

atmosfair meets Nigerian Minister of Environment / Production of efficient stoves all-made-in-Nigeria

A travel report by Dr. Dietrich Brockhagen, Managing Director atmosfair



Dietrich Brockhagen with the Environment Minister Mohammend Abdullahi

Abuja, end of July 2022: The Nigerian atmosfair team with Orezi, Ojo and Abdurrahman will pick me up at the airport. In years past, I could just take a cab into town, this time travel is only possible in a rented car with a driver, tinted windows, and paid, heavily armed security guards. Until I leave, they will not leave our side. Not a nice feeling, but anything else would be naive in these times. Abuja is actually a safe city, but even here there are increasing kidnappings that cannot be attributed to any politically motivated group, but are simply due to crime as a source of income, and increasingly also aims at wealthy Nigerians.

At the hotel we discuss the meetings of the next few days: National Agency of the Great Green Wall, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of the Environment, National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI), Ministry of Women. In between we will have meetings with business partners and work meetings with the Nigerian atmosfair team from Kano.

The team works great: Abdurrahman is always on the phone and coordinates the appointments, which are constantly changing, Ojo and Orezi are the factory managers from Kano and brief me on the latest developments in our factory there.

My job is to conclude an agreement with the Nigerian government that will ensure that our stove factory in the north of the country harmonizes with Nigeria's climate policy and that we can use the CO₂ reductions for compensation. We received such an assurance back in 2008 when we brought the

first efficient stoves to Nigeria. But the international legal framework has changed with the Paris climate protection agreement. Nigeria has its own CO₂ reduction targets now and can use the CO₂ reductions from our stoves to reach their own targets. I have to convince the government that our project is of such high quality that it is worthwhile for Nigeria to hand over the CO₂ reductions generated by the project to us.

Visiting the National Agency of the Great Green Wall is easy. We already have a running agreement with the ministry, it's a visit to keep each other updated. The ministry aims to reforest northern Nigeria as a protection against the Niger Desert, which is more and more spreading south into Nigeria. The Agency cannot reach the goal if people continue to cut firewood for daily cooking, which is the main source of energy there. Our Save 80 stove saves 80% firewood, is made of stainless steel and lasts 10 years. So far we have sold over 30,000 of them in Nigeria. It has been agreed with the ministry that we will also try to process residual harvest biomass briquettes in test villages in order to get rid of forest wood as quick and permanent as possible. But where do we get the briquetting machines from?

The Secretary of State in the Ministry of Agriculture has a tip: In Nigeria there is an agency headed by professors from various disciplines that works to develop technologies and infrastructure, NASENI. We make an appointment with the head professor. As always, Abdurrahman is well connected to initiate a meeting in the shortest possible time.

But first the meeting with the Minister of Environment. I was eagerly awaiting this meeting. The secretariat is surprised that I want to bring the whole team from Kano to the meeting, but they agreed in the end. It is important for me that our employees establish contacts themselves and know first-hand what was discussed and how.

The Minister of Environment Mr. Mohammend Abdullahi is in a good mood. Everyone has to laugh when we started the competition of whose name is harder to pronounce for the other. Luckily there are still business cards here, which helps. Then things get serious and I am allowed to present our project for almost three quarters of an hour. The minister brought two employees with him, they want to know whether we have coordinated with the national associations and how many women work in production in the factory. Then everything goes fast. Mr. Abdullahi says that he will fully support our project because we are the only ones who produce locally in Nigeria and our business model creates new jobs and training positions there. He says that in Nigeria many NGOs come with studies or money. But the pictures from our factory and the fact that our team has already produced the first ovens shows him that we are an exception. "You do our job here," he tells us. "Actually, that would be our job, but as a government we don't have arms and hands, and it's not really worth it for our companies, it's too risky."

However, there is water in the wine as he points out that Nigeria does not yet have any structures implemented for the new rules under the Paris Agreement. Our project will set a precedent and there is also a lack of staff to develop these structures and rules. I give him the draft contract we worked out, then a photo, a handshake, and we're out, uff.

Professor Haruna from NASENI also listens to us, and it turns out: NASENI already has its own pelleting machines that atmosphere could buy. That would be a huge advantage over other machines that are mostly offered in Asia.

Surprisingly for us, the largest meeting takes place in the Ministry for Women. The minister is abroad and cannot come as planned at short notice, but the room is full of almost 20 employees from all levels. The Secretary of State will introduce everyone, then it's our turn. Luckily I had looked at the goals of women's politics in Nigeria beforehand, and our stoves contribute fully to the first three: poverty reduction (by saving expensive firewood), health (our medical study from Rwanda shows that the vital lung functions of women improve immediately significantly improve those who switch

from the 3-stone fire to our Save 80) and training (in our factory). But then there is criticism. A department head advises me next time not only to talk about our oven and show pictures, but to bring one with me. Heck, we only brought two from Kano and they're in the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture now. But Abdurrahman is prepared. While we were still discussing he started to make a call, and only 10 minutes later the door opened and a ministry employee brought in our Save 80. Abdurrahman winks at me: he knew a colleague nearby who had one himself.

Now everyone stands up, many want to touch it. The Wonderbox, which can keep the food hot for a long time, is also examined. Many ask whether the stove burns the wood cleanly as gas and whether one can burn one's hands from the outside when it is in operation. The Secretary of State then breaks off, he had only planned 10 minutes, now almost an hour has passed.

We may not need the formal approval of the Ministry for Women at all. The Ministry of the Environment is in charge, but it will certainly get the approval of the other departments concerned, the administration is well organized. On the other hand, approval by the Ministry of Justice for all international contracts is even required by law.

At the end of the trip, I realize how quickly I got used to Nigeria again. How I would have loved to drive up north with my colleagues to talk to retailers, major customers and our production team, how I would have loved to go to the local markets to get in touch with end customers myself. That's not possible for security reasons, I just have to accept it. In 2009, when I came for the first time, it was still possible and left a deep impression on me.

At the end a warm farewell to the team. Nothing would work here without them, and we plan to at least drive as far as Kano next time. Then hopefully with a Save 80 "approved by the Government of Nigeria".

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