute a lot of the development of Nigeria and their health and safety ensures more productivity.

It is comforting to note that several legislations recognize the fact that the conditions of safety and health of Nigerian workers are a necessity-the constitution of Nigeria, 1999, Factories Act Cap 126 Laws of the Federation Nigeria (LFN) 1990, the Workmen's Compensation ACT cap 470 (LFN) 1990, Mineral Oil Safety Regulation of 1997 etc. Despite the above mentioned legislations and Policies, some challenges stand in the way of achieving the full realization of the health and safety of workers in Nigeria. Those challenges come in the areas of legality, labour market situation, Global Economic crises, etc.

This paper in proffering solutions to occupational safety and health challenges assigned it as responsibilities to the employer, employee and Government. For instance, government should seek for workable, enduring and acceptable solutions to crises, kidnapping and unwarranted attacks to Nigerians/ foreigners in Nigerian establishments. It recommends amongst others that ILO adopted guidelines on OHS should be considered in the implementation of Health and Safety programmes in Nigeria.

Safety and health of workers does not merely mean preventing workers from being exposed to workplace risks and hazards, but also ensures the promotion of healthy lifestyles and practices by employers. Healthy and safe workers in organizations add to the development of Nigeria.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The study aims to expose occupational health and safety management issues, challenges and legislation; then proffer strategies for mitigating these challenges, all in a bid to advance National Development in Nigeria.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Occupational Health and Safety

Occupational health and safety is one of the most important aspect of human concern. It aims the adaptation of working environment to workers for the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations (USAID, 2006).

According to WHO (1995), occupational safety and health can be defined as a multidisciplinary activity aiming at:

- Protection and promotion of health of workers by eliminating occupational factors and conditions hazardous to health and safety at work.
- Enhancement of physical, mental and social well-being of workers and support for the development and maintenance of their working capacity, as well as professional and social development at work.
- Development and promotion of sustainable work environments and work organizations. Successful occupational safety and health practice requires the collaboration and participation of both employers and workers in health and safety programmes, and involves the consideration of issues relating to occupational medicine, industrial hygiene, toxicology, education, engineering safety, ergonomics, psychology etc. (Harrington, 1998). Hughes and Ferret (2005) defined workplace safety as the protection of the body and mind of people from illness resulting from materials, processes or procedures used in the workplace. It therefore means that a safe working environment is that, in which its components, that is physical, biological, emotional, physiological, mental, etc, support the health and well-being of everyone in the work environment and preventing them all forms of illness, diseases and deformities that can arise from the material, process, or procedures used in the work place, (Idowu et al, 2017).

2.1.2 National Development

The issue of national development cannot be over-emphasized. It is a recurring decimal in understanding the history of development strategies and growth models as it concerns an individual country's history (Gilbert, et al, (2015). Hence, commentators on the postulation of western social scientists have emphasized in different forms that development must be conceived in the context of a particular social system. Amucheazi (1980) maintains that the individual and his quality of life must be the centre of conception of national development. This is in view of the fact that development is all about the people.

National development is the ability of a nation to improve its socio- economic, political as well as welfare of its people. It hence needs to improve the social welfare of its people by providing basic infrastructure such as road, schools, hospitals, recreational facilities, etc. Consequently, a country could be considered to be developed to the extent at which every sector of its economy, or national life reflects steady, yet progressive growth, Gilbert (Supra).

United Nations Decade Report defined national development as this:

“National development growth plus change. Change in turn is social and cultural as well as economic and qualitative as well as quantitative”

2.1.3 Importance of Health and Safety in the Workplace

It is important to emphasize that both the employee and employer are equal stakeholders in the effort to maintain a high standard of health and safety in the workplace. Hence, it is vital to consider the reasons why it is important to maintain a high standard of health and safety.

i. Moral and Legal Responsibilities of Employers

Armstrong (2003) opines that the elimination or minimization of health and safety hazard risks is the moral as well as legal responsibility of employers. An employee should not be saddled with the onerous task of constantly being worried about the risk of injury or death in the workplace. This has great implications for the performance of the employee. It is logical to assume that an employee who is in constant fear for his safety will be unbalanced psychologically and may be unable to give his best to the job at hand. It can also result in high turnover of workers with its attendant problems, Idubor, et al (2013).

ii. Economic Reasons

Governments have come to realize that industrial accidents and diseases result in losses to the state (through welfare payments to the disabled, cost of treatment and the loss of the services of the employed), Idubor, supra. The organizations themselves also sustain losses in terms of litigation fees, fines imposed on them, compensatory damages, loss of production, loss of goodwill from employees and other stakeholders. This of course is more apparent in societies where rules and regulations are obeyed and sanctions enforced when they are not, Idubor, et al,(2003)

iii. Employees Suffering

The employee affected by work related illness or accident suffers tremendously. This can result to loss of income for them and their dependents. Even when there is compensation from the employer, the employee may be permanently disabled.

iv. Legal Sanctions

There are usually legal sanctions associated with not maintaining high health and safety standards, which may be enforceable in civil or criminal law. This is usually a function of regulatory bodies put in place for such purposes. A corporate organization may eventually realize that the cost of non-compliance may be so immense and affect the profit margin.

2.1.4 Occupational Health and Safety Management (OHS) and National Development

The service or labour sector is an important component of any country's economy. It makes a direct and significant contribution to GDP and job creation, and provides crucial input for the rest of the economy. According to ILO, (2013), the following OHS priority areas ensure development of nations:

❖ Fighting Poverty

Promotion of OHS in Nigeria can impact a great deal on poverty reduction. First of all, the high economic costs of poor working conditions weighed down on her GDP and thus hold back development. Secondly, lack of OHS control measures and poor working conditions increased the number of occupational accidents and work-related illnesses, each one of which can lead to temporary or permanent incapacity to work, which in turn can lead to reliance on disability benefits- if they exist, and eventual exclusion from the labour market. It can only be seen as a veritable spiral of downward mobility and even death. Promoting the creation of OHS environment as part of development aimed at poverty reduction will help prevent exclusion and will maintain employability and contribute to a more productive society (ILO, 2013).

❖ Promoting Health

Several health- related Millennium Development Goals have moved health to the centre of development theory and policy. There is little doubt that combating preventable diseases is a major task in pursuing national development. There is also little doubt that the shocks generated by sudden health impairments play a significant role in the spread of poverty. The result has been increased attention and funding especially to the "headline" diseases of tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and Malaria.

while not disputing the urgency of addressing these threats to health and social progress it is important to note that work-related morbidity and mortality are likely to account for twice the burden of each of these diseases, and possibly as much as all three taken together. The paradox is that in an era in which health dimensions of development has gained prominence, one of the chief preventable cause of ill- health – poor working condition, remain largely invisible and consequently underfunded.

❖ Increasing business Performance

Good safety and health is good business. Enterprises that actively seek good working conditions for their workers observe that this is good for labour relations, the worker motivation and morale, and can result in higher productivity, with a reduction in sickness absence and retention of skilled workers.

Also, the economic benefits linked in putting in place good OHS management systems outweigh the costs involved. Evidence show that the cost of accidents are much higher than the cost of measures which would have prevented them.

2.1.5 Challenges

At present in Nigeria, a lot of challenges in the way of achieving the full realization of occupational safety and health among workers exist. Some of these according to Onuegbu, (2018) include:

➤ Legal

One of the key challenges is law Since Nigeria is a member of ILO, it reserves the right to ratify some ILO conventions and should pass them into law through the National Assembly. It is surprising that Nigeria has neither ratified these conventions nor reviewed any of the legislations on safety and health of her workers. Even the current workmen compensation Act needs to be amended to suit current safety measures, Onuegbu, (2018).

➤ Labour Market Situation

The labour market situation in Nigeria is just that there are many people pursuing after few jobs. The implication for health and safety at work is that the average worker is afraid to ask for his right to decent work and to safe and healthy working environment. Even when they summon courage to do so, they are met with harsh response from the employers and faced with a long wait to obtain justice. This is very pathetic.

➤ Global Economic Crisis

That there is a global economic crisis of a huge and worrisome dimension is no longer in dispute. It is also not in dispute that the crisis has adversely affected Nigeria leading to the melting of the capital market and increase in interest rates as Government borrowing to augment the shortfall in revenue is crowding our private borrowing. Empirical evidence however suggests that labour unions and workers need to be very watchful as the first casualty is usually the working conditions including safety and health at work.

➤ The insecurity in the Niger Delta

The insecurity in the Niger delta has led to the death, injury and maiming of many workers and their family members. A lot of oil and gas workers have been killed or kidnapped and this obviously adds a dangerous dimension to the safety of workers. This traumatizes workers and worries their family members; also, their productivity to national development will be affected.

➤ Non-unionized Workers and Contract Staff

Experience has shown that non-unionized workers are the greatest victims of unsafe and unhealthy workplace. Empirical evidence has shown that the respect for workers' health, safety and dignity are very much likely to be violated for non- unionized workers and contract staff of all categories.

➤ Ignorance and Lack of Awareness of Their Rights as Workers

All workers, whether they are permanent staff, agency or contractors, need to be aware of issues that affect their health and safety at work. Though union has fought and achieved certain basic legal and contractual health and safety rights for workers, it is obvious that a sizeable number of workers do not even know these rights. This lack of knowledge affects their inability to resort to such rights when impeded by employers.

2.1.6 Measures to Be Adopted

The following measures if followed strictly, will improve the health and safety of workers in Nigeria,

- i. Employers should inform employees about the risk involved in doing their work, example, the need to wear protective equipment (such as protective clothing, head gear, footwear, eyewear, gloves, etc). The employer should provide both protective equipment and conduct training on how to use it if necessary.
- ii. Employers should take certain measures in regard to visual display units (Vdus) such as computer screens. These include checking the reflection and glare, the operator's position in front of the VDU,

- and the board and software used. Operators must be given adequate breaks from the screen. In addition, employers must arrange for eye tests and make contributions towards the cost of prescription glasses, if required.
- iii. All accidents in the workplace should be reported to the employer, who should record the details of the incident. Reporting the accident will protect the employee's right to social welfare payments.
 - iv. Bust et al, (2014) reported that workers interest must be enhanced towards safety practices and usage awareness measures must be put in place and demonstrated by the operatives as one of the real need to upgrade workers safety.
 - v. The ability of employers and employees to comply with safety regulations and ensure international best practices will ensure safety and health of workers. Employers or organizations must make sure they have adequate safety guidelines and polices in place, regular training of staff; thus ensuring compliance.
 - vi. Most employer and employees have the tendency not to comply readily with safety requirement when adequate sections are not postulated for violators and implemented. Hence, Government ensures enforcement of violators of such regulations. With the availability of such measures and others not mentioned, the safety and health of employers will reasonably be ensured.
 - vii. Government has a duty to ensure the security and lives of workers, especially, oil and gas workers who are incessantly attacked, killed, or kidnapped. The need to ensure protection and enforcement of regulations pertaining to security of workers is a necessity. Also inclusive is the need to employ sufficient qualified staff to ensure inspection/ supervision of organizations to ensure compliance of safety regulations in force.

3.0 Methodology

This paper relied on secondary data from sources which include, books, unpublished personal sources, journals, websites, government records, Newspapers, etc.

4.0 Findings

From the study, it was found that both employees and employers are equal stakeholders in an effort to maintain health and safety in the workplace due to reasons which are economic, legal, moral, etc. Economic in the sense that such industrial accidents and diseases result in losses to the state, litigation fees, fines/ compensatory damages imposed on employers, loss of goodwill from stakeholders, etc. Cost of non-compliance on industrial legislations decrease profit margins of organizations.

Since the labour sector makes a direct and significant contribution to Nigeria's GDP and job creation, the health of the workers will be promoted.

Nigeria faces a lot of challenges as it struggles to ensure a full realization of the safety and health needs of its workers. These measures are legal-in the sense that despite being a member of International Labour Organizations (ILO), it has failed to ratify conventions in relations to the health and safety of workers. Other challenges include the labour market situation, global economic crisis, insecurity problems, ignorance of their rights by workers etc. These challenges if reduced reasonably, will ensure the national development of the Nation.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has been able to identify the challenges that employees in Nigeria are facing with regards to OHS. It also identified Nigerian regulations pertaining to OHS and providing measures to alleviate such challenges. It hence proffers the following recommendations:

Government should provide a framework on which OHS will be based in Nigeria. For instance, government should provide mandatory guidelines for workers to follow. This should apply to all category of workers whether formal or informal. There is need for government to adopt the ILO resolution on OHS and adapt it into Nigerian situation.

Government should have a sizeable portion of the annual budget for OHS especially and the disbursement should be monitored.

Government also needs to create awareness on the rights of workers to National Health Insurance Scheme, especially the informal workers. The awareness can be done through use of posters etc. Also, enlightenment programmes can be done through the various association meetings by OHS practitioners and entrepreneurship institutions.

References

- Amucheazi, E.C.(1980).Readings in Social Sciences: in National Development; Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu.
- Armstrong,E.(2003). Ten Human Resource Management Practices. <http://www.academia.edu>.
- Bank of Industry (BOI) (2018).Economic Development through the Nigerian informal sector; A BOI Perspective. Working Paper series: No.2.
- Bust, C.D.B, Gladstone, .K.L. & Grieve; K.R. (2014).Managing Construction Health and Safety: Migrant Workers and communicating safety Messages Safety Science 46 (4) 585-602.
- Ehigiator,.B.O.(2017).The Service sector in Nigeria: An Escalator for New Economic Growth. Master's Thesis, Lund University School of Economics and Management.
- EU- ILO (2013). Safety and Health at Work: Hopes and Challenges in Development Co-operation. Publications of the International Labour office, Geneva.
- Gilbert, L.D. & Ubani,. N.E. (2015).Democracy and National Development in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects, International Journal of African and Asian studies, Vol.3.
- Harrington,.J.M.&Howard,.G.(1998).Occupational Health. 4thed. Oxford, Black well Science.
- Hughes, .P. & Ferret, .E. (2005).Introduction to Health and Safety in Construction; Elsevier Butterworth, Heinemann Publishers, Paris.
- Idubor,.E.E. & Osiamoje,.M.D.(2013).An Exploration of Health and Safety Management Issues in Nigeria's Efforts to Industrialize. European Scientific Journal, Vol .9, (12), PP 154- 169.
- Idowu,.O.M.&Olatubi,.V.I.(2017).Ensuring A Safe Working Environment in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. International Journal of Environment and Resource Economics, Vol.2, N0.3, PP 107-115.
- Onuegbu,.C.H.(2018).Health and Safety at Work: A Basic Right. <https://www.acdemics.edu>.
- USAID.(2016). Occupational Health and Safety, Washington Facilities, ADS Chapter 529.

World Health Organization (WHO)(1995).Global Strategy on Occupational Health for All. Recommendations of the second Meeting of the WHO, Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health 11-14 October, 1995, Beijing, China.

IJFABS