Fire Fighting Preparedness in Idemili North of Anambra State

Obioji, Josephine Nneka & Eze, Kierian Tochukwu

Department of Public Administration and Local Government Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

ABSTRACT
Fire outbreak in public places such as market places and private homes is a recurring issue in Nigeria, and it is a leading cause of lives and properties loss in Nigerian markets. In order to curtail this problem, an evaluation of active fire protection measures in Idemili North of Anambra State was conducted with the aim of generating guidelines that can reduce the spread of fire outbreaks in the Council. The primary research data were Focus Group Interviews administered to the selected people, and the direct observations of the current conditions of the Council. Among the results are: fire protection devices in the Council are not adequate; most of the people in the Council do not know how to operate firefighting equipment because they do not respond to calls for training on how to use them. Among the recommended guidelines are: the adequacy and functionality of fire protection devices should be ensured by the government of Council and training for the people should be enforced by the Council.

Keywords: Fire, Fire-fighting and protection, Anambra, Nigeria, Protection.

INTRODUCTION
At the maiden meeting of the present Federal Executive Council (FEC), President Muhammadu Buhari explained why he created the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management. His reasons were not far-fetched. The country was contending with a lot of humanitarian issues, which were occasioned by unforeseen situations like the Boko Haram insurgency that has displaced thousands of people in the Northeast region of the country, flood disasters, fire outbreaks, communal conflicts and erosions among others. People affected by these unfortunate incidents no doubt needs support from wherever it can come from, especially the government. Although the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has been on ground to tackle such cases at the national level and the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) at the states, President felt that creating the new Ministry was necessary “to fully institutionalise our various interventions that support some of the poorest and most distressed citizens of our country” (Osiberoha,, 2019,P8).

But at the bottom of Nigeria’s humanitarian crisis is the ill preparedness of the agencies mandated to either nip foretold disasters in the bud or mitigate the effects of unforeseen disasters on the victims. Thus, a million humanitarian affairs ministries across the country without the enablement to function effectively will absolutely not yield the desired result. For instance, the recent fire outbreaks in Onitsha, Nnewi and Nkpor in Anambra State claimed lives and razed over 500 lock-up shops on Iweka Street Market and residential houses respectively. Although, the state has a Fire Service Department attached to the Ministry of Power and Water Resources, they were just not prepared to intervene. But for firemen from the neighbouring Delta State Fire Service that were drafted to put out the fire, more causalities could have been recorded.

There must always be excuses for failure. But where was the Anambra State Fire Service? They did not come into the picture and no explanation has been offered. Were they so much ill-
equipped that they could not even stage an attempt to save the situation despite having three fire stations located in strategic places in Onitsha? Fire outbreaks are precipitous and therefore require strategic reactions from the Fire service, the agency trained and equipped to respond to such situations. But as seen in the Onitsha incident, this is not always the case. Hence, The paper examined the state of the Fire Service in the state. The findings showed that while the state government has come to the realisation that the Fire Service is an important agency of government and have steadily upgraded their capacities, state remains hapless fire fighters as inferno continues to wreak havoc in cities across state.

**Contextualizing Fire Fighting in General**

Vigorous fire protection in a popular parlance is the way to extinguish fires with the fire protection devices when they break out in private and public places such as residential houses and markets among others. Ideas on the uses of installed fire protection devices in buildings are very important in tackling fire emergencies; otherwise their installations will not be useful (Kachenje, Kihila, & Nguluma, 2010). The achievement of fire safety is enhanced by a good system of measures at both management and physical levels that collectively interact to give a comprehensive system of fire safety (Kincaid, 2012; Scottish Government, 2008).

Fire fighting comprises the techniques and equipment used to extinguish fires and limit the damage caused by them. Fire fighting consists of removing one or more of the three elements essential to combustion—fuel, heat, and oxygen or of interrupting the combustion chain reaction. From the view above, safety is taken to mean the protection of the occupants of a building (and to a lesser extent their possessions) from accident. Security is taken to mean protection from willful attack these occupants, their possessions may suffer as a result of fire outbreak (Marsh, 1985). Safety has to do with sheer accident, while security deals with someone’s willful intent.

Fire outbreak in public and private places is a recurring issue in Nigeria and is now a serious challenge (Federal Fire Service of Nigeria, 2016). Worldwide, the different technological advancements in fire safety for commercial and industrial facilities have emerged (Menon and Vakil, 2016). However, fire outbreaks in markets are still the leading causes of lives and properties loss in Nigerian markets. Active fire protection in this context is the way to extinguish fires with the fire protection devices when they break out in markets. Ideas on the uses of installed fire protection devices in buildings are very important in tackling fire emergencies; otherwise their installations will not be useful (Kachenje et al., 2010). The achievement of fire safety is enhance by a good System of measures at both management and physical levels that collectively interact to give a comprehensive system of fire safety (Kincaid, 2012; Scottish Government, 2008). Fire Outbreak in market places is a recurring issue in Nigeria and is now a serious challenge (Federal Fire Service of Nigeria, 2016). Worldwide, the different technological advancements in fire safety for commercial and industrial facilities have emerged (Menon and Vakil, 2016). However, fire outbreaks in markets are still the leading causes of lives and properties loss in Nigerian markets.

**METHODOLOGY**

**The Study Area**

The general study area of this research is Anambra state. However, to achieve efficiency, the study area of the research was limited particularly to two Local Governments in Anambra state viz: Nnewi North L.G.A and Idemili North L.G.A.

The choice of these three local governments was based on three reasons: the location of each of the three local governments in the three (3) different senatorial districts of Anambra state, which thus covers the different regions in Anambra state; the divergence of the nature of disaster occurrences witnessed in each of the three local governments (whereas Anambra West is known for flooding, Nnewi North is known for erosion and building collapse, and Idemili North is known for fire disaster, inter-communal conflicts and erosion); and the rise in occurrence of
disasters within these local governments in recent times. We are going to concentrate on Idemili North.

Sources of Data Collection
In the process of carrying out this research, the data used were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sourced data were obtained from oral interview with the staff of ANSEMA, discussion with the members of the focus groups across the three local governments, direct personal observation of the researcher, and Self-Reported information from people of the research area.

The secondary sourced data were obtained from already written books published and unpublished which were found related and relevant to the study such as journal on disaster management, emergency management and the risk management, textbooks, newspapers, good government documentaries, internet, past students’ research, reports etc.

Method of Primary Data Collection
- **Oral Structured Interview**: This method of data collection was used only on the staff of ANSEMA. This is because it is difficult to gather all the staff for a focus group discussion as they are engrossed with their jobs in their respective offices. It is quite helpful to the researcher as it helped to provide direct and in-depth information on the stance of the members of ANSEMA on the subject matter under study.

- **Focus Group Discussion**: This method of data collection was employed on gathering information from the members of the research area. It was adopted because it is convenient for gathering information from a large sample of people who will be difficult to be individually interviewed. The focus group number of this study varies according to the research areas; for Anambra west local government, 36 persons made up the focus group; for Idemili North local government, 20 persons composed the focus group; and for Nnewi North local government, 8 persons made up the focus group. The stake holders of this focus groups consisted of people directly affected by disaster, the villagers, the witnesses of disaster occurrence events and health practitioners (only used in Anambra West).

- **Direct Personal Observation**: This method of data collection was used in all research areas. It was used by the researcher to obtain evidence of disaster occurrence, the evidence of the extent to which disaster recovery function of ANSEMA has impacted on disaster victims and environments, and other relevant information regarding the research area. Hence, it enabled the researcher to obtain information which might not verily be given out by members of the research areas, the staff of ANSEMA and by scholars.

- **Self-Reported Data**: This method of data collection was not readily employed by the researcher, but arose out of the individual report of the people of the research area such as the report of the King of Ukwalla community in Anambra West upon visit to his house about the plight of his people as a result of flood and cholera outbreak. This method of data collection was paramount as it helped to augment the researcher’s already gathered information on the subject matter.

Background of Idemili North Local Government
Idemili North local government area is one of the twenty-one (21) local governments in present day Anambra state. It was created out of the extinct Idemili local government area that consisted of the modern day Idemili North and Idemili South on October 1, 1996 by Late Sani Abacha (GCFR). This local government area derived its name from the famous Idemili River which has its source from Agulu Lake in Anaocha local government area, but flowing through most communities in Idemili North and South, before joining with River Niger at Iyi-owa in Onitsha (Nduagha, 2014). Idemili North local government has the headquarters and seat of government situated in Ogidi, the ancestral home of the late famous scholar “Chinua Achebe”.

Geographically, Idemili North lies between latitude 6°07’ N and 6°12’ N and longitude 6°49’ E and 7°0’ E. It is bounded to the North by Ogbunike in Oyi local government area, to the South by
Idemili South local government area, to the East by Njikoka local government area, and to the West by Onitsha North, Onitsha South and Ogbaru local government areas (as shown in the map). It has a landmass of 43.756km² and its soil is ferruginous, hydromorphic and undulating varying from deep red and brown porous soil derived from sandstone and clay (Phil-Eze & Aratoke, 2017). It is this undulating topographic nature of their soil that accounts for the numerous erosion disasters in different locations in this local government area.

**Figure 4:** Map of Anambra state showing Case Study center – Idemili North Local Government Area

**Source:** Cartography Department of National Population Commission Anambra State.
Demographically, Idemili North local government area is densely populated with a population density of 4959 per Km²; partly because of the existence of major markets in the area such as the Ogidi Building Materials market, the Obosi Mgbuka market, Electrical and electronics spare parts market Obosi, Nkpor Motor spare parts markets (Old and New), etc. The 2006 national census puts the population of Idemili North local government area at 431,005 with 219,223 males and 211,782 females (National Population Commission, 2009); however, contemporarily, they are estimated to be 620,240 persons (City Population 2019; National Bureau of Statistics, 2019), which places them first on the ladder of local governments with the largest population in Anambra state constituting about 10.32% of the total population of Anambra state.

The population of Idemili North unlike that of Anambra West, constitute solely of people of Igbo origin who make up the ten (10) communities in the local government area. These communities include: Ogidi, Abatete, Eziowelle, Oraukwu, Ideani, Abacha, Uke, Umuoji, Nkpor and Obosi. These communities according to Nduagha (2014) are linked up by historical and cultural ties which accounts for the legendary of some of them being siblings to each other (e.g Nkpor, Abatete and Umuoji). Inhabitants of the communities in Idemili North are alleged to be migrants from different places such as Nri, Aguleri, Awka and Umunachi.

From ecological and climatic perspective, Idemili North local government area has the natural terrain typical to that of a tropical rainforest. However, human activities have transformed it to derived savanna biome in most parts of the local government area. Traces of forest are still found in areas designated for idol worship and evil forest in communities like Abatete, Nkpor, Ogidi and Umuoji despite the human activities that is orchestrating rapid disappearance of the natural constituents of this locale.

Idemili North local government area has a tropical climate condition which explains the reason for its experience of rain from April through to October and its absence from February through to April. Consequently, this local government area has an average rainfall of about 1524mm annually, two seasons (rainy and dry) and a brief period of cold and dusty weather (harmattan) experienced in December to February (Muoghalu & Okonkwo, 1989; Phil-Eze & Aratoke, 2017).
It has in its possession, rivers and streams such as the Nkpukpa River in Ogidi, the Oil mill River in Abatete, the Amiagba River in Abatete, the Ododo River in Nkpor, the Nkisi River in Nkpor and the prominent Idemili River that flowed through several of its communities. Electorally, Idemili North local government area has twelve (12) wards. Each community other than Ogidi and Umuoji has one ward, whereas these mention two communities have two (2) apiece. These wards include: Umuoji I, Umuoji II, Abatete, Ezioiwelle, Abacha, Oraukwu, Ideani, Obosi, Nkpor, Uke, Ogidi I and Ogidi II. Consequently, the local government has twelve (12) ward councilors representing each of the above named wards.

Socio-culturally, Idemili North local government area people are generally hospitable and peaceful. Although, from time to time symptoms of violent nature is expressed amongst the people of Nkpor, Obosi and Ogidi who are periodically engaging in violent inter-communal conflicts in which lots of lives are lost. The entire Idemili North communities are culturally and linguistically bound. Little wonder, they generally have python (Eke) as a common totem, which serves as a representative of their deity and a custodian of their cultures and tradition. In reality, the Eke Idemili (Idemili Python) is accorded a high respect amongst the people of Idemili North that one who kills it or who founds it dead on his land is meant to conduct a ritual of funeral rites. Apart from this, the Idemili people are rich in cultural heritage and festivals, prevalently the Mranwu (Masquerade festivals), and the Ji Ofuu (New yam) festivals. Prominent amongst the festivals in Idemili North local government are the Nwafor-Ogidi festival, the Uzo-iyi Umuoji festival, the 4days Iwa-Ji Obosi festival, the Ime-aro Ezioiwelle festival, the Ilo-mnuo Ezioiwelle festival, the Ntu festival of Nkpor people, the Iri-ede festival of Abacha people, the Omaliko Abatete festival etc.

Occupationally, the people of Idemili North local Government Area are basically traders. This is as a result of the presence of large markets situated in its geographical territory as has been noted in this context above, also because of its nearness to the capital city of Onitsha which houses the largest market in Sub-saharan West Africa (Onitsha Main Market) and other subsidiary markets like Ochanja market, Ose Market, etc. Another occupation also prevalent amongst the people of this local government is farming and artisanship, although not in magnitudinal comparison to trading. They are into this occupation as a result of the fertile nature of their land, although, these lands are sometimes subject to erosion because of its low compactibility ratio (Phil-Eze, 2002). This local government area also houses quite a member of public servants serving in different capacities to ensure that the goal of the society is attained.

**State Government Agencies in Disaster Management in Nigeria: Anambra State Emergency Management Agency**

The structure of every federalist country like Nigeria is one in which there is division of authority and responsibility along the devolved levels of government in existence. The federal structure of Nigeria is one that distinctly and officially mapped out three levels of government – the federal, the state and the local government. In line with the existence of these three tiers of government which constitute the federation of Nigeria, authorities and responsibilities are strategically shared among them by the laws of the country comprising of the Constitution and other laws that govern the operation and activities within the country. The whole gamut of effects which disasters pose to a society is something that can never be overemphasized. Hence, disaster management is not a function to be restricted only to the national government as no one knows where, when and how it will occur and the corresponding effect.

It is incognizance of this and to ensure quick response two disaster emergencies that day Nigerian government under degree No.12 of 1999, S.8 (1) established for each state of the federation a state emergency management committee or agency (SEMA). According to NDMF (2010), the establishment of State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) will be backed up by state
legislation which shall also make provisions for local government in each state to establish authorities with similar functions. It stated further that SEMA shall be a body corporate with perpetual succession and may sue or be sued in its corporate name. The S.8 (2) of the Decree No.12 of 1999 also provided for the establishment of governing council for SEMA which shall be constituted by the following persons:

i. The Deputy Governor of the state, who shall be the chairman

ii. The secretary to the State Government

One representative from the following:

iii. The State Ministry of Agriculture

iv. The State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

v. The State Ministry of Health

vi. The State Ministry of Information

vii. The State Ministry of Education

viii. The State Ministry of Works

ix. The State Ministry of Water Resources

x. The State Fire Service

xi. The Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria in the State

xii. The State Ministry of Environment

xiii. The State Environmental Protection Agency

xiv. The State Ministry of Urban And Regional Planning/Lands And Survey

xv. The State Ministry of Justice

xvi. The State Ministry of Local Government And Chieftaincy Affairs

xvii. The Disaster Response Unit (DRU) within The State/Geo-Political Zone

xviii. The Nigerian Police Force

xix. The Federal Road Safety Corps

xx. Directorate of Road Traffic Services

xxi. The Nigerian Security And Civil Defense Corps

xxii. The Nigerian Red Cross Society

xxiii. The State Ministry of Finance

xxiv. The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency in Coastal States

xxv. National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA)

xxvi. Such Institutions/Voluntary Organizations as may be determined from time to time by The Council, and

xxvii. The Head of the State Emergency Management Agency as Member/Secretary

Similarly, the functions of the state government in management of disaster are infused in the functions of SEMA as well as the SEMA Council. This was the benchmark upon which S.9 of Decree No.12 of 1999 outlined the functions of the State government in disaster management under the function of the State Committee and they include:

a. To notify SEMA of any natural or other disasters occurring within the state.

b. To respond to any disaster within the state and to seek assistance from the agency if it deems fit in each circumstance.

c. To carry out disaster management activities in the state as may from time to time be recommended by the agency; and

d. To be accountable to the agency for all funds accruing to it for the purpose of discharging it functions.

Nevertheless, the NDMF (2010) crystal-clearly stipulated that the state government through the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) shall perform the following disaster management functions:

i. Formulate policy on all activities relating to disaster management in the state.
ii. Coordinate plans and programmes for efficient and effective response to disaster in the state

iii. Monitor and provide feedback to NEMA on the state of preparedness of all organizations and agencies who may contribute to disaster management within the state.

iv. Collate data and report from relevant agencies in the state so as to enhance forecasting, planning and field operations of disaster management and supply same to NEMA for planning purposes.

v. Educate the public on disaster prevention and control measures within the state.

vi. Coordinates and promotes research activities relating to disaster management in the state.

vii. Coordinate and facilitate the provisions of necessary resources for search and rescue operations and other types of disaster curtailment activities within the state.

viii. Mobilize support and resources from the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) when damages and the need assessments are considered beyond the capacity of the state to respond.

ix. Facilitate the enabling legislation for the establishment of Local Emergency Management Authority (LEMA) for all the Local Governments in the state.

x. Work closely with LEMA for distribution of relief materials to disaster victims.

xi. Perform such other functions which, in the opinion of SEMA Governing Council are required for the purpose of enhancing disaster management in the state.

Fire Disasters in Anambra State: The Idemili Experience

Fire disaster is one phenomenal variable contained in hypothesis one as a nature disaster managed by ANSEMA. Across the different data collection means, different results on ANSEMA managing fire disaster were obtained. The picture below captures the incidence:

**Figure 1: Ochanja Market Fire Disaster 2019**

*Source: Ikechukwu Okeke (Disaster Victim)*
The members of Anambra West focus group had divergent views towards this scenario. Whereas 5 out of 27 members reached were of the opinion that ANSEMA manages flood disaster, 6 were of the opinion that ANSEMA do not manage fire disaster whereas the remaining 16 persons honestly stated that they don’t know. Among the people that stated that ANSEMA manages fire disaster, Mrs Orakwelu Georgina from Iyiora was of the assertion: “that since ANSEMA is a disaster management agency and manages flood here (Anambra West), they must be managing fire disaster also”.

In contradiction to this Mr. Onwuatu Ojoma from Odomagwu stated that “there was a massive wildfire outbreak in about 4 hectares of their rice farm, yet no one came to neither stop it nor compensate them”. He went further to state that he has never heard nor seen ANSEMA managing fire disaster. Mr. Oneta Philip from Oroma Etiti added that fire disaster management is solely the responsibility of the fire service of the state and not that of ANSEMA.

In Idemili North, no member of the focus group agreed that ANSEMA manages fire disaster other than Miss Ezenwaka Makuachukwu who stated that ANSEMA officials are always seen at the fire disaster screen to inspect the scene and probably to quench the fire. 11 out of the remaining 15 members of this focus group vehemently stated that ANSEMA does not manage fire disaster. In the words of Mr. Ezike Onyebuchi from Nkpor:

*Which ANSEMA manages fire disaster? They don’t manage anything, the Nkpor Junction fire incidence of 2015, did you see them there? The electrical market fire incidence in Obosi, did you see them there? They don’t manage any fire disaster.*

As an addendum to his view, Mr. Mmuoghalu Ekene from Umuoji stated that the Agency is only good at coming to inspect places after fire have destroyed it and nothing more. He added that they neither respond immediately to fire disaster nor provide relief to the victims. The remaining four (4) members of this focus group were indifference stating categorically that they don’t know neither have they seen ANSEMA managing fire disasters.

In Nnewi North, 3 out of the 8 members of the focus group were of the opinion that ANSEMA manages fire disasters, another group of 3 persons disagreed while the remaining 2 persons were indifferent. According to Mr. Innocent Onyekaba from Nnewichi:

*there has never been a major fire incidence in Anambra state without ANSEMA and fire service turning up. These two agencies work hand-in-hand.*

Also, Mr. Andrew Orizu from Otolo who contravened his (Mr. Onyekaba’s) opinion stated that the two agencies (State Fire Service and ANSEMA) are different. He added that ANSEMA do not participate in managing fire disaster rather their head (leader) and some of their delegates are always seen coming with either the governor or some other dignitaries to all disaster sites, be it fire or building collapse for media coverage of their personality.

In the interview conducted at SEMA office Awka, although the 31 interviewed persons stated that fire disaster falls within the framework of disasters managed by ANSEMA. None of the interviewees accepted to having had immediate response to fire disaster cases, rather Mrs. Nkemdilim Okafor of the Operations unit stated thus:

*Fire incidences are essential part of the disasters managed by us (ANSEMA). But this disaster is managed through the state fire service. If you observe, we share this building with them, so in any case of fire incidence, they are the ones to go because that is where they specialize...*

From her statement, it is visibly clear that the management of fire disaster is done by the state fire service and that any role played by ANSEMA in this nature of disaster management is a passive role.

This augments the view of Ejikeme (2017) who opined that the prevalence of fire disaster in Anambra state is sequel to the dysfunctionality of ANSEMA who are more or less not managing
fire outbreaks, and the state fire service who are not only ill-equipped but are also having non-functional stations across the state. Similarly, Uche (2013) citing instances of Ebonyi fire disaster of February 2, 2012 and Bornu fire disaster of May 14, 2012 asserted that NEMA has intervened in fire disasters but SEMA (including ANSEMA) and other counterparts of NEMA at the local level have not been seen managing any fire disasters.

Table 1: Report of Fire Statistics from 2011 to 2017 and Minor Additions from 2018 to 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fire Stations</th>
<th>Year of Occurrence</th>
<th>No. of Response call</th>
<th>No. of Rescued people</th>
<th>No. of People Dead</th>
<th>Cost of Incidence in Millions of US $</th>
<th>Cost of Recovered in Millions of US $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Onitsha (main mkt)</td>
<td>2011-2017</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>190.88</td>
<td>18.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onitsha (Okpoko)</td>
<td>2011-2019</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>341.62</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkpor</td>
<td>2011-2017</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.79</td>
<td>6.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amawbia</td>
<td>2011-2018</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekwulobia</td>
<td>2011-2017</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nnewi</td>
<td>2011-2017</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>11.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaocha</td>
<td>2011-2019</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government House Awka</td>
<td>2011-2017</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>7.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>574.39</td>
<td>52.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Anambra Fire Service (2018); State Bureau of Statistics (2018); Additions by Researcher from Newspaper updates.

Judging also from the statistics of fire disasters from 2005 to 2011 in comparison to 2011 to 2017, it would be seen that fire incidence in the state increased by 112.61% and that death associated with these fire disasters is positively correlated with the increase; hence increasing also from 24 to 90 amounting to exactly 375% increase. Such an increase would be difficult to record if ANSEMA managed fire disasters within the period under study.

In addition, according to the Editorial captioned Fire Service: Neglected at the Peril of Citizens on The Guardian Newspaper dated November 2, 2019, the Anambra state fire service was critiqued for having 20 fire fighting trucks out of which only 8 is functional despite witnessing 110 fire incidences in 2018 and above 30 already from January to November 2, 2019. The
debilitating nature of the above is shown also in the poor amount of finance allocated to this agency by its mother-ministry (Ministry of Power and Water Resources) which for the past three years are: #3,756,183 (2017), #4,131,800 (2018), and #4,544,982 (2019). It is a result of this that the management of fire disaster has been relatively poor. Similarly, the state fire service has fire stations located in major cities but who are challenged by poor equipment. For instance, there are three fire station located in the headquarters at Eze-Uzu junction, Agu Awka, three fire stations in Onitsha (main market, Nkpor and Okpoko), one (1) each at Nkwo Nnewi main market, Building Material market Ogidi, Ekwulobia sports stadium, Otuocha, Umunze, Agulu and Ihiala. Notwithstanding the above, there are many densely populated areas in the state that requires functional fire service but which have known instances include Abagana in Njikoka local government, Enugwu-Ukwu in Awka North, Okija, Oko and Mgbakwu. The last stroke that justifies the poor management of fire disasters in Anambra state is the poor payment and motivation of fire fighters as their hazard allowance is #10; not to mention that the staff strength of the entire fire stations in Anambra State is 70 staff (The Guardian, November 2, 2019).

It is the above observed challenges that necessitate the involvement of ANSEMA in fire disaster management as this management falls within the mandate of their establishment. However, with the increase in devastating effects of fire disaster and from the interview responses above, it could be seen that this agency is non-functional in fire disaster management.

Thus, it is established herein that ANSEMA did not manage fire disasters in Anambra State within this period under study but only played a passive role of visiting locations where fire disasters occurred.

It was gathered that the state has about 20 fire-fighting trucks in all, including back-up water tankers spread across the fire stations. Out of these, eight are non-functional, but following the recent fire incidents in Onitsha, the state governor directed the repair of all the non-functional trucks of the Fire Service.

Further investigations showed that the State Fire Service is an appendage of the Ministry of Power and Water Resources. The ministry had as estimated capital expenditure of N1.827 billion in 2017; N2.375 billion in 2018, and N2.850 billion in 2019. Out of this amount, N3,756, 183 was earmarked for the Fire Service in 2017; N4,131,800 in 2018, and N4,544,982 in 2019.

The State Director of Fire Service, Martin Agbili, an engineer, who is also the state chairman of Nigeria Society of Engineers (NSE), could not be reached for comments. However, a member of staff of the Service who pleaded anonymity told The Guardian that the governor has ordered for the provision of six additional big trucks to the Service.

Again, the agency is equally bemoaned by poor budgetary provisions thereby hampering their efficiency. The staff strength is not anything to write home about. In fact, the conditions of service were not encouraging. But with the recent fire incidents, the state government has come to the realisation that the Fire Service needs adequate attention to perform efficiently. One could be tempted to ask how could past governments place staff on salaries and allowances that are not motivating. Also, there are no boreholes to make water available for the Service and where they exist, they are dilapidated and non-functional.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The growing trend of fire disasters in Idemili North of Anambra state has implications on human existence and socio-economic wellbeing of man. Much bewildering is it when these disasters raise in geometric progression in the face of established disaster management agencies across the state. The implication is that these disaster management agencies are challenged by some problems which negatively affect their disaster management performance. It is the above that formed the focus of this research in a bid to ascertain both the challenges and the prospects to improve the disaster management performance of disaster management agencies taking ANSEMA as an example and some local government in Anambra state as a case study.
Residents of Idemili North of Anambra are battling to cope with an increase in case of a fire outbreak as there will be no help from the state Fire Service due to obsolete equipment and inadequate staff. It was observed that water was leaking from the tank of few functional trucks in the station. Buckets were kept under the vehicle for collection of the water, a sign that the vehicle might not be of any help in case of a fire outbreak.

Observations in the building also showed that the offices were demarcated with local woods, a clear indication of the total neglect of the State Fire Service by the government.

An official of the Service who spoke on the condition of anonymity said the agency had 150 firemen ten years ago but disclosed that the number has reduced to 35 due to non-recruitment of staff even though people retire every year. In the next few years, the staff strength will be less than 20 because of the retirement age. If government fails to embark on massive recruitment, the fire service department will soon go into extinction due to retirement.

The above challenges identified, justifies the view of Uche (2013) who opined that not Nigerian disaster Agencies but the government should be blamed for poor disaster management performances as these agencies are poorly funded. It is also in line with the view of Ndace (2008) and Nwobodo et al. (2018) who described disaster management in Nigeria as a failed duty of the government because the disaster management agencies are neither equipped nor proactive.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the above the research findings of this study, the study recommends as follows:

The Anambra State Fire Service is well not equipped to deliver on their duty, the study’s findings have shown. This is because of the state government has not increased their functional stations to 14 with 20 active trucks from the mere three trucks that serviced the entire state before the coming of the Governor Wille Obiano’s administration.

Despite the purported improvement, some personnel who spoke on condition of anonymity bemoaned a situation where their salaries and emoluments were a far cry from their federal counterparts and other uniform personnel in the state. According to a source, “with my rank, my equivalent in the police force earns close to N200,000 while my take home is merely N75,000. Yet we are involved in a very risky job. There are so many areas that need attention.” So condition of service and welfare package need to be improved upon.

Furthermore, since fire fighting is everybody business, there is to stressed that whenever there is fire anywhere, a fireman is motivated to move in to help out. But they do not do that without clearance from the relevant authority, as the issue of jurisdiction comes into play. So, we seek for the nod of the state governor before we move in to help. This area of jurisdiction needs to be carefully tackled.

On the worthiness of the fire fighting trucks and other operational vehicles, those that are not in good condition should be and residents’ poor attitude to fire prevention and support to the Fire Service should be improved on via horizontal and vertical effective communication.

Related to the above, every individual needs to be disaster conscious. The fire service regularly publicise their emergency free toll numbers, yet residents do not take it to heart. When there is fire, you will see them running helter-skelter in panic. In most cases, before they remember to call, major damages would have occurred. Put a call to us as soon as you notice fire outbreak; do what you can till we arrive, because we prefer the preventive measures, instead of allowing damages and then you pour all blames on firemen.

**REFERENCES**

**Books**


Book Chapters

Journal & Articles


**Report, Government and International Organization Publication**


Unpublished Works


Internet


Newspapers and Magazine


Onu, H. (October 18, 2019). Onitsha in flame again. The sun. p. 2

Workshop, Seminar and Conference Papers