

The loss of lives recorded in different parts of Zamfara State drew the attention of some selected students of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria. The students' rescue mission won prizes for the university. Daily Trust reports

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Under the banner of Entrepreneurship Action and Us (ENACTUS), 14 selected students of the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, brought succour to the sleeping community of Bagega, Anka local government area of Zamfara State. Before the intervention, the community has witnessed the loss of over 1,500 children, farmlands, cattle and has no source of potable water following the menace of lead poisoning, which was bedevilling the area.

ENACTUS, being a non-profit international non-governmental organisation with student-members across the world, the mandate of the organisation to assist communities to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals spurred the ABU students to come up with the Bagega Rising Project initiative.

Although the success recorded by the ABU team was not achieved on a platter of gold, the research and brainstorming that preceded the project brought out the best from the ABU team.

According to the Director of the ABU's Directorate of University Advancement (DUA), Professor Adamu Ahmed, the journey to the realization of the Bagega Rising Project began with determination, hard work and diligence on the part of both the students and the university management.

He added, "the hitherto quiet community of Bagega in Zamfara State

How ABU students tackled lead poisoning, won awards



■ ABU students at the Bagega village after the completion of the water project

is now a beehive of activities as a result of the ABU ENACTUS intervention. The Bagega Rising Project rescued the community from the continued effects of lead poisoning or gold mining. Since 2009, when the mining activities became intense in Bagega, the health hazards following the activities, resulting from lead poisoning of the soil, water and air; have been inimical to the health of the community members.

"The lead poisoning led to soil degradation, air pollution and water contamination which have also led to the deaths of not less than 1,500 children in the community; as well as loss of farmlands and cattle worth millions of naira. The aftershocks of these mining activities are abject penury and pandemic hunger. The economic respite of the mining activities was however too tempting to opt for a total

closure of mining activities to save lives. It was in the light of this that ABU ENACTUS came up with the project, which was aimed at providing clean water, environment and soil for livelihood and agricultural activities."

The breakthrough at Bagega was achieved following collaboration with the National Research Institute for Chemical Technology (NARICT), Zaria. NARICT offered technical support and on-the-field knowledge to the ABU ENACTUS.

The lead poisoning, according to Professor Ahmed, was handled at Bagega community with Jathropa trees. He said Jathropa being a drought resistant plant, it also has the capacity to control erosion and absorb lead and other contaminants from the soil.

Professor Ahmed said; "with this

milestone, the Jathropa trees began to cleanse the soil of lead poison and other contaminants. The team thus went ahead to develop a lead bio-tech filter to purify the contaminated water and to provide clean water for consumption and agricultural activities, as well as other uses. From the lead bio-tech filter, the next line of action was the development of an aqua-ponic system for aqua culture and hydroponics. The outcome of which is the presence of cheap and affordable source of fish for the community as well as rich agricultural products like vegetables and greens through hydroponics.

This project, Ahmed said, has taken back many residents of the community to the farms. It has brought a new lease of life for the members of the community because of the availability of farmlands, potable water and safe environment for human habitation.

The Bagega Rising Project and others embarked by the ABU team were taken to the ENACTUS National Championship. At the end of the championship, the ABU team emerged overall best where it won The Lekoil Challenge for the Most Environmentally Sustainable Project with money prize of N500,000.

ABU's team leader, Abdulaziz Ta'ariq, from the Mechanical Engineering Department of the University, emerged the Most Outstanding Team Leader of the Year, while Tagwi Balami became The Most Active ENACTUS member on Social Media.

Other members of the team that were collectively recognised were Joseph Onaji, Peter Bassey, Obinna Prince Obi, Usman Waziri, Elizabeth Abdumalik, Opatola Tayo, Aisha Abdulkareem, Aisha Alarape, Ephraim Jonathan, Oche Ike, Abdulqoyum Ilori, Kabir Adamu and Mary-Anne Ainoje.