

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY CHALLENGES IN GHANA: THE WAY FORWARD

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The concept of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) was introduced in the Ghanaian industries before the introduction of the Factories, Offices, and Shops Act 1970. The introduction of different regulatory bodies in Ghana have not solved the OHS challenges. The purpose of the study is to address appropriate means for OHS challenges improvement in Ghana. Literature review was conducted on OHS practices and challenges in Ghana. Findings from the study shows numerous OHS challenges which include lack of comprehensive national OHS policy, inability to partner with organizations responsible for the implementing the OHS activities and inability to ratify the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention number 155 as the major challenges are OHS challenges in Ghana. This calls for the strengthening of the existing government policies and the ratification of the ILO convention 1981 (No.155) as a minimum to accommodate any possible OHS challenges in Ghana.

Keywords: Construction Industry, Implementation, Improvement, Legislation, Policy, Regulatory Bodies.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Ghanaian construction industry is faced with Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) implementation problems as indicated by Annan, Addai and Tulashie (2015). The OHS implementation problems in Ghana have risen due to the introduction of different regulatory bodies. Even though, the application of OHS as illustrated by International Labour Organisation or World Health Organisation (ILO/WHO, 2005) is seen to concern with the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations. Yet, there are couple of reported incidences in the Ghanaian construction industry due to lack of resources, inadequate legal and institutional arrangements to management of Health and Safety (H&S) (Kheni, Gibb and Dainty (2007). The inadequate legal and institutional arrangements to management of H&S and the lack of resources have compounded the H&S performance problems in Ghana. Kheni et al. (2007) further pointed lack of infrastructure and equipment, concerted effort by policy makers to address H&S as well as corruption as other factors that lead to poor H&S in the construction industry.

The concept of OHS was introduced in the Ghanaian industries before the introduction of the Factories, Offices, and Shops Act 1970 as pointed out by Annan et al., (2015) and supported by a report by the Ghana Government (2010). Most of the OHS problems

faced by the Ghanaian construction industry as posited by Annan et al., (2015) are related to weaknesses in regulations and professional standards, weakness in enforcing the rules and lack of a legal mandate. This paper presents OHS challenges in Ghana: The way forward. It began with a discussion of different regulatory bodies and major OHS challenges. This is followed with OHS improvement.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Different regulatory bodies which deal with OHS exist in Ghana (Annan et al., 2015) are as follows:

- i. The Mining and Minerals Regulations 1970 LI 665,
- ii. The Workman's Compensation Law 1987,
- iii. The Ghana Health Services and Teaching Hospital Act 526 (1999),
- iv. The Ghana Labour Act 2003 (Act 651),
- v. The Radiation Protection Instrument LI 1559 of 1993, which is an amendment of the Ghana Atomic Energy Act 204 of 1963,
- vi. The EPA Act 1994 (Act 490), which has components that include but not limited to the Pesticide Control and Management Act 1996 (Act 528), seeking to protect not only the environment but also persons, as well as the National Road Safety Commission Act 1999 (Act 567).

2.1 Major Occupational Health and Safety Challenges

The construction industry in Ghana as indicated by Mustapha, Aigbavboa and Thwala (2015) in their study of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Challenges in the Ghanaian Construction Industry, pointed out that OHS issues have not been managed effectively due to lack of comprehensive national OHS policy, inability to partner with organizations responsible for the implementing the OHS activities, inability to ratify the ILO convention number 155, inefficient institutional frameworks responsible for H&S standards and inadequate government support for regulatory institutions.

The existing OHS legislation in Ghana has not covered some key economic sectors. It is fragmented and limited in coverage (Annan et al., 2015). Annan et al. (2010) opined that the body responsible for ensuring and implementation of the necessary requirements for the establishment of the missing national policy in Ghana is not constituted. A report by the Ghana Health Service (GHS, 2007) has observed lack of comprehensive national OHS policy, weak OHS infrastructures, insufficient OHS education, untrained and inadequate OHS professionals, and lack of proper monitoring and surveillances for OHS as the major challenging issues facing the Ghanaian construction industries. Kheni, Dainty and Gibb (2008) in their view indicated lack of skilled human resources, inadequate government support for regulatory institutions and inefficient institutional frameworks responsible for H&S standards as the major challenges facing OHS practices in the Ghanaian construction industries. Several researchers (Kheni et al., 2008; Laryea, 2010; Puplampu & Quartey, 2012; Dadzie, 2013; Annan et al., 2015) have confirmed the implementation challenges of OHS in the Ghanaian construction industry.

The OHS implementation challenges in the construction industry in Ghana has also been confirmed by Annan (2010) on his study of occupational, industrial safety and health in Ghana and concluded that the increasing rate of urbanization has raised

the workforce. Hence, the high rate of workforce has led to the exposure of hazard to the workforce. Therefore, the search for the requirements and committed bodies to handle the mantle of affairs that will initiate the implementation of the national policy should be considered. The OHS challenges in Ghana as posited by several researchers (Frempong & Essegbey, 2006; Laryea, 2010; Ofori & Toor, 2012) has mainly been attributed to the domination of the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) contractors and plagued with their ineffectiveness to manage Health and Safety (H&S) (Kheni et al., 2007).

2.2 Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Improvement

The need for OHS improvement for Ghana based on the OHS National Policy as illustrated by Annan (2010) are as follows:

- i. The nation has to adopt or develop a broad base OHS policy that is in line with the ILO convention 155 as a minimum. This must seek to address H&S issues regarding all projects and operations from design stage, through procurement, construction, and operation and decommissioning.
- ii. Achieving this means all the scattered generic OHS requirements under the different agencies of the Ghana Government such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Factory Inspectorate, Inspectorate Division of the Ghana Minerals Commission and the Ghana Labour Commission with different responsibilities must be brought under a one body. Such a body must be empowered and resourced adequately to enable them organize how the policy would be implemented nationwide and under the responsibility of one body or ministry.
- iii. This policy must be authenticated by the Ghana Government and form part of the nation's legal document. Effective Organization consultation with relevant organizations will positively impact the successful implementation of the "Expected Ghana National OHS Policy". The relevant organizations may include but not limited to the Ghana Minerals Commission, Ghana Chamber of Mines, Ghana National Petroleum Corporation, the Association of Ghana Industries, the Universities, the Department of Factory Inspectorate, the Ghana Institute of Engineers, The Ghana Medical Association, the Ghana Bar Association and Ghana Environmental Protection Agency.
- iv. Of outcomes of consultations and requirements of the OHS policy is salient in achieving a good control of the system. This can be done through the National Media Commission and the associated private and public media operatives.
- v. Competency of the human resource who would be championing the implementation and monitoring of the OHS policy must be built up. This may require introducing relevant courses like Safety Engineering in our Universities and Polytechnics as well as Occupational Health in our Medical Schools. This training institution would need to be adequately resourced and accredited to deliver quality education in OHS for Ghanaians to be able to manage Occupational Safety and Health issues in the nation.
- vi. Between the industry, the public and the established body responsible for the implementation, management and monitoring of the policy is

paramount.

vii. Control of the practices with guidelines either adopted or developed by the nation's OHS body needs specific emphasis. Specific roles and accountabilities with timelines need to be developed for planning and implementation of the OHS policy actions with clear reporting lines. This must not exclude penalties for intentional non-conformances and negligence.

Moreover, of government of Ghana should show good leadership and commitment in the structuring of OHS policy in Ghana (Anann et al., 2015). Hence, the National Policy should be in line with the ILO convention 155 as a minimum (ILO/HO, 2005). The implementation of the National OHS policy will be achieved through good communication and effective consultation with various organisations. Training institutions should be well resourced and collaborate between the industry, the public, and the body responsible for the implementation, management, and monitoring of the policy.

There should be proper planning and implementation to control OHS practices. However, there should also be effective monitoring of the OHS policy after its implementation. Specific timelines, roles and responsibilities must be spelt out to achieve the Ghanaian national OSH policy aim and objectives (Anann et al., 2015). Governing organization should be empowered and resourced to proceed with continual research into workplace exposures, levels that should not be exceeded, safe ways of completing the tasks, and improvement of controls when undesired events, conditions or systems are encountered. These must tie into the roles and responsibilities as indicated under the organization and it has to be specific.

3 LESSONS LEARNT

The existence of different regulatory bodies in Ghana as posited by Annan et al. (2015) was found to be fragmented and limited in scope in dealing with OHS because the legislation has not covered some key economic sectors. Hence, the body responsible for ensuring and implementation of the necessary requirements for the establishment of the missing national policy in Ghana has not been constituted (Annan et al., 2015). Several researchers (Kheni et al., 2008; Laryea, 2010; Pupilampu & Quartey, 2012; Dadzie, 2013; Annan et al., 2015) have confirmed the implementation challenges of OHS in the Ghanaian construction industry. The OHS improvement for Ghana based on the OHS National Policy has been recommended by Annan et al. (2015) and should be through effective planning, implementation and evaluation in order to achieve the set goals. Moreover, the National Policy should be in line with the ILO convention 1981 (No.155) as a minimum (ILO/HO, 2005).

4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study is to address appropriate means for OHS challenges improvement in Ghana. The two major legislation in Ghana under which all industries rely on were found to be fragmented and limited in scope. This fragmentation and limitation in scope have affected the performances of some key economic sectors in the country. The OHS challenges can be overcome by improving on the existing OHS legislation through effective planning, implementation and evaluation. It is recommended that two major edicts should be revisited or modified to reflect existing

OHS challenges in Ghana. The Ghanaian government should also adopt the international OHS policy or develop it to follow the minimum requirement set by the ILO convention 1981 (No. 155) as a minimum.

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