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Though an LP guber candidate, I'm for Jonathan -Great Ogboru



**Exclusive**

# Lagos to sell off Water Corporation

- Tough days ahead for tax payers, say experts
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...News

# Lagos to privatise Water Corporation

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If there are no last minute changes in plans by the Lagos State government towards privatizing water, residents of Lagos may yet add water bills to the growing list of burdens as they strive to eke out a living in the state.

When the ongoing plans takes off, residents and borehole owners will start paying tax on water generated within their premises, Prime News can authoritatively reveal. The project referred to as Public-Private Partnership (PPP), it was gathered, is the highpoint of a planned World Bank partnership initiative with the Lagos State government. The World Bank is world's largest promoter of private water contracts to governments.

Only recently, there was a global outcry over the silence by the Lagos State government on the project despite global disclosures. But when the newspaper contacted Lagos State Water Corporation, (LSWC) the Head, Media and Publicity, Mrs. Famakinwa Ibiroke denied knowledge of the plan. "I am not aware of such a plan, but even where government is looking towards that it is the Lagos State Water Regulatory Commission (LSWRC) that handles such issues," she said.

Ibiroke further explained that the LSWC only has the responsibility of producing, distributing and commercializing water.

It would be recalled that the World Bank had made curious and conflicting statements on the project when it told the global world a few months ago following a deluge of emails and calls to its key

officials by activists demanding disclosure of the agreements it had with the Lagos State government, insisting it had not signed any such contract with the Lagos State government. However, as pressure continued to mount, it contradicted itself by announcing that it had cancelled the International Finance Corporation (IFC) official advisory role in the design of the privatization exercise. The project, sources who preferred anonymity say, when finalized, would lead to the enactment of a law that will make it illegal for any Lagos resident to own a borehole without due payment to the state government. Interestingly, in the face of the raging controversy over the project, the Lagos State government has remained mute.

Only recently, the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) expressed worry over the attitude of the Lagos State government wondering why the LSWC has been silent on the project in the face of global calls for disclosure on the project.

In a statement issued in Lagos, ERA/FoEN said: "While we welcome the cancellation of the IFC advisory contract after the World Bank double speak, we are dismayed by the Lagos State Water Corporation's strange silence which has left Lagos residents in the dark." ERA/FoEN Director, Corporate Accountability, Akinbode Oluwafemi in an interview with Prime News noted that Lagos residents know next to nothing about a project with such far-reaching implications, describing the state government's posture as unacceptable.

## ...imposes tax on borehole owners



A cross section of labour unions and civil society at the protest against privatization of water in Lagos

able. According to him, "It leads us to believe that this is an attempt to clandestinely tie us to the reins of corporate power. The link is a further proof that something not too good is going on under our noses."

Oluwafemi told the newspaper that attempts by ERA/FoEN to get a sense of what the privatisation deal entails have been met with official stonewall at the LSWC office where its officials said they are not involved in any water plans with the World Bank.

He stressed that examples across the globe have shown that IFC designs biased contracts that drive corporate profit, but violates the human right to water, and undermine democracy and the public interest, insisting that Lagos cannot take control of

21 million people's water system.

"In the interest of the public," he said, "we demand that the Lagos State government halt the embrace of a failed model of corporate-controlled and commodified water. This is our Lagos and our water is our right. The LSWC must speak up", Oluwafemi insists.

To further press home their demand, the group in a letter addressed to the Lagos State Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN), cited the failures of the project in countries like Philippines and India, and Nagpur city, describing the project as wasteful. The letter dated March 10, 2015 and jointly signed by Shayda Edwards Naficy, Director International Water Campaign Corporate Accountability International, Comrade Solomon Adedegan, National President, Amalgamated Union of Public Corporations, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE) and Sani Baba Mohammed, Sub-Regional Secretary, Public Services International (PSI), respectively, advised the governor to reject what they described as misleading marketing, particularly what its proponents say is a success story of the project, saying, "it was a massive failure in Manila and India."

The letter, which was delivered to the governor



Akinbode Oluwafemi, Director ERA

as members of the groups marched to the Lagos State Government House, Alausa, as well as the State House of Assembly, also warned of the adverse economic effects such project would have on residents of the state.

They called on the state government to uphold the human right to water as an obligation of the government, integrate a broad public participation in developing plans aimed at achieving universal access to clean water, as well as build a political will to prioritize water for the people

by investing on infrastructure necessary for making water easily and readily accessible to the people, as according to them, such moves would improve public health and invigorate the Lagos economy.

"We urge you to reject all plans aimed at privatizing water or any form of water contracts involving the IFC whose aim is to maximize profit. We urge you to also reject all forms of water privatization and commodification, Water is peoples right," the letter said.



A member of the labour union addressing the protesters