

## **AN EXPLORATION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN NIGERIA’S EFFORT TO INDUSTRIALIZE**

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### **Abstract**

All organizations have a duty of care to ensure that employees and other persons who may be affected by the company’s undertakings remain safe at all times. This paper examines the background of occupational health and safety (OHS) practices in Nigeria, and highlights the importance of mitigating the OHS challenges identified from the moral, legal, financial and other dimensions. In the Nigerian context, the need to reinforce health and safety management (HSM) issues is exemplified from the unsavory recurrent reports of plane crashes in the aviation industry, high rates of motor vehicle accidents, numerous cases of death due to poisoning in the solid mineral sector, frequent accounts of disasters in the petroleum sector arising from oil spills, pipeline vandalism as well as accidents involving petroleum tankers. More effective and efficient management of these issues is a sine qua non to the industrialization efforts of an economy. Against the background of extant HS legislation in Nigeria, some reasons for the frequent violations of OHS standards and norms by the operators were identified as bribery and corruption in the system, the ‘Nigerian Factor’, inadequate funding of monitoring institutions, low level of education of employees as well as problems of persistent unemployment in the country. While recommending ways to mitigate the OHS flaws in Nigerian institutions, the relative duties and responsibilities of stakeholders in the OHS business were identified. The paper concludes by noting the importance of a virile HSM environment to the overall economic development and industrialization of the nation.

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**Keywords:** Occupational Health and Safety, Management Issues, Industrializing Economy

## **Introduction**

Many Nations of the world have striven to industrialize while others are pushing to get there because of the immense benefits accruable from industrialization. The process of industrialization in a nutshell describes a transition from an agrarian society to an industrial society; a shift from a consumer nation to a producer nation; and a movement from dependence on crude methods of manufacturing of cutting edge technology and jet-age ideas.

There are certain prerequisites for any country to industrialize successfully. Economic theorists have listed these as a stable government, a very productive agricultural sector, functioning markets, and a large capable workforce. Sadly enough, these characteristics are largely lacking in Nigeria. Russian economist Gerschenkron (1962) in his theory stated that industrializing countries would have some qualities that set them apart from already industrialized countries. These qualities include: a rapid and intense growth of industrial output, an emphasis on producer goods as opposed to consumer goods, a stress on large scale plant and enterprise, a reliance on technological borrowing and possibly financial assistance from abroad; importance of the government as the promoter of industrial development, spread of ideologies supportive of industrialization, and a passive role of agriculture.

Nigeria as a country is trying very hard to become industrialized but does not display most of the qualities of an industrializing country as spelt out above. As an industrializing country, Nigeria relies to a disturbing extent very heavily on foreign investments, some of which come in the form of manufacturing businesses promoted by foreign companies. Many of such companies are attracted to operate in Nigeria for a number of reasons. These reasons amongst others include: the large cheap labor market, an abundance of natural resources, a huge market for their finished products, the weak legal structure and the lack of strict enforcement of health and safety measures, which enables heinous violations of those measures.

The process of industrialization comes with some peculiar problems that if not properly tackled can cause damage not only to the environment but to the workers as well. The fact however remains that as much as a country seeks to be industrialized, structures and legislations should be put in place and enforced to ensure that the health and safety of workers are not compromised.

While it may be true that organizations exist for the major purpose of making profit in the long run, they have also come to realize that the health, safety and welfare of their employees cannot be separated from their continued effective existence. Hence organizations

are taking more interest in the welfare of their employees not only as a means of protecting their profit line but also because certain laws have been put in place to ensure that organizations provide their employees with a safe environment within which to work.

Health and Safety Management is an area that is concerned with ensuring the safety, health and welfare of people engaged in work or employment. It goes further too to protect co-workers, family members, employers, customers, suppliers, nearby communities and other members of the public who are impacted by the workplace environment (Ferris and Buckley, 2006).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the responsibility is on management to prevent accidents and eliminate health and safety hazards in order to minimize the suffering of the employees and by so doing to minimize their own loss. The Health and safety Executive (2000) estimated that in the United Kingdom alone, about 500 people are killed every year and several hundred thousand are either injured or suffer work related ill health. In an industrializing economy such as Nigeria where there are no accurate data and laws are not enforced, the figures may be higher. Newspaper reports abound in Nigeria of industrial accidents in factories mainly owned by expatriates that are poorly equipped with abysmal safety standards that will not be tolerated anywhere else. These accidents have led to deaths, amputation of limbs and permanent disabilities of the workers. Due to low levels of compliance to rules and lack of enforcement of those rules, the company barely loses anything. In many cases, compensations are not paid and because of gross unemployment, the workers cannot protest as there are countless others waiting to take their place.

### **Background of Safety and Health Programs**

Somers and Somers (1984) traced the inception of the modern safety movement to around 1912 with the first cooperative congress and the organization of the National Safety Council. It was at about this time that state workmen's compensation laws were enacted which imposed financial responsibility upon the employer to compensate personnel injured on the job as well as to pay for the expenses of hospitalization. The National safety Council also began to carry out its sensitization campaign of educating employers on the hidden and indirect costs of industry related accidents and diseases. This opened the eyes of employers that operating an unsafe plant is costly and that safety is good business. Here the interest of the employer and employee coincide because the employee does not want to be injured and the employer does not want to be incurring the cost of the employee's injury.

The major concern of this movement was to acquaint the public with the fact that there was in business a high incidence of industrially caused accidents and diseases. The

progress made in the reduction of industrial accidents and diseases has been attributed to the humanitarianism of business. Flippo (1984) states that preserving human life is an objective that requires no explanation and that economics had much to do with the safety movement.

### **Importance of Health and Safety in the Work Place**

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.

### **Moral and Legal Responsibility of Employers**

According to Armstrong (2003), the elimination or at least minimize of health and safety hazard risks is the moral as well as the legal responsibility of employers. An employee ought not to be saddled with the onerous responsibility 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.

### **Economic Reasons**

Governments have come to realize that industrial accidents and disease results in losses for the state (through welfare payments to the disabled, cost of treatment and the loss of the services of the employee). The organizations themselves also sustain losses in terms of litigation fees, fines imposed on them, compensatory damages, lost production, loss of good will 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.

### **Employee Suffering**

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

### **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 as to encroach seriously on the organization's profit margin.

### **Occupational Health and Safety Legislation in Nigeria**

Nigeria as a member of the United Nations has adopted the conventions and recommendations of the International Labor Organization. In addition to the above Nigeria has her own labor law as spelt out in the laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2004). In the Labor Act Cap L1 under Nigeria laws, the Minister of Labor has powers to make regulations for health, safety and welfare of the worker in the workplace. The Factories' act of 2004, the Workmen's compensation act of 1987 and the labor safety, health and welfare bill of 2012 are important documents aimed at protecting the health and safety of the Nigerian worker. In addition to these, the Federal Ministry of Labor and Productivity and the Nigerian Institute of Safety Professionals also have oversight functions.

### **Employers' Duties and Responsibilities**

As an indication of the seriousness that the Nigerian government now attaches to the need to hold employers of labor responsible for their lapses in respect of health and safety issues, a new Labor Bill was passed in 2012. Pedro (2012), reports that the passage of the bill was a consequence of the report of the Joint Committee on Employment, Labor and Productivity, Health and Establishment and Public Service presented to the Nigerian Senate. This bill, the Labor, Safety, Health and Welfare Bill (2012) has stricter sanctions for offenders. This bill enables the State to charge corporate organizations and the firm's directors of criminal offenses where the organizations actions or inactions result in loss of lives and properties.

Though the list is not exhaustive, the following are some of the salient points that indicate the duties and responsibilities of the employer.

- i. The Employer is duty bound under the various health and safety laws to provide for all his employees at all work locations, a work environment that is free from recognized hazards that are causing or that may cause death, serious injury or illness.
- ii. An employer is liable to his employee for injuries which result from a failure to exercise due care.
- iii. The employer is expected to comply with the safety and health standards created by the appropriate regulatory bodies, failure to do so provide for both civil and criminal penalties that should be vigorously enforced by the appropriate authority.
- iv. The employer is also under a duty to furnish his employee with reasonable safe tools and appliances necessary in the performance of the particular work. The employer is not obliged to furnish the safest or best tools, machinery or appliance.

- v. According to Pomeroy (1997), another duty of the employer is to employ a sufficient number of competent employees for the task. He must exercise reasonable care in selecting and retaining competent employees, and he is liable for any injuries resulting from a failure to do so. He must also furnish a sufficient number of employees to carry out the particular task or service.
- vi. The employer must give specific instructions to his employees as to unusual dangers peculiar to the business. This rule applies to the latent and extraneous dangers of which the master himself has knowledge of, or of which, with exercise or ordinary care, he should have had knowledge of.
- vii. The employer is required to display a poster that informs employees of their rights and responsibilities regarding safety and health hazards. (Middemist, Hilt and Greer, 1983)

### **Occupational Health and Safety Violations in Nigeria**

As has been stated earlier there are laws and regulations concerning occupational health and safety in Nigeria but sadly enough the level of compliance to those rules is abysmal in some quarters. While it is all well and good to make laws, those laws are useless if they are not complied with, they cannot be enforced or are enforced only in certain circumstances, for certain people.

Some of the numerous health and safety violations in Nigeria are briefly examined below:

#### **The hours of service act**

This act provides that no employee of a common carrier engaged in moving trains (commercial transportation) should work longer than 16 consecutive hours, within 10 hours thereafter, or within 8 hours, after 16 hours of labor within any 24 hours. This implies that the driver should in any 24 hours have between 8-10 hours of rest. Unfortunately, this is not so with many Nigeria transport companies especially those involved in haulage. Here drivers can drive non-stop with only a few hours of rest snatched either in their vehicle, under the trailer or in company of commercial sex workers.

There is usually no provision by the company for a comfortable resting place for their drivers who are between stations. The outcome of this unfortunate state of affairs is that one has drivers on the steering wheel who are not well rested, not mentally and physically alert and who use drugs trying to stay awake, with their reflexes seriously dulled.

The same is also true for some industries where workers have to do double shifts for more pay without regards to their health. The rate of accidents is usually high. Sadly, not only the workers are at risk but they put others in the same danger as well.

### **The Safety Appliance Act**

The act declares it unlawful for common carrier engaged in interstate commerce to use engines or cars without certain specified safety appliances and equipment. There is a stipulated fine for violating this act. Although the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) and to some extent the various state vehicle inspection offices have tried to produce sanity in this regard, a lot still needs to be done. The most glaring violators of this act include the soft drinks distribution vehicles of some multinational companies.

These vehicles are observed to either breakdown in awkward places thus seriously obstructing the free flow of traffic, or they even ram into residential houses due to faulty brakes and transmissions and worn out threadbare tires thereby causing avoidable accidents leading to unnecessary loss of lives and properties.

Other obvious culprits in this respect are vehicles used by dealers particularly those involved in haulage of lumber. These poorly maintained vehicles emit thick and dark fumes on the highways that greatly impede the vision of other road users and leading to several fatal road traffic accidents. Besides, the thick fumes emitted by these vehicles are a major source of carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas with serious health hazards for those who inhale it.

### **Provision of a safe workplace**

One of the requirements by law from the employer of labor is to provide a safe place for employees to work. Unfortunately, cases abound in the Niger Delta where employees are kidnapped, maimed and killed all in the name of employment. Newspapers reported a series of attacks and rape against female doctors at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) that triggered a strike action by the doctors asking for better protection in 2008 (Ale, 2012; Ogundimu, 2012).

There have also been reported cases of staff of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) been electrocuted apparently because they were not furnished with the proper safety tools and equipment required to do their job. Some PHCN field workers have even been lynched because of a power outage by irate mobs. In recent history, a female teacher was lynched in Northern Nigeria, her corpse and car burnt because she did not allow cheating in an examination. All these have grievous negative implications for the performance and morale of employees. This in turn can lead to distressing situations that can negatively affect their health.

### **Convention 183**

This convention of the International Labor Organization of which Nigeria is a member, states that maternity leave is now 16 weeks instead of 12 weeks. Nigeria has ratified and adopted this convention in principle and in writing but it is yet to be popularized or implemented even in many Government establishments.

### **Employers to safeguard the employees' welfare**

The laws governing labor as enshrined in the Nigeria constitution severally stresses the fact that the employers are to exercise due care in safeguarding their employees' welfare. Sometime in July 2007, major Newspapers in Nigeria reported that officials of National Agency for the Prohibition of traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) arrested two Chinese men who own and operate a bakery in Wuse district of the Federal capital Abuja for caging their workers near an oven and not giving them access to drinking water. What would happen in the case of a fire when their Chinese employers are not around is better imagined. The workers were denied break periods by their Chinese employer in order to obtain maximum productivity from them (Daily Trust, 2007). This is a clear violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It also violates its section 34 subsection 1 (b) and 1 (c) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which states respectively that "No person should be held in slavery of servitude" and that "No person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labor". The UDHR which is the basic international statement of the inalienable and inviolable rights of all human beings recognizes the right of every human person to liberty, to freedom from cruel treatment and freedom from slavery' ( BBC, 2013)

A few years before this (in 2002 to be precise), there was a midnight fire in an Indian plastic factory located at Ikorodu, Lagos where all the Nigerian employees were burnt to death because they were locked in by their Indian employees (The Nigerian Voice, 2011).

Sadly, China and India are members of the United Nations whose article 23 of UDHR maintains, "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment and to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment" ( UDHR, 2008).

The list unfortunately goes on and after the initial public outrage and outcry over the incidents, nothing substantial is heard on the matter until another one happens and references are made to such past events.

In view of all of the above, the next section examines the peculiar conditions that allow such occupational health and safety violations in Nigeria and in most developing countries, and what needs to be done to radically alter these unfortunate trends of events.

### **Conditions That Aid Occupational Health and Safety Violations in Nigeria**

A number of conditions are responsible for the high level of violation of occupational health and safety regulations. These are discussed hereunder.

#### **Lack of Strict Judicial References**

According to the Human Rights Impact Resource Centre (HRIRC, 2009) the lack of strict judicial references means that human rights compliance is not sufficiently embedded in the national law, such as labor law, non-discrimination legislation, health and safety rights in corporations.

Nigeria like many other developing countries was subjected to repressive and undemocratic rule for long periods. This perhaps explains the unwillingness and inability on the part of government to enforce compliance to democratic requirements of human rights.

#### **Weak Legal Structures**

The legal structures in place in Nigeria are weak in terms of the interpretation and applications of the law. When Corporations violate labor laws, the penalty for such violations is ridiculously liberal for these organizations. For example, under the Workmen's Compensation Act as enshrined in the 1999 constitution (section 4), the penalty for violating the requirement that an employer must insure every workman employed by him against injury or death is: "on conviction for a second or subsequent offense to a fine equivalent to the premium payable for the year in question in respect of the number of workmen employed by him or the sum of N2, 000 whichever is greater". It is only recently that the labor safety, health and welfare bill of 2012 have upwardly reviewed the rates of some violations to a fine of N500, 000 for individuals or N2m in the case of a corporate organization. The catch here is that this is enforceable only upon trial and conviction. How many of such cases go on trial even, not to talk of conviction? In most cases, the old laws were hardly enforced as liberal as they were, so the change that is needed is not stricter laws but enforceable laws.

#### **Corruption and Bribery**

This is perhaps the biggest problem in occupational health and safety violations in Nigeria. The Factory's act for instance clearly stipulates the criteria that are to be met by a desiring organization but most times the standards are not met yet the company has a license duly issued by the regulatory body to operate. The license presupposes that all the conditions have been met and all needed equipment and facilities provided. During yearly inspection of facilities, some companies that operate under substandard conditions are certified okay repeatedly on the payment of bribes.

Another aspect of this is that most of these companies either belong to high-ranking government officials or their friends and relatives. Hence even when the inspecting officer is

prepared to do his job the right way, he or she may often have “orders from above” preventing any sanction from being placed on the erring companies.

### **Lack of Corporate Responsibility and Accountability**

Many of the corporations that operate in Nigeria are multinational and they have laws that govern their operations in their parent countries. However, when operating in Nigeria they conveniently forget those laws and operate with a shocking lack of corporate responsibility and accountability. The fact that certain unwholesome practices are tolerated, even accepted in Nigeria ought not to prevent these multinational companies from being socially responsible as if they were in their parent country.

### **Low Educational Level of the Workforce**

More labor intensive industries like agriculture, mining and construction have large workforces, which are mainly poorly educated. This lack of sufficient education usually prevents the workforce from fully understanding the implications of working in hazardous conditions. Even when they do, they are unable to effectively muster a force that will not only demand for but also obtain safer working conditions.

### **Unemployment**

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is alarming so much so that people are ready to work under dehumanizing and unsafe conditions just to have a job. This also holds implications for why they are unable to push for better work conditions. They count themselves lucky for even having the job in the first place so agitating for safer working conditions is not a priority with them. They do not have job security as most of these companies hire them as contract staff or as casual workers.

### **Repressive and Undemocratic Human Rights Records**

Nigeria has been rated by the United Nations as one of the countries with one of the worst human rights abuses. Under such conditions, it is not surprising therefore to see that occupational health and safety regulations that will benefit employees are not being enforced and those violating health and safety laws are getting away with it or with a slap on the wrist at most.

### **Weak National Occupational Health and Safety Standard**

The standard of occupational health and safety in Nigeria is weak hence even when there is some compliance to safety and health regulations, it is regarded as excessive whereas in reality the compliance is just meeting the minimum requirements.

### **Lack of Political Will (The Nigeria Factor)**

Nigeria as a country has always been good at formulating plans but the problem is usually in the implementation. Nigeria’s labor laws though not the best, is in its own way laudable but certain factors generally referred to as the Nigerian factor makes it quite

impossible for the positive effects of the law to be felt. According to Omoregie (1998) these reasons include, lack of sufficient data, deficiencies in the law itself and the method of enforcement, an unstable political climate as a result of frequent changes in government and hence in policies, lack of political will both on the part of government and the citizenry and socio-political indiscipline, unanticipated economic disturbances and institutional weaknesses.

### **Lack of Adequate Information and Statistics**

This is a real problem as most of the statistics and information we have to work with comes from industrialized countries. This has the effect of making occupational health and safety issues look a western problem. Where statistics exist in Nigeria, it is usually unreliable because it is usually based on one sector or on one part of the country. Secondly, employees do not usually have relevant information on the effects that works under hazardous conditions can have on their health and hence there is no concerted agitation for better health and safety conditions at work.

### **The Cost of doing Business in Nigeria**

The entrepreneur in Nigeria is faced with many unique problems in attempting to run a business. Most often than not, he has to provide electricity for his business at a very high cost, provide his own water and sometimes construct a motorable road to his business place. All these tremendously increases the cost of doing business and after spending so much on infrastructure that Government is supposed to provide, he begins to cut corners on provision of a safe place of work for his employees.

### **Cultural Dimension**

Generally, the culture prevalent in a place goes a long way in determining how things will be done. Some organizations have a safety culture or a maintenance culture and accidents will be greatly minimized there than in organizations that do not. Secondly, the culture, traditions and norms existing in the society also play a major role in how people view accidents at work. In most parts of Nigeria, a religious fatality influences people's belief. For instance the belief that if God or a superior being does not allow an accident to happen, it would not, may cause people not to take safety guidelines as seriously as they should. Accidents instead of being attributed to carelessness and faulty equipment (in most cases) are credited to fate, witches and wizards. Instead of adequate safety precautions to be taken and a safe work environment provided, some employers result to fetish rituals based on superstition.

### **Shortage of Professional Labor**

According to the Federal Ministry of Labor and Productivity (2010), some of the existing limitations they are facing are the shortage of professional labor and occupational health and safety officers in the ministry. Unless more hands are employed, the situation may remain so for a long time to come.

### **Inadequate Training of Staff**

Even when an organization including the Federal Ministry of Labor and Productivity is adequately staffed, the performance and productivity of the staff would usually be a function of their level of skill and expertise. The level of skill and expertise on the other hand is a reflection of the standard of education and on the amount of on- the- job training and development. The need to ensure adequate training of staff to meet the challenges of the ever increasing workplace hazards in the globalizing world of work cannot be overemphasized..

### **Funding Challenges**

Due to poor funding, the Federal Ministry of Labor and productivity is ill equipped and financially handicapped in the execution of its duties. This matter needs to be adequately addressed.

### **Improving Occupational Health and Safety Management in Nigeria**

From preceding discussions on the issue of occupational health and safety management especially in Nigeria, it is obvious that something needs to be done and urgently too. Managing a healthy workforce is beneficial to all stakeholders, including government. The onus is therefore on Government, various regulatory bodies, Employees' unions or representatives, and employers of labor to brainstorm on the way forward and to be totally committed to effecting meaningful changes in the occupational health and management environment.

### **Managements' role in improving occupational health and safety**

- i. Management must consciously and intelligently develop and implement health and safety policies. In addition, management should monitor and evaluate the performance of these health and safety policies and make amendments where necessary.
- ii. It should be management's responsibility to educate employees on health and safety hazards and to watch out for conditions that pose a danger for employees' health so that they can be eliminated or reduced.
- iii. Management must communicate in clear terms what constitute safe working conditions and practices to employees and ensure that they follow laid down rules and regulations.

- iv. Management should provide medical advisers who have two basic roles. First to prevent occupational accidents and diseases from occurring to employees and secondly to deal with industrial accidents and diseases when they occur.
- v. Management should also set up safety committees, which should include health and safety experts. The job of the safety committee should include risk assessments, safety audits, advice on health and safety policies and fashion ways of improving health and safety management.
- vi. Management can through its personnel department or a health and safety department specially created to deal with health and safety issues offer free counselling to employees who are affected by occupational accidents and diseases. This is important because employees so affected can suffer untold mental trauma and anguish. Secondly, treatment and support can also be offered to affected employees. Management can also retain the services of employees who are unable to perform the original jobs they were employed to do due to occupational accidents and diseases by drafting them to a different department where they can function if they so desire. This has the important benefit of positively influencing the morale of workers and it gives them a sense of belonging knowing that the organization cares about them.
- vii. Management can create an employee-friendly environment and work conditions by designing tools that are worker friendly, facilities for rest and recreation and other such incentives to improve and maintain the health and wellbeing of employees.
- viii. Management can ensure that workers go on annual paid vacations. This is an avenue for ensuring that employees take a break from the rigors and stress of work. This has the positive effect of relieving stress and improving the mental health of employees.
- ix. Having good retirement plans and post retirement training will make workers not afraid to retire when they cannot continue to work. The incidence of age falsification in the civil and public service, non disclosure of ill health, drivers with poor visual acuity and night watchmen with hearing problems will be things of the past if this is done.

### **Role of Employees Unions**

- a. Employees' Unions are not only to agitate for better pay but also for better health and safety standards. Most times when workers in Nigeria go on strike, many conditions are given to management to ensure their return to work, unfortunately once salaries are increased, the strike is called off and the promises for better working health and safety conditions are swept under the carpet. Employees' union must be coherent, consistent and

focused in their demand for safer and healthier work conditions. They should intelligently convey to management with facts the dangers they face in the course of their work and how ameliorating those conditions will improve their performance.

- b. Workers' unions and associations must seek the proper education of their members so that they can better understand the risks and hazards inherent in their work.
- c. Older and more experienced workers can also mentor new and young workers and encourage them to improve themselves. Leaders of the unions can show exemplary behavior by adhering to health and safety regulations and ensuring that their members do too.
- d. The workers' union is also a very strong source of support for workers who are affected by occupational accidents and diseases.
- e. On the issue of sensitization, enlightenment and education, the workers' union can be very effective at disseminating information. Employees are more likely to listen to one of their own because of the inherent distrust they have for management's motives. Workers' representatives should be involved in management's efforts at communicating to employees what constitute safe working conditions and practices and in ensuring that safety procedures are adhered to.

### **Conclusion**

The era of thinking that, the provision of a safe and healthy environment for work is a business cost that should be avoided by employers or at best provided haphazardly is gone. It has come to the realization of all stakeholders that maintaining a high standard of occupational health and safety is for the benefit of all.

As pointed by the ILO (2009), the prevention of accidents, improvement of working conditions and enforcement of standards are often seen as a cost to business, little is known about the costs of not preventing accidents or poor working conditions.

Fortunately, this is changing as more and more organizations are finding (sometimes after a bitter and costly experience) that it is cheaper to prevent occupational accidents and diseases than deal with its effects. Many of the health and safety violations take place in an industrializing economy such as Nigeria. Foreign firms who are drawn to operate here because of the weak legal structure and an abundant supply of cheap labor perpetuate some of these violations. The intertwined problem of unemployment, bribery and corruption, and a judicial system that is not credible work to further entrench these violations.

It is believed that more than 2 million people die yearly from work related accidents and disease. (World Health Organization, 1998; International Labor Organization, 2009)

Unfortunately, the dearth of data and statistics makes it hard for researchers to estimate the actual number of people so affected. However, the ILO, death rates in many developing countries are 5 to 6 times those in industrialized countries. Even if the figures were at par, these alarming figures call for immediate action if the tide is to be stemmed.

The danger than environmental, biological and mechanical, physical and psychosocial hazards poses to the health and safety of the worker in the workplace is a clear and present one, to pretend otherwise is to deny the obvious.

Lastly, Government, and employers' and workers' organizations must pool all their resources together to ensure that occupational health and safety of every employee is guaranteed.

The laws and acts governing the provision of good, healthy conditions of work must be implemented and enforced. The full wrath of the law must be brought to bear on all violators irrespective of their size, influence and economic contribution. Both employers and employees must come to know that maintaining and improving the health, safety and welfare of the work force are the key to national and economic development.

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