

THE LAUNCH OF THE REVISED EDITION OF THE ENUGU STATE BUSINESS AGENDA (POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEEPENING REFORMS TOWARDS BETTER BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IN ENUGU STATE) BY THE ENUGU COALITION OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION (ECOBPA)

The Enugu State Business Agenda (SBA) is a policy document produced and launched in November, 2016 after survey was carried out on eight (8) priority issues that were affecting businesses in Enugu State. The maiden edition which was accepted by the State Governor, His Excellency, Rt. Hon Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi as a working document during a courtesy visit to the Governor in 2016 by the Enugu Coalition of Business and Professional Association (ECOBPA), dealt with 8 business issues which includes:

1. Problem of Multiple Taxation.
2. Indiscriminate arrest of citizens & vehicle clamping by Traffic Officers of various other government Agencies such as Enugu Capital Territory Development Authority & Ministry of Transport;
3. The Arbitrary nature of ESWAMA operations in Enugu State;
4. The high cost of rent of commercial property in Enugu State;
5. The Challenges of Insecurity and exorbitant security expenditure;
6. The problem of extortion by Ministry of Agriculture (Government Warehouse Officials) in fertilizer distribution to farmers in Enugu State;
7. Demand for bribes by Ministry of Land officials for issuance of Certificate of Occupancy from people who want to register land in Enugu State and
8. The problem of epileptic power supply and arbitrary electricity charges by EEDC for businesses in Enugu State

At the end of the first tenure of His Excellency, Rt. Hon Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, the Executive Governor of Enugu State which is also about four years after the launch of the maiden edition of the SBA policy document, it became imperative for the Coalition to review the document to find out the level of improvement made so far. The assessment revealed that three out of the eight issues dealt with in the maiden edition had received appreciable level of improvement.

Interestingly the 2018 World Bank Ease of Doing Business Report which scored Enugu State second best out of the 36 States of the Federation and the FCT may not be unassociated with the improvements recorded as a result of the implementations of some of the recommendations of the maiden edition of the Enugu State Business Agenda launched in 2016.

Therefore the revised edition of the Enugu State Business Agenda was launched and presented to the public on January 21, 2020. This edition however dealt with the other 5 priority business issues that were yet to record appreciable improvements. These issues include:

1. The challenges of insecurity and exorbitant security levy
2. The Problem of Multiplicity of taxes and rates
3. Arbitrary nature of ESWAMA operations
4. The high rental cost of commercial property
5. The arbitrary electricity charges by EEDC for businesses

The revised SBA policy document has a number of policy recommendations for Government implementation, to better business operations and foster investment-friendly environment in Enugu State.

The document recommends amongst others, that the Government should consolidate on the security situation of the state, undertake security audit in the state to ascertain the security risks, create more security posts at strategic locations, and strengthen local vigilante groups especially in the rural areas.

Government can address the problem of multiplicity of taxation and rates by streamlining the payments, introduction of tax incentives, and the enforcement of electronic payment system which is capable of reducing evasion and increasing the IGR by 30%.

The documents also recommends that the Government should provide more waste disposal equipment, engage properly orientated personnel and stop the use of political thugs/touts/police officers as waste bill collectors. Also, Government should prospect for private operators to recycle these solid wastes which can be a source of revenue through tax and rates payments which can increase Government IGR by 5%.

On the issue of exorbitant property rent regime, the Government should call for the revision of the extant rent laws and ensure the compliance of the landlords and property agents to the laws. Government should develop low cost shops or industrial parks and make land easily accessible for private developers in order to reduce the current housing deficit and increase IGR by 20%.

Finally, Government should lend a voice to the advocacy on tariff control of power/electricity suppliers, ensure improved power supply and provision of pre-paid meters to consumers, create window of opportunities for competition in the energy distribution sector in order to remove monopoly and inject efficiency as well as reduce the energy tariff.

The launch of the revised SBA which was graced by His Excellency, Rt. Hon Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, Governor of Enugu State who was ably represented by his SSG, Prof Simon Uchenna Urtanya, attracted key operators in the Private and Public Sectors in Enugu State. The opportunity provided enhanced platform for further constructive engagement and deepening of Public Private Dialogue for the improvement of Enugu Business Environment, where all investors will have equal opportunity for prosperity.

Meanwhile, the Enugu Coalition of Business and Professional Association (ECOBPA) supported by Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), Washington DC is a coalition of over 32 Business and Professional Association in Enugu State that has since its inception in 2009 devoted its efforts in Advocacy for the improvement of the Enugu State business environment.

The Coalition therefore passionately appeals for the intervention of the Enugu State Government and all Stakeholders in implementation of/addressing these issues to make the business environment more conducive for the benefit, survival and growth of businesses in the state which will positively affect the IGR as well as the socio-economic wellbeing of the citizens.

Engr. Henry Nduka Awuregu
DG, ECCIMA