

# The Right to Water: How the People of Ekwusigo Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria are Coping

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**Abstract:** *Water is a very important component of life. It is a common substance on the earth yet very scarce in some localities. This study looked into the water supply problem being experienced by the people of Ekwusigo local Government Area of Anambra State. 220 copies of questionnaires were randomly distributed to four sampled communities in the area. Results indicate that the major constraint to right to water in Ekwusigo Local Government Area is negligence on the part of government. Majority depend on private and community owned boreholes for water supply. Recommendations were made on how to overcome the problem.*

**Keywords:** common substance, borehole, constraint, negligence, component

## 1. Introduction

Every human being has the right to potable water supply. This right to water has been protected under international human right law. The human right to water is recognized in international human right treaties, declaration and other standards. The need for water as a basic necessity of life cannot be over emphasized. It is stated in the Millennium Development Goals(MDG) to ensure that all rural areas have potable water in the required quality and quantity. The supply for water has to be constant. Ezedike, (1990) argued that safe, adequate and accessible supplies of water combined with proper sanitation were surely basic needs and necessity of man, and have recently become essential for rural development in Nigeria and many other developing nations especially in Africa. Njoku (2005) observed that Everyone who desires to remain strong and healthy must have abundant supply of water each day in order to avoid trouble with internal organs. The supply for water to consumers has to be constant. Unfortunately, in most local government areas in Nigeria, scarcity of water is one serious problem confronting rural dwellers. Where potable water is available, it is hardly adequate.

## 2. The Problem

Lack of potable water is a big problem confronting the people of Ekwusigo Local Government Area in Anambra State. The supply is not adequate to meet the demand of the people. The water scheme project in the area have been abandoned by government. People are left with the option of fetching water from other sources of water which are mostly far away from their homes and the quality of such water is not guaranteed. The sight of people pushing wheelbarrow in search of water, and carrying jerry cans on car boots and on motorcycle to fetch water is common in the area. It is therefore evident that water supply is a major challenge confronting the people of Ekwusigo LGA. The aim of this study is to achieve potable water supply in Ekwusigo L.G.A. in order to improve the quality of life of the people. The study will also unveil the inhibiting factors to the provision and supply of accessible potable water to the people.

## 3. Study Area

Ekwusigo is one of the 21 Local Government Areas in Anambra state of Nigeria. It is located between the coordinates 5 58' 24" N and 6 49'43" E of the equator. It covers a land area of about 116.41km with a population of 158,429(NPC 2007). Ekwusigo L.G.A. is bounded by Idemili south LGA to the north, Ihiala to the south, Ogburu to the west and Nnewi south to the east. Ekwusigo is made up of four (4) major communities; Ozubulu, Orifite, Ichi and Ihembosi.

The area is under equatorial tropical climate, characterized by rainy and dry season. Rainy season lasts from April to October and dry season from November to March of every year. Annual Rainfall is about 2200mm with high rainfall intensity except during the August break which does not last up to two weeks. The dry season is characterized by high temperatures between 33c – 35c and high relative humidity which is up to 90%.

Ekwusigo is drained by two main rivers, the Orifite River and the Ihembosi River. The Orifite river divides the study area into two. Ekwusigo river rises from Nnewi north L.G.A. and flows across the area in an east west direction while the Ihembosi River flows into the study area from the southern part and continues north-west towards Ozubulu before flowing out of the study area into Ogburu L.G.A.

Ekwusigo L.G.A. is located on the hilly part of the lower rainforest belt of Nigeria. The nature of the land which is hilly is a major determinant of the availability of other sources of water apart from rainfall. There is uneven distribution of water in the area especially during the dry season and this has led people to tap ground water as a more reliable alternative by drilling boreholes.

## 4. Water as a Resource

Akudike (1999) noted that "after air, water is next in importance to human life and existence". Njoku (2005) equally observed that water is the key to man's survival. He

further stated that man must have water to drink, wash and to sustain industrial growth, transportation and recreation, Njoku's observation was corroborated by Olemeforo (1997). Water therefore is an important environmental resource to man. It is not only a basic need and necessity of man's survival, it is necessary in sustaining the world's ecological system Njoku (2005). It has been observed that the human body can survive without food for several weeks without any harm but not without water for a few days Akudike (1999). Indeed water plays a significant role in the physical, economical and socio-political well-being and development of man.

### 5. Right to Water

According to United Nations (CESC General Comment ,2002) ) "The right to water entitles everyone to sufficient safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses". This right is recognised and protected by international human rights law. The human right to water places the main responsibility upon government to ensure that people can enjoy "sufficient, safe, accessible and affordable water, without discrimination". Most especially, governments are expected to take responsible steps to avoid a contaminated water supply and ensure there is no water access distinction amongst citizens. The human right to water is in itself essential for life and dignity, but it is also the foundation for achieving other human rights, including the right to health and the right to development. Navi (2008). The United Nations proclamation of the International Drinking water supply and sanitation decade (IDWSSD 1980) recognized the right of all humans to have access to a minimum of potable water for the daily needs. The accessibility to water is an aspect to be considered in the provision of potable water to the people. It is very pertinent to know that many communities in the third world countries, especially in Nigeria lack most basic amenities including potable water. In essence, most of the people still depend on natural means. Lack of access to safe drinking water affects women and children in particular. This is because they do the collection and carrying of water when drinking water is not at home and this is a very big burden on them. Under normal circumstance, households should have "reasonable access" to safe water supply. According to world Bank report (1996) reasonable access means „sufficiently close so that family members do not spend a disproportionate part of the day fetching water.“ Akudike (1999) quoting Igbozurike (1985) considered 500 meters as a working figure for any water source to be considered accessible to household members. Unfortunately, most of the households in the study area neither have potable water supply, nor do they have easy and "reasonable access" to the water supply sources. Public taps that once supplied water to the locals are now dry. Water pipes have been destroyed by government construction projects which are hardly competed before another government takes over leadership. Nest (1991), observed that no social service has suffered as much from the neglects of the rural areas in Nigeria as the supply of potable water. Even in state budget little priority is given to provision of drinking water.

### 6. Government Participation in the Provision of Potable Water

Government has the obligation to ensure the realization of human right to water and sanitation as contained in the United Nations report on "realizing the human right to water and sanitation", Catarine (2014). According to Article 2(1) of the ICESCR governments are expected to take steps to realize economic and socio-political development of all places in the nation using all the resources available to them. The establishment of the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1989 and other similar projects after that was to improve the quality of the rural dwellers including the provision of adequate drinking water stressing the importance of good water to man. Lack of continuity on the part of government office holders is one factor that has militated against provision of basic infrastructure including potable water in the rural areas.

### 7. Methodology

Primary data was the main source of information for this study. Others include population figures from national population commission, map of Anambra State from ministry of lands and survey, and the Anambra State water board. In carrying out this work, a reconnaissance survey of the available water sources and their spatial location in the study area was carried out. The researcher equally looked into the location of these sources of water, the population they are suppose to serve, the distance taken to reach each source, the state of the water schemes and the impact of various agencies in the provision of water to the study area. Oral interviews were conducted . The people interviewed include housewives, children's, town union officials, elderly members of the communities and community leaders.

Questionnaire: Two different sets of questionnaire were distributed among two different sets of people. The first set for the individuals in the community and the second for the community leaders.

The techniques adopted in the sample design is the stratified random technique, the presence of the streams were used to divide the area into 2 parts labelled group 1 and 2 for easy data collection. 220 copies of the first set of questionnaire were distributed to the individuals in the communities.

**Table 1: Questionnaire distribution**

<i>Community</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Number Distributed</i>	<i>Number Returned</i>
Ichi	36,439	51	50
Ihemboosi	38,023	53	50
Orifite	39,607	55	53
Ozubulu	44,360	61	57
Total	158,429	220	210

Source: Author's fieldwork 2014

The questionnaire was structured in close and open-ended formats to derive information on the supply of water to the households, the source of water supply, accessibility of water source and socio-economic factors. The second questionnaire was administered among community leaders

in the sample area. A total of 25 questionnaires were distributed.

**Table 2:** Questionnaire distribution

Community	Number Given	Number Collected
Ichi	6	6
Ihembosi	6	6
Orifite	6	6
Ozubulu	7	7
Total	25	25

Source: Author's fieldwork 2014

The questions were centred on the subject matter, i.e. provision of water to the community. In the analysis and presentation of data collected from both oral interviews and questionnaire survey, diagrams, tables, percentages and charts were used where appropriate.

## 8. Water Supply

At present the general situation of water supply in the study area is quite unsatisfactory. Among the sources of water supply available to the people are rainfall (roof catch), spring, water vendor (tanker) and borehole.

**Table 3:** Reliance on Sources by Households

Source	A	B	C	D	Total	%
Rainfall	11	12	13	11	47	22.4
Spring	2	6	3	6	17	8
Water vendor	7	10	12	10	39	18.6
Borehole	30	22	25	30	107	51
River	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	50	50	53	57	210	100

Source: Author's Fieldwork August 2014

KEY: A= Ichi  
 B= Ihembosi  
 C= Orifite  
 D= Ozubulu

This table shows the sources of water available to the four (4) communities interviewed. Rain water accounts for most of the water supplied in the area during the rainy season, its reliance is due to the fact that the source is seasonal. When dry season sets in, the roof catch gives way to the other sources of water which are spring, water vendor and borehole. Borehole water records a relatively high percentage (51%) among the other sources of water. This is because a sizeable number of boreholes have been sunk in each community. In Ihembosi community alone there are roughly twenty-four individual boreholes located throughout the nine villages that make up the community. The boreholes serve as water supply sources to the households that own them throughout the year and also to their neighbours during the dry season. In some cases the people are forced to pay money to enable them fetch water. Where money is not involved people queue on long lines at the borehole before they can get water. Sometimes after spending reasonable number of hours they end up not getting the water.

Only about (8%) of the sampled population depend on spring water. This is because the location of these streams are not easily accessible. However, the dependence on this

source increases during the dry season, especially during serious water scarcity.

The roles of water vendors are high during dry season. These are the people that use trucks which have water tank on them to pump water from the rivers into their tankers and in turn sale them to people in their household storage tanks. The non-accessibility of the rivers discourage people from the direct reliance on them for their source of water. People prefer going to spring as the rivers are far away from settlements.

## 9. Spatial Distribution of Sources

The area has nearly an even distribution of water supply sources which is mainly boreholes. These boreholes are privately owned and few others built by community efforts (that includes churches). As a result of this type of ownership, the availability of water is not stable because sources of water are operated and run at owners will or direction.

Little or no effort is made by government in the provision of potable water to the study area. Presently, there are four water schemes in Ekwusigo namely Ichi rural water scheme, Ihembosi rural water scheme, Orifite rural water scheme and Ozubulu rural water scheme. Out of these water schemes in Ekwusigo, Only the Ichi water scheme is still operating which is grossly inadequate for the population of the study area. The others were neither completed nor commissioned. The very few that have access to government provided water, do not enjoy the full right to water in terms of sufficiency and accessibility.

The people are left to source for water on their own. About 22.4% of the respondent depend on natural sources of water, that is, rainfall and spring water, 18.6% depend on water vendors, 14.8% have borehole in their compound while 36.2% depend on other individual borehole or community owned borehole for their source of water. Based on this, it became necessary to know whether there are people or, town union or churches in the community working towards enhancing the water supply system in the study area and how they are doing it.

The answers and reports were provided by the 25 respondents among whom are community leaders, priests, and spokesmen. These people attest to the fact that some good spirited individuals provide water freely to the community. Churches also provide water freely to the people. They do this by providing some taps outside their compound for the public to fetch water from. Most of these borehole sources are not reliable because they do not run on daily and regular basis as the owner mostly rely on electricity power to pump the water. These individuals do not only provide taps outside their compound for the general public to fetch water from, they also let their relatives and neighboring compounds have direct access to the water by letting them tap the water into their compounds. A situation was observed in Ihembosi where the water was distributed up to a distance of more than 3km to a particular compound. This water is provided at owner's will.



Most of the churches in the study area are not left behind in the struggle for the provision of water for the general public. Some of them open their gates occasionally for people to fetch water within the church compound while a few provide taps outside the compound and the water run periodically within the week.

There is absolutely little or no effort made by the town union or the community leaders of the different communities in the study area in terms of provision of water for the general public. The reason being that over the years funds raised for such projects usually end up in a few private pockets. Where the projects were finished maintenance becomes a problem and over time they are abandoned.

## 10. Summary

The researcher identified that the major constraint to the right to water of the people of Ekwusigo L.G.A. is negligence by the Government. This has caused the people of Ekwusigo not to have sufficient, safe, accessible and affordable water for their household needs as stipulated by the United Nations. The government and community water schemes in the area are not functional because they were not completed for reasons ranging from diversion of funds into private pockets to misplacement of priorities whereby the money for the provision of potable water is used for other non-valuable project.

To address this problem of deprivation of the right to water in the study area, government should rise up to their responsibilities and obligations by ensuring that people enjoy their right to water as protected under the international human right Law.

## 11. Conclusion

Scarcity of water is a serious problem facing the people of Ekwusigo Local Government Area. From the findings of this study, it has been identified that of all the sources of water in the area, none of them was provided by government whose responsibility is to provide basic amenities to the people. Majority of the people depend on other individuals, groups or community boreholes as their source of water for their household needs.

The researcher therefore concludes that there is lack of finance to the water corporation. Government should allocate more funds to the corporation for effective execution of this task.

The existing rate of water supply in the area is not enough compared to the demand for it.. This is well below the target set by the Federal Government under the third national development plan.

It was also observed that the distance to the sources of water supply in the study area is a major problem to the people of Ekwusigo. A lot still needs to be done first by the government and the community to achieve better and lasting potable water supply in the study area.

## 12. Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that the government and its various agencies responsible for the provision of water to the rural areas and the community should help in the following ways; The community and town union leaders should follow the example set by Oka village to have a functional rural water supply. The efforts of the people of Oka village in Ichi is commendable and worthy of emulation.

When water projects are set up, the people on their part should contribute to the maintenance and protection.

Wealthy individuals among them can still do more by drilling more boreholes to help the community. Government should partner with the communities to complete the abandoned water projects in order to provide potable water to the communities. This will make life easy for the rural people. This is necessary because sanitation is tied to availability of water and availability of water reduces the risk of waterborne diseases. Government should also conduct via the appropriate agencies regular inspection of all water projects to make sure they are in good working conditions and maintained.

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