

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The free medical intervention of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) that targets over three million persons in the ravaged oil region is said to have afforded free medical surgery to 184 patients in Rivers

and Bayelsa states last week alone.

In Rivers State, the scheme is going on at the Ogu General Hospital in Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Speaking at the week-long free healthcare pro-

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Sunday 09 JUNE 2024

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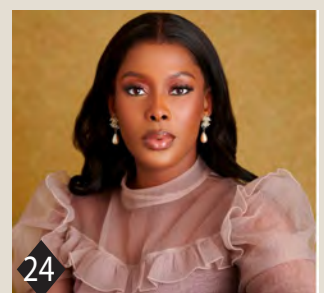
# Governors' comment on N60,000 minimum wage offensive, insensitive – Nigerians

■ As workers accuse SGF of hypocrisy **See story on page 42**  
 ■ Say states unproductive despite huge monthly allocations

**Why Nigeria must impose capital punishment on kidnapping, others – Kolawole**



**AI-powered digital advertising will help businesses reach their goals – Izugbokwe**



**How infrastructure deficit in federal, state varsities boosting Open University's fortunes**



**Roma owner Friedkin emerges favourite in Everton takeover**



R-L: Godswill Akpabio, President of the Senate; Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man/President, Dangote Group, and Opeyemi Bamidele, leader of the Senate, at a dinner with the leadership of the upper chamber at the Eko Hotels and Suites, Victoria Island, Lagos, weekend.

## Angst, anxiety mount over news of fresh strike

■ Nigerians recount experience of recent NLC's action  
 ■ Lament worsening cost of living crisis

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

**F**ear is presently erupting among many Nigerians over the likelihood of organised labour reactivating their earlier relaxed nationwide strike.

This comes as the Tripartite Committee constituted by the Federal Government to champi-

on negotiations on National Minimum Wage failed to reach an agreement with the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) after their marathon meeting Friday night.

While the committee recommended N62,000 as the monthly minimum wage for civil servants, organised labour

on the other hand, has rejected the offer, insisting on N250,000.

Earlier, the state governors said they could not even pay the earlier proposed N60,000 minimum wage which was later increased by N2,000 to arrive at N62,000 that labour also rejected.

**Continues on page 44**

## Military takeover of civil policing signals Nigeria's worsening insecurity

OBINNA EMELIKE

**F**or many years now, Nigeria has been contending with assorted security issues which have kept successive governments and administrations on their toes.

The country is said to be in low-grade war all these years. The constant attacks by various categories of criminal elements on innocent citizens have become a serious concern to both the government and the Nigerian people.

These attacks with heavy

casualties have over the years necessitated the involvement of the Military in local policing, which is totally off their remit. This wholesale involvement however, has also created a lot of anxiety in society.

Recently, many legal luminaries criticised the Police for ceding its constitutional responsibility to the Army.

Referring to the handing over of one of the eight persons declared wanted for the killing of 17 soldiers in Okuama, by the Police to

**Continues on page 45**



# News

## Nigeria races to comply with EU's regulation for cocoa export ahead December deadline

..govt says regulation stringent, seeks more time ..as rising cocoa prices excite Nigerian farmers

GODSGIFT ONYEDINEFU

The Nigerian government is racing to comply with the new regulations set by the European Union in order to sustain export of her cocoa products to the European market as the December, 2024 deadline nears.

The European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) is a regulation which prohibits products from entering the EU market unless they are deforestation-free and legally produced. The Regulation applies to wood, palm oil, soy, coffee, cocoa, rubber and cattle, as well as most of the derivatives. Under cocoa, it applies to beans, products and chocolate.

The regulation entered into force on June 29, 2023, with an 18 month preparation period that will expire on December 30, 2024 when it fully enters

into application.

The National Cocoa Management Committee convened critical stakeholders in cocoa sub-sector in Abuja to strategize how to boost Nigeria's cocoa production, and most importantly address the gaps to ensure the country complies with EU standards.

The Committee serves as the regulatory body for all matters that concerns the cocoa sector. It was inaugurated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and comprises of members that cut across all the sectors in the cocoa value chain.

Patrick Adebola, Executive Director of the Committee, informed that government and all stakeholders are putting heads together on the EUDR, noting that if Nigeria does not comply with the standards, the country may no longer be able to export cocoa beans and products to Europe, which is the biggest market for the country.



He expressed concerns that Nigeria exports about 70% of cocoa beans and failure to meet standards set will significantly impact the value chain.

"The key issue that we are discussing in this meeting is the issue of the EUDR regulation on our cocoa that will come into force in December

this year. If we are found not to be compliant, it means our cocoa beans may not be accepted to be sold in European markets. That is the reason why we are putting our heads together to see how we can start to discuss compliance to EUDR", Adebola told journalists.

He also informed that the

World Cocoa Foundation is also providing support to enable Nigeria comply with the standards.

The executive director, however decried that the EUDR is rather unfair and stringent, stressing that the EU did not consult widely with exporting countries before drafting such regulation.

In addition to prohibiting cocoa harvested from deforested areas, Adebola said the regulation also prohibits cocoa planted and harvested through child labour, big said their definition of child labour may not apply to Nigerian context.

"One of the contentious issue in this regulation is that they don't want our they don't want cocoa beans that are being harvested from deforested area because deforestation leads to environmental degradation, even though we are arguing with them that when you cut down a tree and plant cocoa tree, that is not a defor-

estation. We were not given an opportunity to discuss before the EU regulation.

"We feel these regulation are very stringent and Nigeria will need a lot of help in order for us to comply with this stringent regulation. We see it as being unfair, and we felt that countries that are involved were not really fully engaged before this EUDR was rolled out", he said.

"Our own situation is peculiar, and what they see as child labour might not necessarily be a child labor in our own Nigerian context. So all those issues needs to still be discussed", he added.

The executive director also wants the EU government to extend the time to ensure proper preparation by exporting countries. According to him, only about 50% of the exporting countries will be able to comply with this stringent regulation before the deadline of December 2024.

## Adebisi presents account of stewardship to constituents

...Says Assembly has created basis to better lives of people in Ojo, Lagos

JOHN SALAU

Ege Olusegun Adebisi, member representing Ojo Constituency 01 in the Lagos State House of Assembly, has rendered the account of his stewardship in the last one year, saying that several measures have been taken to better the lives of the people within the local council.

In a press statement personally signed by Adebisi, the House of Assembly member disclosed that his days in the house since he took the oath of office as a member of the House of Assembly represent-

ing Ojo Constituency 01 have been a worthy experience of steering the constituency on a path of meaningful progress.

"My campaign slogan which we all know as the 'Game changer' is a reflection of my plan to bring the feel-good factor into the administration of Ojo Constituency 01. Although the past year has brought its own fair share of challenges, we have created the basis to better the lives of our people — after all, governance is essentially about the people," he said.

He further said that he was grateful for the support he received from the people for their

staunch belief in his capacity to chart a new course for a greater Ojo Constituency 01.

According to him, the last one year has been a privilege to serve the constituents and bring the dividends of democracy to their doorstep.

He disclosed that the positive feedback from constituents in the last 100 days have further strengthened his resolve to put the people first. He said that he was confident that the task of building the Ojo Constituency 01 of their dream can be accomplished through collaboration.

"Without being immodest, I am pleased to say that we have given a good account of ourselves in the execution of our mandate in the past one year.

"In seeking to meet your aspirations within the shortest possible period, this administration pays particular attention to the core areas of education, youth employment/empowerment, women empowerment, security, healthcare and the environment.

"As a demonstration of our commitment to promoting qualitative education, we are giving out 'Back to School' backpacks to our children in various schools. We would continue to do all that is necessary to shape their lives positively, build their character and prepare them for a brighter and rewarding future," Adebisi said.



Ege Olusegun Adebisi

## Oriental Energy donates climate monitoring, observation station to UNIUYO

ANIEFIOK UDONQUAK, Uyo

An indigenous oil firm, Oriental Energy Resources Limited, has donated the first phase of component of climate monitoring and observation station to the University of Uyo (UNIUYO), Akwa Ibom State.

The state-of-the-art facility situated at the main campus of the University will provide practical experience in the various components of climatology and climate change studies in the university. It will also encourage research in climate-related studies across several disciplines within the University and lay the fountain for the introduction of capacity building programmes on climate and meteorology for internal and external clients.

The Managing Director of the firm, Mustafa Indimi, who presented the facility to the university, said the project was the company's contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs)13 as adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

Indimi, represented by Ka-zeem Koleoso, head of external relations, said the company was committed to partnering the government and the private sector to combat the negative effects of climate change.

"In specific terms, SDG13(- Climate Action) requires that

urgent steps are taken by the public and private sectors to combat climate change and its impacts, by mitigating its effects, promoting adaptation, and increasing resilience to climate-related hazards.

"This is very important because every person, in every country, in every continent of the world will be impacted by the negative effects of climate change. "Beyond donating the climate monitoring and observation station to the University of Uyo, Oriental Energy has been taken significant steps to reduce its environmental footprints, especially through our decarbonization journey.

"We have continued to make progress towards the reduction of emissions from our operations. Our approach to flare reduction is in line with industry standards.

"We are also taking actions to improve our monitoring of carbon emissions, especially when it comes to methane. We are currently reviewing plans to eliminate flaring at our Ebok field while development plans for Okwok field include a zero-flare concept from the start."

Also speaking, the Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on Implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR), Oby Lilian Orogbu commended Oriental Energy for donating the facility to the University.

Orogbu said that the company has contributed to envi-

ronmental sustainability and scientific research in Nigeria.

"Procuring the equipment and ensuring installation of this station demonstrates the company's clear understanding of the environmental challenges we face and a willingness to be part of the solution.

"As such, this CSR initiative goes beyond simply writing a cheque, it is indeed a strategic investment in our future.

"Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time globally. Accurate data is essential for understanding climate pattern, predicting future changes, and developing effective migration and adaptation strategies.

"This station, in the Committee's opinion, will provide valuable data for researchers, policy makers, and the public," she said.

The Vice Chancellor of the University, Nyaudoh Ndaeyo thanked Oriental Energy for the gesture, saying it will help the institution deepen its exploits in areas of climatology research. Ndaeyo urged the company to commence the second phase of the project to optimise the usability and effectiveness of the station.

"Therefore, like Oliver Twist, I on behalf of the University of Uyo community, appeal to our donor to please direct the commencement of the second phase of the project which is the building and monitoring aspect.



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# News

## Experts advocate value cultivation in food, beverage, tobacco manufacturing sector

BRIGHT IMOH

Stakeholders in the Food, Beverage, and Tobacco (FBT) sector of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) have enjoined local manufacturers to sustain the culture of quality throughout the entire manufacturing process to maintain brand loyalty and ultimately increase the bottom line consistently.

This charge was made during the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the Food, Beverage, and Tobacco Sector of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) which was held recently in Lagos.

Declaring the AGM open, the Director General/CEO of MAN, Segun Ajayi-Kadir, urged manufacturers to prioritise quality, standards, and innovation in the manufacturing process to remain relevant to consumers. He stressed the need for collaboration among manufacturers to create a great-



Ekuma Eze

er impact on the Nigerian economy.

He decried the increase in electricity tariff, saying it worsens the already harsh operating environment.

“Local manufacturers have remained resilient against daunting macroeconomic and infrastructure inadequacies – notably power.

But manufacturers need

power at a fair price. Power accounts for about 40 percent of our cost, depending on how power-intensive the manufacturing process is,” Ajayi-Kadir said.

Speaking on the theme: ‘Cultivating Value: Employing Quality, Standards, and Innovation in Strengthening Food, Beverage and Tobacco Manufacturing,’ the Guest Speaker and Head of Corporate Affairs & Sustainability of Rite Foods Limited, Ekuma Eze, described the Food, Beverage, and Tobacco Sector as a very significant sector in the Nigerian manufacturing landscape, representing 34 percent of the entire manufacturing sector and a gross domestic product (GDP) contribution of about 5 percent in 2022.

He however, noted that although the manufacturing industry is a key driver of the economy, Nigeria’s manufacturers were far from being competitive because of structural and systemic challenges that have inhibited the growth of manufacturing and its con-

tribution to the economy.

“Whereas the Food, Beverage, and Tobacco manufacturing sector remains the largest manufacturing sub-sector, it is still far from competitive on a global scale,” Eze emphasised.

According to him, “On the local scene, the odds are steeped against manufacturers including poor infrastructure, high inflation, energy issues, forex illiquidity, unpredictable regulatory environment, insecurity, and high tax burdens which has severely impacted the profitability of the Food, Beverage, and Tobacco sector in recent years.”

He however, advocated for strategic government intervention to enhance the sub-sector’s competitiveness, particularly in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

“Our policies must encourage manufacturing to ensure economic progress because manufacturing should be a key driver of economic growth, job creation, income generation, and contribution to the GDP,” he said.

Also, Aina Olugbenga Steven, deputy director at NAFDAC and chairman of the Nigerian Institute of Food Science and Technology (NIFST), Lagos chapter, said that local manufacturers must be commended, “for continually combating such challenges as electricity tariff and foreign exchange volatility within Nigeria’s business environment which has remained volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA).”

The high point of the day was the election of new officials to lead the group. Chinedu Okereke, managing director of The La Casera Company emerged as the new chairman; Fred Chiazor, vice chairman; Olajumoke Bamigbola, treasurer and Bukola Akanmu, technical adviser.

The outgoing Chairman, Patrick Anegebe thanked everyone for their support and called on members to cooperate with the new team for the overall growth and progress of the Food, Beverage, and Tobacco sector.

## Lafarge explains how sustainability, innovation shape future of business

CHUKA UROKO

Lafarge Africa, a leading innovative and sustainable solutions company in Nigeria, has given insights into the importance of sustainability and innovation in shaping the future of business and the industry.

The company, which is one of the largest producers of cement in the country, believes that sustainability is not just a goal but a way of doing business, adding that it is also about finding innovative solutions that minimise environmental impact while maximising value for the company’s stakeholders.

Lolu Alade-Akinyemi, the company’s GMD/CEO, who gave these explanations, pointed out, however, that innovation is not a solitary endeavor, explaining that it requires collaboration, creativity, and a willingness to challenge the status quo.

“That is why we are here today, to explore new ideas, share best practices, and strengthen our collaboration,” Alade-Akinyemi, who spoke

at the company’s inaugural suppliers summit in Lagos recently, explained further.

The summit which had as theme, ‘Sustainable Business, Innovating with Excellence’ had in attendance key stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, industry experts, and partners, who discussed sustainability, innovation, and strategies for excellence.

The summit highlighted the company’s commitment to fostering innovation and promoting sustainability across the industry. It featured insightful panel discussions, networking opportunities, and interactive sessions focused on key topics such as innovation, efficiency, technology, and partnerships.

Saeed Ande, the company’s Procurement Director and host of the summit, also highlighted the critical role of procurement in driving sustainable practices. “I understand the critical role that our suppliers play in our success. You are not just suppliers; you are our partners in growth, our allies in sustainability, and our collaborators in innovation,” he said,

Marylyn Obaisa-Osula,

Head ESG/Sustainability & Climate Change at PwC Nigeria, in her keynote presentation, provided an overview of sustainable supplying, highlighting the role of innovation in this transition.

A major highlight of the summit was the panel discussion on sustainability in business, featuring industry experts, including Olukola Dawodu, Assistant Director, SMEDAN represented by Leke Babalola, Chief Enterprise Officer, SMEDAN; Patrick Eneh, Head, Acquisition & Specialised Sectors, Stanbic IBTC; Vishant Dalamal, MD/CEO, MDV Limited; Temilola Abdul, Manager for Governance, Risk and Compliance at PwC Nigeria; and Anuoluwapo Gbadegesin, Legal & Compliance, Lafarge Africa, as moderator.

The discussants stressed the critical need for sustainable practices in business operations to ensure long-term environmental and economic health. They encouraged partnerships between suppliers, customers, and industry leaders to share best practices and drive collective success.

## Uzodinma, Afrexim Bank unveil Imo’s Africa Quality Assurance Centre

SABY ELEMBA, Owerri

To boost commerce and industry in Imo State, the officials of the African Export-Import (Afrexim) Bank and the Imo State Government have unveiled the second African Quality Assurance Centre (AQAC) in the state.

The unveiling, which took place at Umuowa in Ngor Okpala Local Government Area of the state, attracted many dignitaries from the state as well as the natives of Umuowa community.

Also in attendance were foreign investors who are Afrexim Bank’s partners such as representatives of Hassan Allam, Elsewedy Electric and Bureau Veritas and Afrexim Bank local partner, the Fidelity Bank’s officials.

Prior to the unveiling the Centre alongside Afrexim Bank officials and other critical stakeholders, Governor Uzodinma said, in his remarks, that the project would scale up inter- and intra-trade businesses that would facilitate industry and job creation in Imo State, boost the economy of Imo and that of the adjoining states.

He also expressed delight to participate in the unveiling just as he sincerely welcomed the delegation of Afrexim Bank partners from Egypt.

He described the centre as a world class facility that would certify export of goods for Imo

State and other states within the area and reduce the losses incurred in the past by exporters.

He further said that the investment was in alliance with the Shared Prosperity plan of his administration anchored on job creation and reduction of unemployment, and assured that the decision to site the multi-billion-naira facility in Imo State would be justified.

He acknowledged that Imo State was central to other states surrounding her and that Imo people would give the investors all the necessary support they needed to succeed having themselves “helped to include Imo State in the World map of trade and business.”

The governor promised conducive environment for investors’ businesses, noting that “Igbo people at the end of the day will be the first beneficiary.”

Uzodinma highlighted that Imo State was prepared for international business, as it had engaged in the dredging of Orashi River to the Atlantic Ocean, creating Orashi Free Trade Zone, working hard to harness the abundant gas deposit in the state that has necessitated the signing of Orashi Electricity Company Limited pact with an Egyptian Company, Madkour Group.

The governor also said that all the efforts were aimed at encouraging the oil and non-oil products and trade in Imo.

“I am very delighted to participate in this ceremony. What the bank has done and still doing is to provide homegrown

solution. I recall how our people were subjected to untold scrutiny just to export the African products. Now the Afrexim Bank has risen to the occasion and is bringing solution.

“From what I have seen, any certification derived from here cannot be subjected to another scrutiny. I am happy Imo is the second to have this Centre in Nigeria. The Nigeria National Development Plan is in line with this.

“My administration in Imo is centred on prosperity for all which is to activate opportunity for economic growth. Afrexim Bank decision to cite this project here will not be regretted. I have no doubt we will have a win-win situation. We will give you every support you need to achieve results. It will create jobs for our people. The economic gains coming out of this project, surely, we will be the ultimate beneficiary. We will support it to encourage foreign direct investment in Imo,” he said.

In his remarks, Benedict Oramah, president and chairman of the Board of Afreximbank, who was represented by the Executive Vice President, Intra African Trade, Kanayo Awani, said that the centre would end the era of African products being rejected at the international level.

He said that it takes strong political will and leadership backed by capital from Africa, “as the best force of our people, to achieve economic growth and transformation.”



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# News

## Nasarawa governor sees hope for agriculture, landscape restoration in ACRoSAL

CHUKA UROKO

The Nasarawa State Governor, Abdullahi Sule has said that Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes (ACReSAL) project was a beacon of hope for national agricultural development and landscape restoration in semi-arid regions like his state.

Sule spoke at the opening ceremony of a joint World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and Federal Government of Nigeria Hybrid Implementation Support Mission for the ACRoSAL project.

The governor, who was represented at the event by his deputy, Emmanuel Akabe, emphasised the significance of ACRoSAL in addressing pressing challenges facing the agriculture sector.

Through ACRoSAL, which is a World Bank-supported agency of the Federal Government, the government intends to restore one million hectares of degraded land in the northern part of the country.

According to the government agency, a total of four million hectares of degraded



L-R: Munirat Abdullahi, Nasarawa State Commissioner of Finance; Soji Kayode, representative of the Federal Ministry of Finance; Joy Iganya Agene, World Bank Task Team Leader, ACRoSAL; Emmanuel Akabe, Deputy Governor, Nasarawa State; Abdulhamid Umar, National Programme Coordinator, ACRoSAL, and Manivel Emmanuel, an official of the World Bank, at the joint World Bank Food and Agricultural Organisation and Support Mission to Nasarawa State, Nigeria recently.

land is set for broader landscapes restoration by 2030. The project will also help reduce the vulnerability of millions of the extreme poor people in northern part of the country, strengthening their own roles in achieving environmental sustainability.

With ACRoSAL, the Federal Government strategises on checking the menace of desertification, restoring degraded

lands, developing special ecosystems and catalysing sustainable agricultural production in the 19 northern states as well as the FCT, Abuja.

"Nasarawa State, like every other state in the nation's semi-arid region, experiences adverse effects of climate change, which threatens our security and livelihoods. Through collaborative efforts and innovative approaches like ACRoSAL, we have the opportunity to build community resilience and ensure sustainable agricultural practices," the governor said.

He further said that ACRoSAL project would not only help reduce the vulnerability of millions of extremely poor people in the region, but also empower them to play an active role in achieving environmental sustainability.

A positive uniqueness of the project is its community-driven approach to setting up its projects. Projects are tailored towards meeting the specific needs of the communities. These communities are at the forefront of understanding, owning, protecting and defending projects, making them sustainable in the long run."

Sule commended ACRoSAL, describing it as an embodiment of the spirit of partnership and co-operation, bringing together government agencies, development partners, people from academia, local communities, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and all to find solutions to our shared environmental challenges.

He was optimistic that there would be beneficial dividend in the agricultural sector as states collaborate on the ACRoSAL project.

"Together, we will leverage the power of technology, research, and community engagement to transform our agricultural landscapes and secure a better future for generations to come.

"As we embark on this important project implementation journey, let us remain steadfast in our resolve, mindful of the impact of our actions, and responsiveness to the needs of our farmers and the community," the governor advised.

Joy Iganya Agene, Senior Environmental Specialist at World Bank Nigeria and Task Team Leader for the ACRoSAL project, explained that the aim of the mission was to assess implementation of ACRoSAL catalysed activities in the 19 Northern states and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) that are participating in the project.

## itel urges youths to acquire relevant skills for financial independence

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Youths have been advised to learn skills that will keep them engaged and empower them to achieve financial independence.

Speaking at the itel RS4 City game tour grand finale and prize presentation ceremony which held in Lagos, Marketing Manager of itel, Oke Umurhohwo described Nigerian youths as creative and multitalented beings, adding that if youths can channel their mind towards positive ventures, they will eventually live a fulfilled

life.

On the itel RS4 City tour which targeted at the youth Umurhohwo explained that it was a gaming tournament in which gamers and fans will be invited to contest against one another and participate in.

According to him, the grand finale brought together the victorious players from the previous state level competitors held in Lagos, Eboyi, Ibadan and Kaduna.

Explaining further, he said: "itel City game tournament is the first in its series and the gaming masters displayed their skills and determination competing for the converted grand prize of one million offered by the itel."

Stating that the event was held in collaboration with firms such as MTN, Google, itel marketing manager further said that the tournament also aimed to build long term relationships with the winners, not just for one-off events.

"We aim to support and empower them to represent itel at local e-sporting events and potentially on an international stage," Umurhohwo added.

High point of the event was prize presentation of one million naira to Alabi Kwam who emerged as the winner.

Other participants were not left out as they were also rewarded with mouth-watering gifts by the organisers.



## Firm offers insights on attaining green, sustainable Africa

IFEOMA OKEKE  
-KORIEOCHA

Green Growth Africa has organised a virtual forum, 'Path to Just and Sustainable Africa: Attracting Global Opportunities Impacting Policy,' to catalyse a transition towards a green and sustainable Africa.

The event served as a beacon of hope, drawing attention to the imperative fusion of grassroots environmental initiatives with national and international policy frameworks.

The forum boasted an impressive lineup of attendees, including: Jennifer Morgan, German State Secretary and Special Envoy on International Climate Policy; Sena Alouka, executive director of young volunteers for the environment; Olumide Idowu, executive director of the International Climate Change development initiative Nigeria, and Dipo Adedodoyin, co-lead of Green Growth Africa Community.

Morgan, who also led the global climate change programme of the Worldwide Fund of Nature (WWF), appreciated the level of commitment and efforts taken to build

a sustainable Africa and also encouraged that WWF was taking steps to ensure the longevity of this growing initiative.

"WWF is working to sustain environmental health and a sustainable plan by partnering with youth civil organisations," Morgan said.

Olumide Idowu, executive director of the International Climate Change Development Initiative Nigeria, articulated the essence of the forum, saying: "How local action can contribute to addressing global challenges is at the heart of our discussions today. We are focusing on awareness and education, sustainable practices, community engagement, advocacy and policy change, and the economic impact of these initiatives."

Idowu advocated that the initiative was in order to build an economy that is just and would address global challenges.

"We need a sustainable plan, because our actions can contribute to environmental change, and we also need to look at how local action can contribute to addressing global challenges and how we can make our lands acceptable to people," Idowu said.

To this effort, the director

of international climate change entreated that the Nigerian government should listen to outside bodies in terms of climate change. Idowu noted that there was a policy breach between policy formulation and implementation and stated that a change needed to occur for change to shine.

"How can we bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation in Africa? This involves a policy approach that is implementable," he also said.

Green Growth Africa's initiative aimed to address the pressing issue of limited capacity among Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other environmental actors to engage with governmental bodies and influence policy at broader scales. Through the workshops and discussions, the organisation aspired to empower CSOs with the necessary tools and knowledge for effective citizen and community engagement, thereby facilitating a just and sustainable transition.

In line with their objectives, Green Growth Africa provided a digital platform designed to showcase local initiatives, attract global opportunities, and impact policy both nationally and internationally.





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# News

## Tinubu urged to ensure provision of balanced meals for children across nation

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has been urged to increase his government's effort with the renewed hope agenda to provide balanced diets for children across Nigerian schools.

Chairman, board of directors, Women in Dairy Production Association (WIDPA), Olusola Olakojo, made the appeal during the launch of 'Diary 4kids project' held in Lagos.

Speaking at the programme which came under the theme, 'Milk and dairy products: an integral part in child's health and development,' Olakojo stressed the need for Tinubu's administration to feed children in various schools, churches, mosques, orphanage and motherless babies' homes and IDP camps, adding that it is a task that must be done.



Tinubu

According to him, WIDPA is dedicated to bridging the gap in milk availability, supporting families and empowering communities.

"A state or a nation that can-

not provide for her children and nurture them has no future. We envision a community, a state and a nation where every child can grow strong, healthy and confident with a

brighter future ahead," he said.

While stating that the journey requires collective efforts, compassion and dedication, Olakojo invited all to join in the noble course. He said: "Together, let us make a difference in the lives of our children. Investment in infrastructure is necessary, but the only investment that can guarantee us a greater and brighter future is the one we put into the lives of our children."

Anita Nana Okuribido, founder and national coordinator for Agro-Women Synergy International and president of Women in Renewable Energy Association of Nigeria, said that Nigerians should make it a priority to give their children milk and dairy products so that they can grow and become smart children, as well as excel in their academics.

Okuribido therefore, urged the Federal Government to revise and review the policy

framework to make it friendly with children's nutrition.

"When we make the policy framework, it should include in the priority dairy products to the nutrition of our children in homes, hospitals, IDP camps, schools, orphanage homes.

"We must make it a priority to give our children dairy products to make them excel in their education. We want the children as our future generation to be well-fed with good nutrition so that they can lead us a right," she said.

On his part, technical director WIDPA/Dairy 4 kids, Ifelajo Peter Ojo, lauded WIDPA's initiative to provide good nutrition to Nigerian children by making milk and dairy products available for them.

"It is a laudable one and I am grateful to be a part of making this nutrition available to our children in certain parts of the country, and giving them access to good nutrition by mak-

ing milk available in schools, IDP camps, motherless babies' homes and hospitals," he said.

Speaking earlier, Founder, Dairy 4kids project, Rachael Eyitayo Ariori said that the theme of the programme which was part of her organisation's activities to mark the 2024 Children's Day was ideal, considering the fact that children are the worst hit by malnutrition in the country.

She appealed to government to assist WIDPA with the provision of funds so that they can produce more milk for companies that are in to manufacturing of milk products.

Ariori said that the programme was organised to mark the Children's Day, adding: "Because of the importance of the children, DIARY4KIDS decided to support Nigerian children who deserve more. It is their right to have access to good nutrition, good milk and good bones' development.

## Cornerstone wins Insurance company of the year award

MODETSUS ANAESORONYE

Leading underwriter, Cornerstone Insurance Plc, has won the Insurance Company of the Year 2024 Award by the African Insurance Organization (AIO). This recognition was presented to Cornerstone Insurance at the 50th AIO Conference and General Assembly held in Windhoek, Namibia.

The award affirms Cornerstone's commitment to excellence, innovation, and customer satisfaction in the insurance sector as the company has consistently demonstrated outstanding performance and growth in the industry, setting new standards in service delivery and product offerings.

Now in its 9th edition, the African Insurance Awards honours distinguished Afri-

can insurance companies and CEOs who have demonstrated unprecedented leadership, competence, and achievement in the industry. It aims to foster the best corporate governance, innovations, and sustainable growth within the insurance sector.

Speaking on receiving the award on behalf of the company, Stephen Alangbo, managing director/CEO, Cornerstone

Insurance, said: "We are deeply honoured to receive this award. This recognition is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our entire team, who strive every day to provide exceptional service and value to our customers," he said.

As the leading insurance provider in Nigeria, Cornerstone Insurance continues to invest in technology and talent to drive its mission of delivering superior insurance solutions. The company remains committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity and professionalism, ensuring that its clients are always well protected and well served.

Cornerstone Insurance is licensed and re-certified by the National Insurance Commission (NAICOM) to do both general and life business. As the first insurance company in Nigeria to provide customers with an online platform for insurance transactions, our services are technologically driven by cutting-edge insurance applications. These services are accessible with ease through the internet and on mobile devices.

At Cornerstone, we remain committed to both our core values of integrity, empathy, professionalism, innovation, and team spirit and our continued mission of delivering value beyond expectations through needs-based products and quality service.

## 2027 Presidency: Why LP will not allow Atiku-Obi alleged alliance

INI OBONG IWOK

Abayomi Arabambi, Labour Party's national publicity secretary, has said that the party would not allow its 2023 presidential candidate, Peter Obi, to join the People's Democratic Party (PDP) despite the crisis rocking the party.

Arabambi made the disclosure while speaking on Channels Television, adding that the party is working towards a political solution to solve its internal crisis so that Obi would not work with Atiku Abubakar ahead of the 2027 presidential election.

The Labour Party chieftain said: "Politically, we will not allow the crisis to fester for long and we will now allow Peter Obi to join Atiku.

"We knew their plan, that was why we said we need to explore political solution between ourselves."

After meeting with the former vice president, Peter Obi was rumoured to be nursing a plan to dump the Labour Party for the PDP.

Several political pundits have predicted that the duo could work together to unseat

President Bola Tinubu in the 2027 presidential election.

Arabambi, who also spoke on Labour Party's legal tussle, further commented on the legal crisis rocking the party.

The FCT High Court ordered Abure and two others to refrain from parading themselves as the Labour Party national officer. In his reaction to the judgment,

Arabambi said every action taken by Abure from March 2023 to March 2024 remained null and void.

He said: "Since the Court of Appeal just set aside the judgement in March 2024, every other thing done between March 2023 and 2024 by Julius Abure is a nullity."

Meanwhile, Peter Obi, the former presidential candidate of the Labour Party, has reiterated his commitment to the party.

The former governor of Anambra State made the comment while denying the report that he was planning to dump the party for the PDP.

Rumours about Obi dumping the Labour Party for the PDP went viral following his closed-door meeting with former Vice President Atiku Abubakar.



Stephen Alangbo, MD/CEO, Cornerstone Insurance, receiving the award of the Insurance Company of the Year at the 9th edition of the African Insurance Awards held at Windhoek, Namibia.



# Ganduje launches training programme for APC youth wing

INI OBONG IWOK

The All Progressives Congress (APC) National Chairman, Abdullahi Ganduje has launched the APC Youth Wing Workplace Readiness Training Programme, a significant initiative aimed at enhancing employability among young party members.

The programme, themed 'I Am Employable', took place from June 4th to June 7th, 2024, in Abuja and was accessible virtually for participants nationwide.

According to the organisers, the program was designed to equip young party members with essential skills and knowledge, covering topics such as professional development, effective communication,



Ganduje

leadership, and industry-specific skills.

The organiser, in a statement issued on Sunday, said Ganduje's

involvement highlights the APC's commitment to youth empowerment and fostering a culture of excellence and

professionalism within the party. In appreciation of the gesture, APC National Youth Leader and Training Convener, Dayo Israel stated that the youths were thrilled to have Ganduje inaugurate the vital programme.

"This initiative reflects our dedication to the youth and our belief in their potential to drive positive change in our society," he said.

Prominent speakers at the event include E.G Jibola Ponnle, former CIPM CEO and former Lagos Commissioner for Training; Niyi Adesanya, CEO of FifthGear Plus and Management Consultant; and Morayo Afolabi-Brown, a respected media personality.

"The APC Youth Wing Workplace Readiness and Employability Skills Training Programme (WREST) aims to help young Nigerians aged 16 and above develop the core

skills employers seek, improving their ability to secure jobs, retain employment, and navigate the labor market.

"The programme will enhance personal branding skills, effective CV and resume presentation, core workplace skills, innovative thinking, and competitive strategies for thriving in a global society.

"With the theme 'I Am Employable', this initiative is a major effort to build the economic capacity of young Nigerians, equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their communities," APC National Youth Leader said.

Israel added "The underlying objective is to contribute to Nigeria's structural transformation and economic growth by enhancing employability, labor productivity, and reducing

unemployment.

"This initiative is part of the APC National Youth Strategic Plan 2024-2027, reflecting Israel's commitment to fostering youth empowerment and development through strategic initiatives and partnerships.

"It highlights a strong dedication to youth capacity development, targeting youths, graduates, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, and individuals transitioning careers, aiming to enhance their employability in today's competitive job market.

"Our primary goal with this program is to improve the economic capacity of young Nigerians, especially young progressives, by empowering them with the necessary core skills that will enhance their ability to secure a job, retain employment, and move flexibly in the labour market, prepare young people for the workplace."

## Adeniji Kazeem unveils book on Electronic Transaction June 11

INI OBONG IWOK

Former Lagos State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Adeniji Kazeem, a senior advocate of Nigeria (SAN), is set to unveil a new book titled 'The Nigerian Law of Electronic Transactions' on June 11 in Lagos.

In a statement by Adeniji Kazeem & Co. on Friday, the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi, SAN, will chair the public presentation of the book. A former Federal Commissioner of Works, Femi Okunnu, SAN, will be the Special Guest of Honour.

The book examines the pre-dominance of electronic transactions in the 21st century and the need to understand the legal framework that governs it.

Kazeem, as noted in its preface, said: "In today's digital age, electronic transactions have revolutionised the way we conduct business and manage our financial lives.

"From online banking and mobile payments to cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology, the landscape of electronic transactions is constantly evolving.

"As we navigate the digital economy landscape, it is essential to understand the legal framework that governs electronic transactions," Kazeem said.

He further described the book as a gateway and guide to the world of electronic transac-

tions, which according to him, would enable readers to navigate this complex and rapidly evolving field with confidence.

He explained that the book "shows that the digital economy and the huge financial transactions it generates is made up of a complex but exciting web of laws and regulations that sometimes defy regular understanding. "Any country including Nigeria wishing to prosper and benefit from the wealth of the global village must continue to create an enabling environment and enact laws for Electronic transitions to thrive.

"Nigeria appears to be moving in the right direction with the various levels of activity occurring in its digital space, but there is clearly room for improvement and this work aims to catalyse that process further," the senior advocate explained.

The book, in essence, covers

electronic contract formation, evidence and electronic contracts, legislating for electronic transactions, cybercrimes and electronic transactions and resolution of electronic contract disputes.

The book delves into the laws and regulations that guide electronic transactions, including but not limited to the Companies and Allied Matters Act, Nigerian Evidence Act, Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act, Uniform Electronic Transactions Act, ECOWAS Electronic Transaction Act, Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard, General Data Protection Regulation, Nigerian Data Protection Regulation, Nigerian Data Protection Act, Nigerian Data Protection Commission, National Information Technology Development Agency and Cybercrimes Act.



Kazeem

## Obaseki attributes transformation of Edo to investment in technology sector

IDRIS MOMOH, Benin

The Edo State Government has attributed the transformation of the state in the past seven-and-half years to investment in technology sector.

BusinessDay reports that Kelvin Uwaibi, managing director, Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO), made the remarks while speaking with newsmen in Benin City on his return from the second annual Africa Business Forum in Tallinn, Estonia.

Uwaibi opined that the public sector reforms of the Governor Godwin Obaseki-led government have positively impacted businesses and repositioned government agencies to thrive in a globally competitive environment.

The ESIPO boss said the theme of the forum was, 'Building Pathways to Partnerships'.

He noted that the investments in the technology sector have boosted the government's revolutionary e-government structure, that enabled Edo State Government workers to work remotely and efficiently.

According to him, investments in the technology sector in Edo State have further enhanced governance and the business environment.

"These include laying an additional 2,000 kilometres of fiber optics to connect all 18 local government areas with internet access and constructing a tier four data centre.

"Additionally, our public sector reforms facilitated by



Kelvin Uwaibi, managing director, Edo State Investment Promotion Office (L), during a panel session at the second annual Africa Business Forum in Tallinn, Estonia

our revolutionary e-government structure, enable Edo State Government staff to work remotely and efficiently. This reform includes providing laptops to government employees and, in collaboration with our partners, training 3,000 staff members in ICT," he said.

While corroborating the position of Olatunbosun Tija-

ni, minister of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Technology, he posited that the private sector is crucial in developing Nigeria's technology infrastructure.

Uwaibi also noted that innovation can occur more swiftly in Africa compared to more developed regions due to less entrenched legacy infrastructure.



# News

## Experts in conflict resolution call for mentoring of young women as peacebuilders

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Experts in conflict resolution and peace building have stressed the need for older generation of peacebuilding practitioners to train and equip young women as peace builders in Nigeria.

The experts spoke at a two-day national youth forum on intergenerational peacebuilding organised by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)- Nigeria in partnership with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and Global Affairs Canada.

Speaking at the virtual forum which came under the theme: 'mentoring the next generation of women peacebuilders', National Network Coordinator, WANEP-Nigeria, Bridget Osakwe said the forum would promote mutual understanding, respect and

collaboration among young women peacebuilders and more seasoned peacebuilding practitioners, contributing to the advancement of the UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and UNSCR 2250 Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) resolutions in Nigeria.

According to her, "The older generation of peacebuilding practitioners will serve to mentor the young women peacebuilders. It is expected that the forum will provide the opportunity for knowledge exchange and foster multi-generational cooperation among peacebuilders for the actualisation of the Nigerian WPS and YPS NAPs."

Similarly, WANEP-Nigeria Head of Programme, Patience Ikpeh-Obaulo said the expected outcome of the meeting is to seek to increased understanding and cooperation between young women peacebuilders and established practitioners contributing to a broader and

enriched perspective on the implementation of the WPS and YPS resolutions in the country.

Speaking on: 'Building self-confidence and the act of leadership', a peace building expert, Emem Okon explained that building self-confidence instigate positive energy in youths to take action for personal and professional aspirations. Explaining further Okon said: "Self-confidence is the act of believing in oneself or being certain that one can control any situation or circumstances by herself.

"It is trusting in yourself, your judgment, capabilities and abilities to achieve, impact or make possible, and being in control of your attitude, behaviour in life generally.

"Future leaders should develop self-confidence, assertiveness, appreciative, humility, fearless, calmness, willingness to help others, bold to ask for help, secure enough to admit

a weakness as part of characteristics they need in their endeavours."

On her part, Patricia Donli of the Gender Equality, Peace and Development Centre, Maiduguri who spoke on the 'importance of mentorship for young persons: role of mentor and mentee' defined a mentor as person who can support, advise and guide another person.

The purpose of mentoring, she said is to connect an individual who has a lot of knowledge and experience with someone who hasn't gained the same knowledge or experience yet. Giving a hint on how to become a peacebuilder, Donli, who is a professor, stressed the need for one to establish her vision, objectives and strategies for achieving such goal.

Peacebuilding skills according to the her include; communication skills; conflict resolution techniques which she said include; negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.

## Eno mulls completion of abandoned international conference centre, 14-storey hotel

ANIEFIOK UDONQUAK, Uyo

Governor Umo Eno appears set to complete the abandoned Ibom Tropicana Entertainment Centre which also houses an international conference centre in Uyo, the capital city.

The project, which includes a shopping mall and a cinema centre, was initiated by the Godswill Akpabio administration but was abandoned subsequently.

Eno, who has visited the project site in Uyo, has ordered immediate reclamation of all trespassed portions of the 82-hectare landed property acquired for the Ibom Tropicana Entertainment Centre.

As he moves to complete the moribund and uncompleted parts of the facility.

Eno gave the indication while undertaking an inspection tour of the theme park, the 14-storey Tropicana hotel building and the 5000-capacity Conference facility at the Ibom Tropicana Entertainment Centre, Udo Udoma Avenue, Uyo.

The governor, who had earlier held a re-evaluation meeting with major contractors on the project, said the visit was informed by his resolve to attend to critical infrastructure with potentials to grow the state's

economy.

He explained that his drive to reclaim the facility was also in furtherance of his pledge to complete uncompleted projects initiated by previous administrations and make them functional.

"We have resolved to put the past behind us. We have structures on ground; what I'm doing now is to see all of the vision, what it was all about, how we can link them together and how we can revive them. This can give several thousands of jobs to Akwa Ibomites.

"We've been trying to create a theme park at the Udo Udoma Cenotaph but seeing what we have here, why do I need to duplicate? Why do I have to start something new when we have something here, we can build on?" he said.

Governor Eno therefore, directed the Commissioner for Lands, Iniobong Ekong, to avail him with the survey plan of the entire land area that was acquired by the government for the project, with intent to sack trespassers and bring down illegal structures.

He also directed the Ministry of Special Duties to ensure the cleaning of the entire area, and the Commissioner for Internal Security and Waterways, Koko Essien, to immediately take over the security of the entire facility.

## Customs modernisation project built foolproof against cyber-attacks, says Ogunshola

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) Trade Modernisation Project (TMP), has been built foolproof against cyber-attacks, according to Ahmed Ogunshola, general manager of Trade Modernisation Project (TMP) Limited.

Speaking to journalists during a tour of the project's office in Abuja recently, Ogunshola said the project is built with the latest security network gadgets to ensure its safety and integrity.

According to him, the system's software, described as the Unified Customs Management System (UCMS), has seven layers of security built to resist cyber-attacks.

Ogunshola said the project incorporates a high level of security for its operations.

"We are working with one of the world's leading cyber security firms to ensure the software's safety and doing code-level cyber security analysis of the software. Before any code is pushed into the software, it analyses and assesses it. We are working towards the ISO 27001 information security standard, which is the high-

est you can get in the world," he said.

Expressing confidence in the cybersecurity framework and other security measures put in place to ensure the safety of the software, Ogunshola said the measures were also extended to its hardware and other reporting systems to guarantee safety.

He said the Unified Customs Management System is an interactive platform that checkmate fraudulent activities in trade operations, as traders can monitor all the processes using the software.

"We have made significant progress in achieving the deliverables of the project and by the end of the project, NCS will be a pride among its peers. This will bring Nigeria Customs fully into the 22nd century to ensure that it earns its place of pride among Customs administrations globally," he said.

Also speaking, Abdullahi Maiwada, national public relations officer of NCS, said the tour was to showcase the efforts of the service in implementing its modernisation project.

According to him, the move is in line with the efforts of NCS in facilitating ease of doing business and efficient service delivery.



L-R: Gabriel Aja, chairman, Enugu State Universal Basic Education Board; Emeka Ajogwu, Commissioner for Special Duties; Osita Eze, chairman, Committee on Education, Enugu State House of Assembly; Chidiebere Onyia, Secretary to the Enugu State Government; Tivlumun Ahure, Director and Ambassador, International Human Rights Commission, African Region; Peter Mbah, Governor of Enugu State, and Ndubueze Mba, Commissioner for Education, Enugu State, at the opening of the maiden NGEducators International Model United Nations (NGIMUN) summit in Enugu recently.

## Prudence in cost of governance earns Mbah recognition, commendation

CHUKA UROKO

The Enugu State Governor, Peter Mbah, has been recognised and commended for being prudent in managing state resources, especially the cost of governance, in the first quarter of 2024.

While the governor was recognised and awarded 'The Most Prudent Governor' in Q1, 2024 by Open Nigerian State, a website supported by BudgIT, the commendation came from civil society organisation known as the Enugu Good Governance Group (E-3G).

The group, in a statement by its national coordinator, Odinaka Okechukwu, said the report published by Open Nigerian State which showing that the Mbah Administration recorded the least recurrent expenses among other states in the first three months of 2024, is yet another indication that the governor's presence in government was inspired by selfless service.

Data published by Open Nigeria States based on the budget implementation by the states shows that whereas Benue, Imo, Niger, Rivers, Sokoto and Yobe states have no data to their names, the remaining 30 state governments spent N986.64bn on recurrent

expenditures, which includes workers' salaries, refreshments, sitting allowances, travelling and utilities within the period under review.

Lagos State recorded the highest recurrent expenses nationally, having spent N189.62 billion, followed by Delta State, which recorded N68.68 billion.

Ebonyi State recorded the highest recurrent expenses in the South East with N14.95 billion, followed by Abia State with N10.92bn and Anambra State with N9.91bn. Enugu State recorded N7.51 billion to emerge the least in in both the region and the entire country. Imo has no data.

"This is a clear testimony

to the high level of fiscal discipline in the Mbah Administration, and a demonstration that accountability, transparency, and traceability, which he said would be the guiding principles in the administration of public funds were not mere campaign buzzwords.

"With a record N107.2 billion recurrent expenditure, representing about 21 percent of Enugu's N521.5 billion 2024 budget and a whopping N414.3 billion or 79 percent of the budget earmarked for capital projects, Governor Mbah has left no one in doubt of his commitment to disrupting the status quo to transform the state in all ramifications," the group said.



# Transport fare spikes in Delta as government bans 'Okada'

## ...Residents groan as bus drivers, keke riders smile to bank

MERCY ENOCH, Asaba

**D**elta residents affected by government's ban on motorcycle as means of transportation, are in confusion and pain as they spend exorbitantly on transport, swelling the pockets of tricycle (Keke) operators/riders and commercial bus drivers who are now smiling to the bank.

They are confused because two weeks into the ban, they are yet to see action to prove that the ban is in the interest of the citizens as claimed by the government.

While some of those not affected are happy with the ban, the okada riders and residents who rely on their services daily, are not.

Eight out of 25 local government areas of the state are affected by the ban.

The 8 LGAs are Oshimili South, Oshimili North, Ika North East, Ika South, Ethiope East, Sapele, Uvwie and Warri North and these are LGAs worst hit by criminal activities traced to Okada riders though not every resident depend on Okada. If you live in streets away from tarred roads, you depend on Okada.

Those who seem to be hard hit by the ban are in the cities like Asaba metropolis which is the state capital.

Eunice Diribe, a petty trader who purchase food-stuff from Otulu Market and sell at her shop in Oduke, near Bonsaac, Asaba, Oshimili South LGA, told BusinessDay, "The best thing to do is not to ban Okada."

According to her, "Government knows that most of our roads are terribly bad and it is Okada that conveys us to and from our residents. Keke only stops at major streets that are tarred."

"Today (Friday), I've gone to Otulu Market. From Jemok Junction, I chartered a keke. The things I bought were few because I had no adequate fund to buy the



Okada riders before the ban.

items like garri and other food items I needed. So, boarding Okada with N300 could have been better for me than the N1,000 I paid for Keke.

The ban has seriously affected us as it has also made our goods to be more expensive and what this means is that we lose our customers when they can't afford to buy at exorbitant rate."

According to her, Keke as the means of transport does not also guarantee a crime-free state because criminals also commit crimes with Keke. Few days ago, there was this incident of Keke rider disappearing with four stolen children.

"If however, the state governor thinks that lesser crimes are committed with Keke, he should have first rolled out tricycles for okada riders to switch to rather than throwing them out of business first and also bringing suffering on us," she said.

Continuing, she said: "They said that the ban is in the interest of the residents and I am saying that the ban is affecting us negatively. They should also remember that these ones have families to fend for and if there is not serious intervention for them, some innocent ones may end up committing the crime because of hunger."

Said Julius Ephraim who operates a Canteen, said, "You can see that there is no business. Those who used to patronise me have been

banned from operation. I advise the state government to lift this ban to save us from having a more criminal state.

Another resident from Ibuza Community in Oshimili North LGA, said that it is even horrible for them because the Keke that are operating in the area are given 10pm to close work or be arrested.

However, Goodluck, a barber simply believes that it is better to ban Okada riders because of the manner they go about. Majority of them are from a part of the country known with violence and that is what they are exhibiting here, he said. "They bring out their danger at slightest provocation. If government don't deal with them now, they would overtake the state."

Edith Ukwuoma, a businesswoman in Asaba, however said she is in no way affected by the ban but want government to do the right thing for the citizens to be happy living in the state and doing business.

Some Keke riders are happy because the ban has positioned them to be reaching the areas initially meant for Okada riders and are smiling to the bank.

"The ban has favoured us," said Keke rider who introduced himself as Gerald. "At least, no day passes without me going home with N30,000 and above. I'm making use of this opportunity while it lasts," he said as he smiled.

But Pascal Chimobo, another Keke rider said he is not happy at all despite making huge money daily following the ban.

"I would have preferred government to push the Okada riders inside the street so that they won't come to the major roads. They make our work easier because they used to bring our passengers for us to carry. Now, the situation is forcing us to be plying those rough and flooded streets that Okada riders used to operate in. There is no job for us because we find it difficult to enter streets."

"The best thing is to get them registered for easy identification and restrict them to streets and not tarred roads," he said.

Michael Ogbodo, a trader, advised the government to work towards putting effective transport system in the state especially for those living where roads aren't motorable.

"You cannot satisfy everybody. What I know is that this policy has good side and we should see it that people will get used to it. Some of the affected riders may even graduate to shuttle bus and Keke owners/riders soonest," Ogbodo said.

### Ban excites Delta CP

Abaniwonda Olufemi, the Delta State Commissioner of Police (CP), disclosed that he played a major role in getting the state government ban Okada and metal scavengers popularly

known as "Iron Condemn" following the upsurge in crime traceable to them.

"Since the ban and the enforcement, there is a lot of down trend in crime across the state," the CP stated.

"A lot of these 'Okada' people don't even have registration number. Even when they commit a traffic offence, there is no way you can trace them."

### Govt's solution to the ban

Last week, the government said it would invest heavily on road infrastructure to connect various towns, cities and communities.

The government said this would enable vehicles, keke and other means of transportation to convey passengers, goods and services without difficulties.

Latimore Oghenesivbe, chief executive officer of the state orientation bureau, made the disclosure last week during a radio programme in Asaba, the state capital.

"The ban on Okada as means of commercial transportation in Delta State is real, and has come to stay. And it is not directed at any tribe or ethnic nationality. The governor is detribalised."

"Governor Sheriff Oborevwo promised enhanced peace and security in his MORE Agenda, and he's committed to protect life and property in compliance with constitutional provisions. The ban is essentially to upscale security measures in the state."

"The decision is for the best interest of the greater number of Deltans, and within a reasonable time, government will provide alternative means of transportation, to ease stress currently experienced by commuters in the affected eight local government areas in the state," Oghenesivbe assured.

He said that the ban was in tandem with constitutional provisions mandating governments at state and federal levels to protect life and property.

He revealed that Sheriff Oborevwo, the state governor, was reluctant to support the ban on commercial motorcycles but that the rising wave of criminal activities linked to majority of Okada riders in the state encouraged him to take the bull by the horn via the instrumentality of the state Regulation on Okada as means of commercial transportation.

### Commissioner of Information reacts

Ifeanyi Osuozu in a radio programme, explained that government officials held several meetings with leaders of Okada Riders Association with the view to tackling the menace of criminal activities of some of their members, but that all efforts failed woefully, hence the outright ban of Okada for commercial transportation in the affected eight LGAs in the state.

He however, said that the ban does not affect use of motorbikes for corporate services; such as courier services and delivery of products ordered online, as well as security personnels on duty who sometimes use their personal motor bikes to get to their places of primary assignments, or for surveillance without using same for commercial activities while on mufti.

### Conclusion

State government, its officials and security operatives say, "Yes" to the ban. Some residents say "Yes" because they want security but they are afraid that if government mismanages the situation, crime would increase in those areas.

The fear is worsened by the fact that security agencies may not be available when a criminal would attack in such 'remote' streets/areas, except residents would start arranging for special vigilantes if they must sleep with their two eyes closed.

Both those affected and those not affected are all looking forth to action from the state government to prove the ban is in truly in their interest.



# City file

## Abia killing: Do not punish innocent persons, Otti urges Nigerian Army

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State has reiterated his appeal to the Nigerian Army not to punish innocent persons among those so far arrested following the killing of five soldiers a week ago by suspected armed hoodlums at Obikabia junction in Obingwa Local Government Area (LGA) near Aba.

Otti said the Army should continue to carry out its investigation with the consciousness that some of those so far arrested might be innocent.



The Abia Governor stated this during his continued morale boosting shuttle for the officers and men of the Nigeria Army with a visit to the 144 Battalion Osioma, Abayi near Aba.

Otti's visit to the Army formation was in continuation of his visit last week to the 144 Battalion Asa, where he commiserated with the officers there as well as paid condolences to the wives of the deceased soldiers, who were killed by yet-to-be-identified gunmen on May 30 at Obikabia.

Otti, who was received on arrival at 144 Battalion by the Commanding Officer, Major K.P. Duniya, (Major) on behalf of the Commander, 14 Brigade Ohafia, O.O. Diya, a brigadier general, told the troop that he had come

to commiserate with them, encouraged them and to let them know that the Abia State Government would continue to support them as they carry on the onerous national duty of protecting the citizens.

"I came specifically to address you on the unfortunate incident that happened a week ago in Obikabia Junction in Obingwa Local Government Area, very close to Aba.

"My name is Alex Otti; I am the governor of Abia State. I feel it is my responsibility as the Chief Security Officer of the State to speak to you, commiserate with you, and also ensure that your morale is boosted, that you don't get discouraged and you don't get distracted by this

unfortunate incident.

"The state has already placed a bounty of 25 million Naira on anybody who has information that will lead to the arrest and prosecution of people who were involved in this dastardly act, remotely or directly.

"We have started getting very credible information. This intelligence-gathering will continue, but I do not want it to dampen your morale. We have all been working together to secure this state in the last one year that I have been the governor of the state, and I want to encourage you to continue your work, don't get distracted.

"I believe, from credible intelligence available to us, that this criminal act may have been executed by people who are opposed to the progress and the good things that

are happening in Abia. One of the last things we want to do is to humour them by allowing them to distract us.

"So, we will get to the root of the matter; we will arrest everyone that is involved. I have in the last few days also visited the widows of the five gallant officers that were brutally murdered. As a state we have committed to absorbing them, whether they come from the state or not, we have absorbed them as part of this state. All their children are now on scholarship and they will remain on scholarship until they graduate from the university and we will also keep supporting the widows and

ensure that they do not lack anything.

"I want to assure you that this state will do everything possible to ensure that all of you are protected," Governor Otti guaranteed.

He further said: "I'm also aware that some people have been picked up before now, but when I spoke with the GOC this morning, he told me that virtually everyone that was picked up has been released except for about nine or 10 people who are still being investigated.

"We, as a state, support thorough investigation, but we will also appeal to you that a lot of innocent civilians, who you will en-

counter may not have been involved. I believe that most of them are not involved. It is even possible that those who committed this crime came from outside the state. "So whatever be the case, we will not like to punish those who are innocent with those who are guilty because like it is said, two wrongs cannot make a right.

"So, I will like to encourage you, I will like to appeal to your leaders to ensure that people are treated decently, people are given the utmost respect that they deserve while we are doing our job of fishing out the criminals.

"Once again, I just want

to say thank you for the work you are doing in Abia. Thank you, on behalf of the government and people of Abia State. Continue to do your work.

"In the last one-year, criminal activities have gone down drastically and it is attributable to you. Most times, I drive around, even some times at midnight with few security, and I see how you people are at alert.

"So, continue to be alert and I don't want anybody to be discouraged and for their spirits to go down. Once again, CO thank you for this opportunity and I will like to say that at the end of the day, we will get the criminals."

## Why KAI's method is inappropriate in sanitising Lagos

... 'You can't achieve legality through illegality'

INIOBONG IWOK and JOHN SALAU

In their drive to sanitise Lagos and prevent people from running afoul of the law, officials of the Lagos State Environmental Sanitation Corps (LAGESC), formerly known as Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI), have been deploying tactics that run contrary to their mandate.

KAI was established in November 2003 by the Lagos State government, with a collective objective of enhancing public health, maintaining environmental standards, and creating a conducive living environment for the residents of the state.

However, the law setting up the agency was consequently repealed and signed into law by former governor Akinwunmi Ambode on March 1, 2017, changing the name of the agency from KAI to LAGESC.

Though there was a change in name, the mandate and objective of the agency did not change, which was to support the overall policy of the state government in regards to its war against indiscipline across Lagos.

The agency, no doubt, plays a vital role in maintaining environmental and social order in Lagos State. However, the high-handedness that greeted the renewed drive of the state's Ministry of Environment to discourage Lagosians from crossing major highways where there is a pedestrian bridge by the KAI officials has called for more reorientation on the part

of the agency.

That an agency of government set up to enforce discipline and compliance with the state's environmental laws to run afoul of the same law is a call for an overall societal re-birth. The agency in enforcing compliance is sadly putting a wedge on innocent Lagosians and luring them to fall into traps they were not supposed to fall into.

In its bid to arrest offenders who violate environmental and street trading laws, especially the 'no crossing of the highway' law; officials of KAI like other agencies of government in the state would rather lure unsuspecting Lagosians to cross the express for extortion purposes.

Many of the KAI officials prioritise punitive measures far above preventive in carrying out their primary mandate. While, the law empowers the agency to arrest offenders where and whenever they run afoul of the state's environmental laws; it does not allow for tactics that contravene the law.

It would have even been better if those arrests were made for genuine offences and not what is being experienced in many parts of the mainland where pedestrians were lured to break the law by the same people who are meant to enforce the environmental laws.

Similarly, the fact that many of the arrests happen under the radar is also another reason for the state government through the state House of Assembly to revisit the mandate of the agency with clear guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for KAI.

Many people say the brigade officials are not disciplined in the way they go about their work and called for large-scale reform.

In recent times, many Lagosians have expressed concerns about extortion from brigade officials in their quest to generate revenue for the state government.

From encounters in various parts of Lagos, there are several people who have tales of woes, with many accusing the brigade officials of being overzealous.

"I agree we need that sort of agency to put us on track, especially knowing how Nigerians are, but it is apparently these guys could be overzealous and corrupt," Lucy Onoh, a trader said.

Although evidence abounds of positive changes in the conduct of the citizenry and is noticeable in some parts of the state, there have also been complaints about deliberate efforts to extort money, especially from ignorant citizens in society who break the civil law of the state.

The brigade has come under heavy criticism for using brute force, the quest to arrest and extort money or to generate revenue for the Lagos State government.

In their quest to effect arrest, confiscate traders' wares, and extort money many traders have been wounded, or chased into harm.

Wasiu Ogunwale, 30 years old, narrated how she almost lost her leg to an accident when KAI officials chased her toward an upcoming vehicle on Ikorodu

road.

Ogunwale admitted to breaking the law by crossing the express road, but stated that the manner the KAI officials were carrying out their work was scary and dangerous.

"I was almost knocked down by a running vehicle on Ikorodu road, all of a sudden, I saw two men chasing me from nowhere and I was also running too not seeing the vehicle in front of me.

"I actually did not know they had stopped people from crossing the expressway in Lagos.

"I injured my leg and was still arrested, when we got their vehicle, they asked for N20,000 or else they would take me away to their office. After much pleading they took N5,000 and released me."

Similarly, in Cele, Oshodi-Apapa expressway, Micheal Paul, job-hunting fresh graduate, narrated how he had a bitter encounter with KIA officials recently after crossing the expressway without knowing they were standing around.

Paul said that he was taken into their black maria vehicle to be taken to their office, but was saved by a colleague, noting that it was apparent that the officials were only after money.

"I really do not know if they are after generating revenue for the state government or just for their pockets, because they would be hiding, suddenly they just come out from nowhere to arrest you.

"That is what they do across the state. It is sad, targeting ignorant people to make money out of them. That is what you

see when an agency is set up and there is no due supervision."

But many people have called on the Lagos government headed by Babajide Sanwo-Olu to sanitise the agency so it can redirect its focus to its primary objectives.

### More complaints

For instance, many Lagosians have complained about how some KAI officials around the Oshodi-Along corridor, especially at Ladipo bus stop, lure pedestrians to cross the expressway rather than taking the advisory route of urging them to use the pedestrian bridge to prevent them from crossing the highway.

Also, KAI officials who are meant to enforce environmental laws along the Lagos-Badagry corridor themselves contribute to messing up the environment. In many instances, officials of the agency urinate in the open at Mile 2 and other places, and also turn a blind eye to traders who occupy the road and walkways to display their wares.

In other places, officials of KAI collect levies from roadside traders on a daily or weekly basis just as they do the same during the weekly Thursday's environmental cleanup exercises where businesses get locked up for extortions.

While the state government and the ministry of environment are busy pushing forward initiatives to promote a cleaner Lagos; it's high time the corps marshal of the Lagos State Environmental Sanitation Corps Agency (KAI), Olaniyi Olatunbosun Cole is called to order on the need to re-orientate his kick against indiscipline brigade.

It is commonplace that KAI officials require clear guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure consistency and fairness in carrying out their operations across Lagos.

Similarly, there is a need for the agency to revisit the internal disciplinary measures of the agency in developing a comprehensive handbook outlining their powers, responsibilities, and protocols.

Also, the corps marshal must regularly review and update the SOPs to reflect changing circumstances across the state, which will ultimately establish a clear chain of command and accountability among the men on the fields.

According to public commentators, KAI can minimise confusion, ensure transparency, and maintain public trust by having clear guidelines and SOPs. Similarly, it is said that the agency would require sufficient resources and funding to effectively carry out its functions.

Accordingly, it is said that the state must step up its investment in KAI by allocating sufficient funds for training, public awareness campaigns, and operations on the back of providing adequate personnel, vehicles, and equipment, to ensure timely maintenance and replacement of equipment and vehicles of the agency.

"By investing in KAI's resources and funding, the Lagos state government can demonstrate its commitment to a cleaner, more disciplined environment," Oke Araino, Lagos based media professional, told BusinessDay SUNDAY.

According to him, the Lagos state government must re-orientate the agency to make it fit for purpose as it used to be. He said further that Lagosians no longer regard the KAI officials because of their corrupt tendencies.

"You know how Lagos is; everything in Lagos is all about bribery and corruption, and most of these officials go as far as liaising with 'Agberos' to collect money from hawkers, sellers on the highway, on the streets of Lagos. That is why our markets are not clean, which is also the reason people do not make use of the pedestrian bridge because of the

practices of KAI officials," he said.

According to him, the KAI brigades are no longer as effective as they used to be on the streets of Lagos. He said many of the officials often look away rather than carry out their function. He said further that oftentimes in front of the KAI officials, people cross the highways and sell on the streets.

"Of recent, they just carried out a responsibility in Mile2; as I was passing through Mile2 the other day, I saw the Hausa boys fighting the KAI officials. Why would they fight KAI officials? Because of what they have indulged in.

"Some of these KAI officials go as far as collecting money from these people, and these people selling under the bridge in Mile2 pay lots of money to KAI officials; that is why they took it upon themselves to fight the officials. So, they do not have respect anymore because they indulge themselves into what they are not supposed to indulge themselves into," Araino said.

However, Chinyere Okoroafor, told BusinessDay SUNDAY that it is very important for Lagosians to respect the state's environmental laws, and urged the agency to bring to bear human-face in their enforcement drive.

"Because of the nature of how we are as Nigerians, the method in which they apply to catch offenders is okay; but then, there are also disadvantages. In the process to apprehend an offender, the official

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leading to more effective enforcement and a cleaner, safer Lagos.

Beyond the collaborative move with other agencies, there is also a need for the KAI brigade to leverage technology to enhance its enforcement and overall operations. Similarly, the agency should utilise drones for surveillance and monitoring, coupled

with adopting data analytics to identify hotspots and optimise patrols, just as it considers implementing a mobile app for citizens to report violations.

Accordingly, by embracing technology, KAI can streamline its operations, increase efficiency, and respond promptly to violations. But, in responding promptly to viola-

tions, the agency must deepen community engagement and partnerships.

Therefore, KAI should engage with local communities and partner with stakeholders to develop tailored solutions for specific areas that prioritise collaborating with community leaders to identify and address local issues.

Similarly, KAI will have to ramp up partnership with private organisations to support clean-up initiatives at the grassroots levels, and the establishment of community-based programs to promote environmental awareness.

By fostering strong community relationships, the Lagos State Environmental Sanitation Corps can build trust and encourage collective responsibility for a cleaner, more disciplined Lagos, where the overall mandate of the agency could be realised. Also, it is crucial for the Lagos state government to support the KAI brigade in their efforts and work together towards a better future for all citizens.

Although many Lagosians have commended KIA for the visible orderliness in some notorious locations in the state, like Oshodi, Mile 12, Mile2, Cele on Oshodi-Apapa expressway, Ikotun among several other parts of the state, but many have questioned the method used to achieved the progress.

It is not clear if money generated by KIA officials is accounted to the Lagos State government or it ends up in the pockets of the officials.



# News Feature

## Amid surge in cybercrime, what next after suspension of security levy?

BRIGHT IMOH

**T**he rise of internet fraud has eaten deep into the heart of the society rendering innocent businesses and citizens helplessly vulnerable.

Cyber crimes occur in various forms, some of which include hacking, phishing, bank verification number (BVN) scams, spamming, cyber harassment, ATM spoofing, social media hi-jacking, and so on. Cyber crimes materialise when criminal minds exploit the vulnerabilities of both electronic devices and their users, suffice to say that the increasing number of internet users has provided a fertile ground for cyber breaches.

Statistics by DataReportal reveal that Nigeria's internet penetration rate stood at 45.5 percent of the total population at the start of 2024, making Nigeria, the country with the highest number of internet users in Africa.

In Nigeria, a number of key factors - such as a high rate of unemployment, economic instability, the quest for wealth, a lack of strong cybercrime laws, incompetent cyber security structure, amongst others - have integrated to make cybercrime a significant problem for the country and its citizens, compelling some individuals into cyber crime as a means of livelihood.

Cyber crimes have been considered a threat not just locally but also internationally due to its 'transnational' nature, as perpetrators operate across borders, making it complex to combat by law enforcement efforts.

### Cybersecurity levy

The cybersecurity levy refers to a percentage (set at 0.5%) of the value of every electronic/banking transaction carried out by all Nigerian banking and financial institutions as a directive from the Central Bank of Nigeria in a significant move to fortify national cyber security.

This levy on banking transactions was authorised in response to the escalating concerns over cyber threats as it follows the guidelines of the recently enacted Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) (Amendment) Act 2024.

With the development, all electronic transactions were expected to attract a levy of 0.5 percent. The money was to be remitted to the National Cybersecurity Fund overseen by the Office of the National Security Adviser (NSA).

On the 6th of May, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) mandated banks, mobile money operators, and payment service providers to implement the levy as contained in the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) (Amendment) Act 2024.

However, the cyber security levy was suspended by the Federal Government as controversial reactions



sprung up from some elite and stakeholders within the economy.

The Federal Government had on May 14, 2024 suspended the controversial cybersecurity levy following a wide outcry by the citizens.

According to Nigeria's Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, while briefing state house correspondents after the Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting at the State House in Abuja on Tuesday, 14 May, 2024, "The Federal Government of Nigeria has suspended the controversial cyber security levy on electronic banking transactions.

"The position of the government is that that policy has been suspended. It has been put on hold. That is the position of the government for now. It is undergoing some form of review. It was reiterated in the council (FEC meeting) yesterday. You know that

.....

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today's council (meeting) is a continuation of the council meeting of yesterday. So, I can tell you that the cybersecurity levy has been put on hold. It is being reviewed by the government."

The Central Bank of Nigeria in its latest circular dated May 17, 2024, referred to the earlier May 6, 2024 circular and mandated to financial institutions that the initial circular on implementing the cybersecurity levy "is hereby withdrawn."

Hence, adherence to the initial authorisation dated May 6, 2024, where the apex bank directed the deduction of the levy to be remitted by mobile money operators, all deposit money banks, and payment service providers, to the National Cybersecurity Fund (NCF) addressed to be administered by the office of the National Security Adviser.

The development deemed necessary as depleting loss incurable from threatening cyber attacks could be incomparable when considering the percentage of value remitted.

The place of technology in the fight against cybercrime in the country

Cyber criminals constantly develop new tactics and tools to bypass security measures which include sophisticated malware, ransomware, phishing attacks, and advanced persistent threats (APTs). The rapid evolution of these threats often outpaces the ability of security measures to keep up.

Ensuring that every sector of the country - ranging from public sectors, private businesses, to individuals/citizens - maintain robust cyber-security practices is challenging but crucial as many cyber attacks target supply chains, exploiting weaker links to gain access to larger networks.

To tackle the rise in cyber crime, a couple of various technological approaches need to be taken by not just individuals and private enterprises but by the government as well, as governing bodies need to allocate sufficient resources to upgrade their cyber-security infrastructure and adopt cutting-edge technologies like AI and machine learning for threat detection and response.

Ensuring that every sector of the country upholds robust cyber-security methods can be demanding but necessary as many cyber breaches are aimed at supply channels in order to attack large networks through weaker links.

According to Raza Nowrozy, a skilled cybersecurity expert and IT security advisor, "The world of cybersecurity looms large, affecting individuals, businesses, and governments alike. The consequences of cyber breaches are far-reaching, spanning from financial losses to damage to one's reputation and the potential exposure of sensitive information. Drawing from my experience in the field of cybersecurity, I can affirm that one crucial element frequently contributing to cyber breaches is the absence of proficiency in cybersecurity practices. Cyber breaches exact a steep toll, both in terms of financial expenditure and the toll they take on an entity's standing. While we face advanced cyber threats and sophisticated hacking methods, the absence of competence within an organisation can significantly heighten the risk and elevate the likelihood of successful cyberattacks."

Incompetence in cybersecurity can manifest in various ways. Inadequate security measures, for instance, can be a direct outcome of such incompetence. Organisations may falter in establishing robust

security protocols, thus exposing themselves to potential attacks. Inadequate password policies, outdated software, and ineffective firewalls create vulnerabilities in an entity's cyber defenses.

Another critical manifestation of incompetence lies in subpar employee training. Employees serve as the first line of defense, but without proper training and awareness programs, they may unwittingly engage in risky actions. These can range from falling victim to phishing emails to employing poor passwords, unwittingly paving the way for cyber attacks.

Furthermore, neglecting software updates and patches is a common sign of incompetence in cybersecurity. Competent cybersecurity practices necessitate the regular updating and patching of software and systems to address known vulnerabilities. Overlooking these essential updates can render an organisation vulnerable to attacks that exploit these weak points. Even within the realm of cybersecurity professionals, incompetence can emerge as a significant challenge.

The industry is in a constant state of evolution, requiring cyber professionals to stay current with the latest threats and defensive strategies. Incompetent cybersecurity practitioners may lack the requisite skills and knowledge to effectively safeguard their organizations.

Raza Nowrozy further said that "the cost associated with cybersecurity, which includes investments in technology, training, and incident response capabilities, can be substantial. Nevertheless, it is imperative to weigh this cost against the potential repercussions of a cyber breach. The financial consequences may involve direct monetary losses, regulatory fines, harm to one's reputation, business disruption, and legal liabilities. The ramifications of incompetence in cybersecurity practices are far-comprehensive.

Organisations must prioritise cybersecurity investments to shield themselves from cyber threats adequately. Although the price of cybersecurity may appear expensive, it pales in comparison to the potential financial and reputational damage that can result from a successful cyber breach. Competence in cybersecurity is not a simple suggestion; it stands as a vital necessity for survival and prosperity. This holds true for both organisations and the cybersecurity professionals tasked with safeguarding them."

Employing proactive measures such as threat hunting and continuous monitoring can help identify and mitigate threats before they cause significant damage as well as staying updated with regulatory requirements and integrating them into the country's security strategy which is vital for maintaining compliance and protecting sensitive data.



# News Feature

## As June 17 approaches, ex-militant warns Wike's key ally

...Is it substance or mere ranting?

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

There is apprehension in the air in Rivers State as the epochs of one year anniversary recede in the back skies of the ocean giving birth to the dreaded 'Ides of June'.

This represents the period that the tenure of the 23 local council leaderships in the state would end and a new team ought to take over. The problem is that the new team is not known yet.

The constitution provided when the local council election timetable ought to be out, and if this did not happen, there would be no election. The time came and went and there was no timetable.

The state has been in turmoil since October 2023 when an attempt was made to impeach Governor Fubara. The Rivers State House of Assembly where the move started suffered fire attack, and was later demolished. The governor said it was to rebuild it.

The House was divided into those that supported the Wike-backed impeachment and those that opposed said to be Fubara backed lawmakers. The impeachment group or Wike group were 27, and the naysayers were four. This pitched the state into war against both camps now known as the Wike versus the Fubara camps.

Many ugly things happened. The House was controlled by Wike but Fubara moved to get the four to form the new House. Those that defected were treated as non-members for crossing carpet when there was no division in their party (PDP).

The cabinet was equally divided until the Wike camp in the cabinet left and has been replaced by all Fubara men and women.

Now, the local councils are the next frontier. The 27 defected lawmakers initiated a bill, passed it, and signed it into law, saying the local council chairmen and councilors would stay on for initial additional six months. The Fubara camp called it term elongation and rejected it. The Wike camp vowed that it must be so. It was at this point that some vocal council chairmen like Sam Nwanosike of Ikwerre LGA and Chidi Llyod of Emohua LGA began to speak and act tough.

This created what many now called 'the Ides of June', because on June 18, one day after end of their tenure, the world would stand to see whether the council men would retain power or the governor would replace them.

This battle would mean much



Governor Fubara



General Gabriel Asabuja

in assessing between Wike and his god son Fubara who now controls the state. Wike has majority in the parliament, Fubara has majority in the cabinet; it seems to be the local council level that may decide the dice.

### General Asabuja appears

Nwanosike, popularly called Ishi, was quoted to have vowed never to quit on June 17. He was said to have threatened Fubara and his men to dare come to unseat him. This was when a video went viral, countering the threat.

In an interview, one huge man appeared and stated thus: "My name is General Gabriel Asabuja, the Masquerade of Niger Delta. I am not happy anymore and I must speak out. I have been silent for too long. But that is not out of fear. We are talking about Ishi (Samuel Nwanosike, the Ikwerre

Local Council chairman of Rivers State). We say, send your cockroach day or night, we are waiting. Sorry will be your name.

"I do not fear, am a warlord, and a leader. My worry is the insult from Nwanosike. He once insulted former governor, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi. He equally insulted Asari Dokubo, leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force. Nwanosike called Asari 'small boy'. Now, he is insulting His Excellency, Sir Siminalayi Fubara. Why is he doing all this and nobody is talking? Ishi knows me from university, in the streets, etc.

"He has not held tools (arms). Now, because he has power as a local council boss, the power that the former governor Nyesom Wike gave him, he insults everybody, and because he works with Wike.

"He is threatening the governor, saying let them come (June 18, 2024,



Nyesom Wike



Samuel Nwanosike

the expiration of his tenure.

"I wish the state government can appoint me something in Ikwerre local council to go and collect power, they can even make me an adviser to the incoming council chairman, then see what will happen. I will ask the police to stay away and watch us.

"Nwanosike thinks it is about grabbing all the money, acquire and acquire, build and build, and amass wealth, and give the boys peanuts. Let him meet me man to man. I say, let thunder fire him, let God punish him.

"He was a boy just yesterday but because then Governor Wike gave him position of power, he is blowing up his ego.

"Is he a warlord, has they played Egbesu music, Ijaw music or Ikwerre music for him?

"Look, we are behind Gov Fubara: the Ijaws, the Ikwerres, etc. They

(Wike) asked us to vote for Fubara and we did. We stand with him, and I stand with him, if others don't.

"I do not fear any person because one does not die twice. Yes, we have recanted and we now stay quiet, but that should not be why somebody will be insulting his seniors and warlords.

"Nwanosike has no tools (arms), and has not handled tools before. He has no walking stick (rifles). I ask the monarch (believed to be HRM Ateke Tom), I ask Asari Dokubo, I ask the youths, should we keep quiet for this boy?"

Efforts to get reactions from Nwanosike or his backers proved abortive so far.

### Unmasking Gen Asabuja:

Many kept asking who this man was that dabbled into such a big matter. There was thus effort to confirm the identity of this man threatening the council chairman. Findings showed that 'Gen' Gabriel Asabuja was head of Operations of Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) under Government Oweizide Ekpemupolo alias Tompolo. He held a prominent position in MEND, sources said.

By this, his capacity in that direction may not be in doubt. Some sources however say he may be out to gain relevance or popularity.

No matter what, many say it is Ishi that attracted such threats. Now that the wave seems to be toward Fubara, most persons now offer one service or the other to him. Many want to help him remove obstacles on his way.

Asari had made his own road show, throwing tantrums and threats against opponents of Fubara. He had described Fubara as an Ijaw son that must be protected in the 'Asawana' fashion. This may have stirred other 'Asawana' brotherhoods to raise their fingers in case help was needed.

Rivers State has always been a state where each governor must declare his policy on youths and bad boys. Peter Odili settled the boys, Amaechi shunned the boys, Wike worked with 'youths' recruited under GDI. Now, what will Fubara do?

### Conclusion

As June 18 draws nearer, the air is pregnant. Who will govern the 23 local council areas that day-the Wike boys (old local council chairmen) or the Fubara ninjas (administrators to be appointed)? Whoever rules would have to stay in power for proper local council elections to hold. It is believed that such persons would deliver their local councils to elected executives that would rule in the interest of who put him there.



# Politics

## Tinubu must emphasise policies that promote national unity and cohesion - Agunbiade

Babatunde Agunbiade is an ICT professional, philanthropist, and chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), who previously ran for councillorship in Ward D of the Ayobo-Ipaja LCDA in Alimosho, Lagos State, and contested for the House of Representatives on the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) but last year, decamped to the APC. In this interview with REMI FEYISIPO, Agunbiade spoke on the state of the nation, one year of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, how best to tackle corruption, among others. Excerpts:

**How would you rate the first year of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration?**

**T**he first year of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration has been marked by a mix of significant achievements and notable challenges. Some his achievements included, economic reforms, healthcare and education especially with the introduction of student loans and the Nigerian education Loan fund aimed to improve access to higher education, despite accompanying fee hikes, security liberation of thousands of hostages and the neutralisation of many insurgents, infrastructure and agricultural Initiatives among others. But the year also comes with challenges such as fuel subsidy removal, currency devaluation, increased education costs, persistent electricity problems.

But in the overall, President Tinubu's first year has been characterised by substantial reforms and ambitious projects aimed at long-term benefits, but these have come with immediate economic difficulties for many Nigerians.

So, the administration's success will likely depend on how effectively it can mitigate these short-term pains while ensuring the promised long-term gains materialise.

**The FG removed fuel subsidy and this led to increase in prices of goods and services and high inflation; what is your opinion about this and do you think the President is on the right path on the economy?**

The removal of fuel subsidy has significant effects on the economy, including increased prices of goods and services and higher inflation, as observed in Nigeria. Whether this decision is the right path for the economy depends on various factors, including the overall economic context, the effectiveness of alternative policies, and the government's ability to mitigate the negative impacts on the population. As for whether the President is on the right path on the economy, it ultimately depends on the effectiveness of the government's overall economic strategy, including its efforts to address inflation, promote economic growth, and improve the standard of living for Nigerians. The removal of fuel subsidy is just one aspect of economic policy, and its success or failure should be evaluated within the broader context of the government's economic management.



Babatunde Agunbiade

**The economic indicators and performance index of the economy were not giving Nigerians any hope. What do you think FG can do to cushion the effect of the hardship?**

To cushion the effects of economic hardship in Nigeria, the Federal Government should consider implementing social safety nets, job creation, more Infrastructural development, adoption of appropriate monetary and fiscal policies to stabilise the economy and support growth, Investment in Education and Healthcare, accelerate efforts to diversify the economy away from reliance on oil and promote growth in non-oil sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services, Public-Private Partnerships to foster collaboration between the public and private sectors to drive economic growth and development, transparency and accountability in the management of public resources to minimise waste. By implementing these measures, the FG will help alleviate the hardship faced by Nigerians and create an enabling environment for sustainable economic growth and development. It is therefore, important for these efforts to be comprehensive, coordinated, and targeted to address the specific needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

**If you are to advise the President going forward, what should he be doing?**

Going forward, if Tinubu aims to lead effectively and address the challenges facing Nigeria, he should prioritise national unity. I will also advise him to emphasise policies and initiatives that can promote national unity and cohesion. Nigeria is a diverse country with various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, and fostering unity among its citizens is crucial for sustainable development and peace.

Apart from this, he should likewise, promote good governance, ensure good governance, engage with civil society, foster dialogue and collaboration with civil society organisations, the private sector, and other stakeholders to address the needs and concerns of the Nigerian people. He should also promote Regional Integration: Strengthen Nigeria's relationships with its neighboring countries and regional organisations to promote peace, stability, and economic cooperation in West Africa. Regional integration can unlock opportunities for trade, investment, and development across the region. So, by prioritising these areas and demonstrating effective leadership, Tinubu can contribute to building a stronger, more prosperous, and more united Nigeria.

**The issue of corruption has not been tackled head on, as there are still corruption allegations here and there. How best do you think President Tinubu should handle this?**

Addressing corruption requires a multifaceted approach that combines legislative, executive, and judicial actions, as well as societal changes. But it is important to note that tackling corruption is a long-term and ongoing process that requires sustained commitment and effort from all sectors of society. President Tinubu should work collaboratively with other branches of government, civil society organizations, the private sector, and the international community to effectively address this challenge.

**What's your take on restructuring; should the report of the 2014 Constitutional Conference under former president Goodluck Jonathan be implemented or do you think another one should be organised?**

The question of restructuring in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted, and there are varying opinions on how best to approach it. The 2014 National Conference convened by former President Goodluck Jonathan produced a comprehensive report with recommendations on various aspects of governance, including restructuring. Some argue that implementing the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference could provide a starting point for addressing the issue of restructuring in Nigeria. These recommendations were the product of extensive consultations and deliberations involving various stakeholders from different parts of the country. Implementing them could potentially address some of the longstanding grievances and disparities in the country's political and economic structure.

However, others argue that the 2014 National Conference may not adequately represent the views and aspirations of all Nigerians, and thus, there may be a need for further consultations and dialogue to ensure that any restructuring process is inclusive and comprehensive.

Additionally, political will and consensus among key stakeholders are essential for successful implementation of any restructuring agenda.

Ultimately, whether to implement the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference or to organise another one is a decision that should

be made through a transparent and participatory process, taking into account the diverse interests and perspectives of Nigerians. The goal should be to pursue a restructuring agenda that promotes national unity, equity, and development.

**How are you impacting on your community especially youths and women, and what are you doing presently?**

As a citizen and philanthropist, I can certainly outline how I have positively impacted youths and women in my community through my NGO-COBATALK Initiative.

I provide accessible and personalised education resources, helping both youths and women to learn new skills, access quality education, and pursue their interests regardless of their geographical location or socioeconomic status. I have assisted in matching individuals, including youths and women, with suitable job opportunities based on their skills and interests. I empowered women and youths by providing them with tools and resources to start their own businesses or initiatives, access financial services, and participate more actively in the economy. I have also provided healthcare services, through personalised medical advice, and assist in early detection and treatment of diseases, benefiting both youths and women.

Presently, am actively working on creating and implementing solutions that address these areas. For example: Developing educational platforms that cater to different learning styles and abilities; creating job search platforms that match individuals with suitable employment opportunities; building enabled financial services platforms that cater to the specific needs of women and youths; implementing healthcare solutions for remote diagnosis and monitoring and establishing online communities and forums specifically for youths and women to connect, share resources, and support each other.

These efforts aim to leverage Government system to create positive impacts on the lives of youths and women, ultimately contributing to their empowerment and well-being.

**Next year, Lagos State will conduct another LG election, are you aspiring for any position?**

Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as government of the people, by the people, and for the people. So, it all depends on my people; if a clarion call comes, I will respond; but, the dream is bigger.



# Politics

## How we have reduced deaths arising from snake bites in my local government - Manship

**Christopher Audu Manship is the Transition Implementation Committee (TIC) chairman of Qua'an Pan Local Government Area of Plateau State. In this interview with NATHANIEL GBAORON in Jos, he spoke on his achievements as chairman of the local government since his appointment on 9th June, 2023, exactly one year ago. Excerpts:**

**You've been the local government chairman of Qua'an Pan local government since 9th June, 2023; what would you say has been your experience all this while?**

It has not been easy, but I thank God Almighty for the opportunity given to me to serve the people of Qua'an pan local government and to serve at the grassroot, is not always easy. We met a lot of issues like the issue of insecurity, lack of infrastructure. Our medical system has been down, completely dilapidated roads, so many things. Lack of electricity in the rural areas, in the communities and in the secretariat. But the most important issue was insecurity, it was something else, as at then.

**Okay, so what have you been able to do in terms of your major challenges so far?**

We have done a lot and we thank God it's subject to verification. We have done so many things in terms of security. Some are physical and some are things that you do that people don't see on the physical. But what the people want is to sleep with their eyes closed and then knowing that their lives and property are safe. Security is not something that you can do it and round it up. You will only do your best and reduce it to the barest minimum. I think that is where we are in Qua'an pan local government. We met a situation where robberies were done in broad day light, people don't go to markets, people don't go to farms. Kidnapings were everywhere, house theft, culpable homicides were all in Qua'an pan. We made sure that we do our best to see that people go to their farms, people go to the markets, people open their shops to do business. So, we have done a lot by trying to see that we collaborate with the security agents, the traditional council, the community leaders, the religious leaders, civil society. In fact, no group has been left without being discussed with to see that our security has improved, which arrests have been done, people were prosecuted. We are on it and we are trusting God that with what we are seeing now. I think we thank God for what he has done for us in the local government in terms of security.

**Talking about infrastructure, can you tell us exactly what you have been able to do?**

Thanks to the executive governor of Plateau State, Barr. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang, for giving us a free hand to operate. We in Plateau State, we get to know that transition is different from elected. But the executive governor has given us an open-door



Christopher Audu Manship

policy. We discuss and he allows us to do what our people want. So, all the success that we have, he has been behind it. He tells us, we discuss and he instructs us, go and work for your people. That is the only thing I need from you. Work for your people. Make sure you improve in your security.

So, in terms of infrastructure, we built five brand new hospitals, clinics. We remodel the chief's palace, which is our heritage. We equally make sure that our villages are accessible, by that we completed the bridge in Tunya, Kwande district we built another bridge in Jack Shindai, we have the Vankage and the Kongdong. Clinics are built in Pandan and Namu. The one in Namu is 18 beds; The one in Pandan is twelve beds. The one in Kwaka is 14 beds, The one in Monde Dungras is 14 beds. For the snake bite clinic, the center is in Dumak and it's 14 beds. These are clinics that we built from scratch. We did not renovate. We built them from scratch. We equally solarised the council secretariat. All the blocks are solarised. Initially when we came, no light. And, you know how far is our local government. We are not connected to the national grid. So, we solarised the whole secretariat. We solarised the chairman quarters and the guest house. And equally, we renovated the guest house, furnished it. Anybody who knows our area will know that we don't have good hotels. We have no option when visitors come, so we have renovated it, landscape it, fur-

nish it too, and it's now ready to be used. The district office in Kwala was fenced, redesigned and then renovated equally. We had the Duma Gitchin clinic which was demolished, rebuilt, fenced. And that location is like a cattle area. The clinic was located around there. So, most of the staff that were in that village don't have accommodation because it's a village. So, what we did this time around was to fence the clinic, built staff quarters for the clinic, and before, when you go there, you will see cows roaming around the clinic. But now we have fenced it. There are so many things that we have done. We have constructed roads. We built a culvert for them, the one in Doka. In Doka we also built a clinic for them. So, I think those are some of the infrastructures that we have been able to do so far, so good to our credit. Within this period, we have 16 projects.

We equally look at in terms of education, we gave scholarship for our students in all institutions, even in professional schools worth about 25 million. We equally looked at our situation where most of the students are not science oriented, we don't have a science school. So recently we bought science equipment for two secondary schools, one in the northern and one in the southern Qua'an Pan worth about 15 to 18 million naira so that our schools will be science oriented. When you go to our local government, you hear lawyers, journalists and whatever, we don't have much doctors, we don't have

much engineers, and we feel that charity begins at home. Let us try to see if we can inculcate those kinds of values to our people. Let them be science oriented, most especially the young ones. Equally in terms of agriculture, we have refurbished all our tractors. When we came, the three of them were down but to the glory of God, now it's raining season. The three of them are already in the field. We purchased fertilizer for our people. We purchase five trailer-load of fertilizer from the state government at the cost of 6,250 naira and I think in Plateau state we are the only local government that subsidise our fertilizer from N6,250 to N4,250 we subsidised each bag 2000 and we have already distributed it. So far so good, we are on cost in terms of education. We registered JAMB for our students, about 1000 of them in January. And recently, with the current hardship in the University of Jos, the final year, students we are looking up to, we understood that there is a policy in the school that you must pay your school fees before you write exams. So, we took care of the balances. We collected their receipts and paid the balances of all the students from the local government who couldn't pay their school fees before the exams, most especially those at the final year.

**What informed your decision to set up the special clinic for snake bite patients?**

When my predecessor started the project in 2018. It was just like a pilot project. He started it in the staff clinic in the council, and it had only two beds. So, we decided that, no, our people are vulnerable to snake bites because of our location, our people are farmers. We don't have one factory in the area 99.9% are farmers except civil servants. Everybody is a farmer, so they are prompt to snake bites. And when he brought the idea, he couldn't build a place for them, and we felt that it's a good one, it's a laudable project, and we felt that we should continue with that, and we also felt that we should have a permanent place for it. When you go there, you see the patients and the patient relatives are almost staying in the whole offices and on the floor, because it's not only the people of our local government that seek for the help because we have subsidised the anti-snake venom from N75, 000 to N40, 000. Now it's around N95,000 but we are still giving N40,000 per anti-snake venom. Now, people come from various parts of Nigeria most especially people from Taraba, Nasarawa and Benue states.

So, we felt that we should expand

the clinic, and that was actually what happened. We built a permanent place so that the staff clinic can be renovated, and then we started using it.

**Have you reduced the cases of death relating to snake bites in the area?**

Yes, seriously, because initially, when snake bites you, you are sure of dying? In fact, let me say, 98% of those people who had snake bites died. But now, you can confirm. For now, you can see that the death rate has dropped. Since I became the chairman, nobody died in that clinic. The man has been trained outside Plateau State on the treatment of snake bites. All the staff were trained outside Plateau and that is the result. So, it has reduced. Once you are there, you are rest assured, by the grace of God you will be okay. And what will interest you to know if you visit the clinic is that, I told him those people who cannot afford the anti-snake venom, he should relate to us. And then we settle the bills without them knowing until when it is paid.

**Revenue generation and remittance is one of the notable challenges at the local government; can you tell us the revenue base of Qua'an Pan local government?**

We try to see that we reduce the leakages. To discover the leakages and make sure that all revenues accrued to the local government goes into the post of the council. In fact, we begin to visit the markets with my committee members to see that all revenues accruing to the local government are remitted. We took care of our markets and one of the things that will interest you is that we make sure that throughout this rainy season, those districts that vehicles don't go to bring out agricultural products. We have taken care of the bridges and now they are beginning to come to the markets. The economy of that place has grown; We made sure we discussed and we are discussing with the state Internal Revenue Service to improve the IGR of our local government.

**How would you assess the administration of His Excellency Governor Caleb Mutfwang within one year?**

His Excellency barrister Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang is God sent to Plateau state. We have seen development; infrastructural development. We have seen peace. Peace has returned to Plateau State salaries are being paid as and when due. Let me tell you, even as a local government. We now pay salaries on the 24th. It has never been like that in Plateau State.



# Politics

## Why Nigeria must impose capital punishment on kidnapping, others - Kolawole

Musibau Taiwo Kolawole, former House of Representatives member from Ajeromi/Ifelodun Constituency in Lagos State, expressed his belief that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is on the right path to addressing Nigeria's challenges. Kolawole, who has served as deputy speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly, emphasised in this interview with INIOBONG IWOK that nation-building requires leaders to make tough decisions. He also cautioned against premature celebration, remaining optimistic, seeing a glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel. Excerpts:

**President Bola Tinubu is one year in office; do you think we have anything to celebrate, especially in the areas of the economy and security?**

**T**here is no time we would not celebrate at least because of life, one should be happy. As the people in power and people who are determined to solve the problems of the country, it is not yet Uhuru. We have set a standard; people have seen that this is a serious government. They have never seen this type of government or President before, the President that can stand before the world and talk about the country proudly and boldly and invite them to come and invest.

Bola Tinubu is a President that faces the economic problem of the country headlong and is tackling it. We have a lot to celebrate, but we have not got there and when it comes to the time of celebration, we will celebrate. President Tinubu is moving forward, Nigeria is moving, but I won't tell you that we have anything to celebrate rather than to work harder.

**But people are saying that President Bola Tinubu started economic radicalism too early and that he shouldn't have removed fuel subsidy immediately. Do you agree?**

Don't let us deceive ourselves; it is the people that are there that see the problems that we have. If Tinubu had not removed subsidy as at the time he did, the problem would have been much. There is no way they could run the government with fuel subsidy. There was no money to run the government again and nobody would borrow us money.

The revenue we were earning as a nation was not even enough to service the existing loans. There is no way you would not find hardship in solving problems, when we were destroying the whole thing, it was all of us that were enjoying it and laughing, then we were borrowing to pay salaries. We were giving ourselves subsidy that was not realistic.

This is a nation that is talking about capitalism, we have free market and we are doing subsidy. Subsidy is about trying to make life accessible and meaningful to everybody, while capitalism is saying that you cannot have it,



Musibau Taiwo Kolawole

when you don't have the means.

The complaint is that the fuel of the commoners, which is diesel, was not subsidised then, but the fuel of the rich, which is petrol, was the one being subsidised to high heavens and people were taking advantage of it.

When I was a member of the National Assembly, on many occasions, we raised the issue of the exact figure of the petrol that we consume as a nation. They will round trip it, take it out and sell it to the neighbouring countries after it has been subsidised by the Nigerian government.

I don't know any way else that we ought to go then, when subsidy was above a trillion naira annually. Do you think a good person that took over the government would go and sleep or continue the process that was there? There is no time they would remove subsidy that we will not experience hardship.

It's even better to do it at the beginning, a good administration takes hard decisions at the beginning and he would have time to show the people that what he has

done is for the benefit of all. Yes, we talk about insecurity, but for the first time, our children were kidnapped and they were returned.

**Therefore, I don't think there is one area that he should not look at, particularly now when you are talking of development, and restructuring, when you are talking of representing the blueprint for Nigerian development, it's holistic**

For the time, we have an administration that said that they would release the list of the people that are funding this thing.

The list had been with the previous administrations and they refused to release it, but this administration released the names of those that are funding the insurgents and they said that they would go after them. Are you saying kidnapping has continued, no, it is reducing? Even in the past administration, when infrastructure started improving, kidnapping started reducing.

The spate of kidnapping is even beyond Boko Haram and terrorism issue, it has become an economic problem. Hope you can recall the story of a common driver that was kidnapping people and became a billionaire, but he was later arrested.

As a nation, particularly in Lagos State, we have imposed capital punishment on kidnapping and it has become less lucrative in the state. Due to the renewed hope on infrastructure of this government, the roads are getting better. In the past, there were some roads in Nigeria that the driver would have to get to zero acceleration before he could move to the extent that even if someone held a plastic knife, he could kidnap the whole people in a truck.

But is it possible now, can somebody cross Lagos-Ibadan Expressway now and say he wants to kidnap people, it's not possible again. The work of a nation building is not done by one administration or by one person. That was why I said though we ought to thank God for being alive; it's not yet time for celebration.

**Recently, a former chief of defence staff, Theophilus Danjuma (rtd.) said that no person, especially foreigners, would be willing to come to the country to invest or visit tourist sites when their security was not guaranteed. What is your comment on this?**

Is that a patriotic statement, it's not. Even the insecurity that we talk about in the north, they are self-driven. For instance, see what is happening in Zamfara State, these are people that are stealing gold from the government.

But see what the government did, they put a very serious-minded person in the Ministry of Solid Minerals Development in

person of Dele Alake and the guy is moving from one place to another.

They must catch them, so they are not happy. These are the people that have taken the resources of Nigeria free of charge and they are proving difficult. This is why you hear such comments from people that have benefitted even wrongly through the military interregnum and they are coming out to say all sorts of things about Nigeria.

This is a country that is ranked as one of the 10 happiest nations in the world. Lagos, for instance, is said to be one of the five cities in the world people should visit, according to them, not even us. With the types of infrastructure, the state government has put in place, you can see that is happening there, and somebody sits in one corner to make comments that can deprive people from coming to Nigeria and you are celebrating that.

This is a man that is over 80 years old, he cannot even come out and jug. He ought to be praying for Nigeria rather than making such comments.

**How soon do you think we should have state police in Nigeria?**

It's now, even yesterday. In 1999, I was a legislator, when President Bola Tinubu was the governor of Lagos State, and we requested for state police then. So, I'm not surprised that he said they could come up with state police and the whole states are planning it.

Lagos State is seriously planning how to start state police. We should not mind what federal police are saying that Nigeria is not ripe for state police. This is a time that the world is even moving from quality control to quality assurance. You must do it well the first time.

**What do you think President Tinubu should concentrate on as he is moving to second year in office?**

It is a government, and government is about everything. The President must know everything, he has set the tone, he has appointed people into positions and they are working.

Therefore, I don't think there is one area that he should not look at, particularly now when you are talking of development, and restructuring, when you are talking of representing the blueprint for Nigerian development, it's holistic.



# Politics

## Nigeria has made no progress since return to democracy 25 years ago – Retired General

Yakubu Usman, a retired Army general, in this interview with a select group of journalists, spoke on a number of issues, including life after retirement, Nigeria's democratic journey since 1999. INIOBONG IWOK brings the excerpts:

**How are you fairing under retirement?**

Well, I thank God for everything because the grace of God is making me to survive as things are not easy these days.

**Many people are still wondering how you are getting your energy from to move around. How do you keep going?**

Well, If you join any service, the military plans for your retirement and you know that there is nothing that lasts forever and how do you plan towards it is that at the end of your service you have something to fall back on and that is exactly what I did because towards the end of my service period I made sure that I establish some outfits to keep me busy and one of such outfits is a security company I set up and that has been sustaining and keeping me busy. And once you are busy and not sitting idle you will be strong and that is exactly what I am doing.

**Don't you think it is time for you to sit back and have some rest having achieved so much in life?**

The outfit I setup is being managed by people; I am not the one running it. I don't go out to safeguard a place or supervise it. I have people I delegate responsibilities to. As it is now, I don't go to office, the office comes to me because they bring their requests and problems to me rather than me going to the office. So, I am already resting and have enough energy by the grace of God to ready my papers, So, I am not that busy as you might think.

**What is your daily routine like because you have worked so hard in the past?**

My daily routine starts once I wake up; I pray and thank God for keeping me alive and after my prayers I take my bath, take my breakfast, read my papers, my correspondence through my mailbox and WhatsApp and in the afternoon, I visit friends and attend meetings that I am supposed to attend if any and go back home to rest.

**Do you still do exercise?**

Yes of course, I walk around and ride my bicycle.

**It is 25 years Nigeria returned to democracy. How do you feel about Nigeria's democracy in the last 25years?**

Unfortunately, I will describe it as one step forward and two steps backwards and some of us who are privileged to have seen so many regimes right from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nnamdi Azikwe to Aguiyi Ironsi, to General Yakubu Gowon and others. In fact, throughout the



Yakubu Usman

military regime I was very active and I know what transpired during the Civil War and even after the civil war before we became actively engaged as peace corps officers and then the disengagement of the Military and the coming in of the current civilian rule; it was a great expectation that was dashed.

People thought by 1999 the civilian will hit the ground running but unfortunately things took a different shape. In 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo came, did his best and laid the foundation, Musa Yar' Adua came and his life was cut short and Jonathan took over and tried his best but his best was not good enough. Muhammad Buhari came and things took a different shape that people are making reference to whether he has done good or bad his records are there to show. And whether he has done good or bad definitely his records are very clear. And the present government now is one year old in office and there are records whether he has achieved or not; the records are also there. But definitely, it has not been a rosy story for the past 25 years because it is one step forward and two steps backwards. We are not where we are supposed to be because we have been going backwards because if you take one step forward and two steps backwards that means that we have gone backwards for about 25years. In fact, five and ten years ago I can tell you that we are better off 25years ago because if you

ask anybody on the street what he or she feels, he or she will tell you that he will prefer 25years ago. In fact, it was better 25years ago.

So, it is left for the people in government to try their best and improve the situation. It is not beyond remedy; they can do it if they put on their thinking cap and put Nigeria where it is supposed to be.

**They have come and gone and it is left to Nigerians to assess them and I believe Nigerians have made their assessment if you are current and reading newspapers as the case may be**

**Do you see Nigeria being at par with other developed democracies where their votes count?**

Not the way we are going; the way we are going unfortunately, is not the right way because we are not practising democracy as it is supposed to be because democracy is government of the people, for the people and by the people but where a group of people sit down and take decision for the populace to accept whether they like it or not is not the best way to go. So, if we want to copy other developed democracies, we have to take democracy back to the people and let the people decide what is good for us. If we allow people to do what is right, we will not be where we are today. We are hungry in the midst of plenty and if you go to the market today you will see food but no resources to purchase such food you desire; so, how do we do it?

**You said this is not the democracy we desire?**

Yes

**Do you have any regret?**

Laughter. I don't have any regret; the regret is that we are reaping what we sowed. You reap what you sow because Nigerians have the opportunity every four years to elect the government that we want; we are the ones that voted them in; so, what is the regret I have? I am not everybody and it is what the people want and that is what democracy is all about. It is about numbers. So, if majority says we want this so be it. I have no regrets whatever.

**You were involved in international diplomacy as a soldier. How will you compare Nigeria with other countries in the region in terms of democratic practice?**

If you talk about international diplomacy, Nigeria is well-respected abroad among the comity of nations across Africa and even around the world. I was privileged to serve under the United Nations in Lebanon and ECOMOG. In fact, I was the first battalion commander under the operations in Liberia. Nigeria was and is still respected internationally but back home the military is restricted on what they can do and what they cannot do. So, to answer your question, Nigeria as a nation is well-respected internationally and diplomatically because our diplomatic representation has exposed Nigeria globally.

**What is your take on the military takeover in some West African countries?**

The military is not supposed to rule because democracy is the order of the day; they know the meaning of

every military action. However, as citizens of their country they know the best because I cannot decide for them. He who stays in a house knows where the house is leaking. While I condemn military rule I cannot decide for all those countries that are under military rule. But be that as it may, they may have seen some wrong things they want to correct. I don't think there is any one of them that wants to perpetuate himself in power or in office. Whenever they come they will tell you or say we need some time to put things right before they put the country back to civilian rule; and they themselves know that military rule is abnormal; therefore; it is left for them and their people to decide or do what is right at the appropriate time and don't stay longer than necessary. Military is not supposed to rule; they are supposed to protect those in power and their country.

**General Olusegun Obasanjo started this journey in 1999 exactly 25 years ago and then came Yar' Adua, Jonathan, Buhari and now it is Bola Ahmed Tinubu. How will you compare all these leaders in the last 25years?**

They have come and gone and it is left to Nigerians to assess them and I believe Nigerians have made their assessment if you are current and reading newspapers as the case may be. The only one that is now in government is the Tinubu administration and has just started, they have spent one year and people are already commenting on their achievements and failures in the last one year. Therefore, I have already said that it has been one step forward and two steps backwards. None among them as far I am concerned that has done anything significant or that is outstanding in a nation like Nigeria looking at our resources. Obasanjo tried his best having gotten our debts during that period forgiven and we came back almost zero. Like I said before Yar'Adua era and administration was cut short and Jonathan tried but he left a lot of things undone then came Buhari and people thought he would do something better but he disappointed a lot of people. And now, here we are waiting on how they will renew our hope. So far, we have not seen how our hope will be renewed.

**Finally, what is your advice to Nigerians towards the biting economic situation in the country?**

My advice to them is to be patient which we have been all the while. We should think out of the box and look for what we should do and not wait for government because government has a lot of responsibility and collectively we will move forward.



# Politics

## Why insecurity persists in Nigeria despite efforts – Ademola

**Tade Ademola**, a politician, is a former Lagos State chairman of the Inter-Party Advisory Council of Nigeria (IPAC) and recently elected president of Alumni of the Federal Polytechnic Ilaro Alumni Association. In this exclusive interview with **INI OBONG IWOK**, he spoke on a number of issues, including President Bola Tinubu one year in office and the spate of insecurity in the country. Excerpt:

**What is your take on Bola Tinubu's administration one year after?**

It has been a very tough year since the ascension to power by President Bola Tinubu's administration.

The government and the people have not found the situation palatable with mass Nigerians in deep mess because of the economic downturn amidst rising inflation and cost of essential needs of the people.

However, we look at it, it is a no-win situation for all of us both the rich and the average Nigerian.

Democracy has not failed. We are yet to allow the doctrines of democracy to thrive.

**A lot of people have knocked Tinubu's administration so far, subsidy and the rest. What is your take?**

The knock on the administration is just starting be-



Ademola

cause in the real sense subsidy is still in operation. If truly there is no more subsidy the price of petrol would have been well over a thousand naira with the current price of the dollar.

Much as the administration may mean well for the country, their body language is depicting a different tone and in fairness to Nigerians this is one government they have been very sympa-

thetic with.

**Nigerians can't eat, because of the cost of food. What do you think is the problem?**

Cost of everything, not only food, has gone haywire. We need to be fair in this regard as everybody is calling on dollars but some items are locally produced with no imported input and their prices have jumped more than dollar dependent prod-

ucts. Our people need to be enlightened on the multiplier effect of such an increase.

**We had a two days strike by the NLC last week, has the government handled the situation well?**

The labour union is justified in asking for a raise while the government looks at possible positions that will not drive the inflation they are struggling to curtail. It's a negotiation they must convince each other.

Labour must realise that wages is part of cost of production or cost of operation which is built into product or services of a company, the multiplier effect of arbitrary increase will be high cost of goods and services and also loss of job as some organisation will reduce their workforce which in the long run will be counterproductive.

**What is your take on the spate of insecurity in the country?**

This situation has lingered on for too long and I want to believe some people including security operatives are benefitting from it. Most of the arrests made are solo criminals who want to take advantage of the situation, not the cartel who demand hundreds of millions.

The security situation in

Nigeria is multi hydra headed. I see the complicity of the international community, the security apparatus, and traditional/religious leaders.

My country, Nigeria, is a place where 90% of us live on corruption; efforts to make changes are always sabotaged.

Look at the abduction of children some months ago in Kaduna, for me it is an organised crime. Many questions are begging for answers. A layman can see the laxity exhibited by security lapses. Corruption, I have always defined as collusion and collaboration.

Those arrested for kidnapping are splinter groups who were not part of the cartel. The signs are ominous. There're now kidnapping groups all over the country. The situation is pretty bad.

**What is your take on plans by the opposition parties to merge and challenge the ruling party ahead 2027?**

Merger or not, are the politicians ready not to allow ego and personal ambition override the majority?

**Do you have any political ambition for 2027?**

The door to serve is never closed. I am a member of

the governing council of the polytechnic and with other alumni presidents we are formidable enough to act as a pressure group to end the HND and B.Sc. discrimination.

**You recently assumed the position of president of the federal polytechnic, Ilaro alumni association. Can you tell us your immediate goals?**

The need to assist the government in providing quality education particularly in the technical areas which the polytechnics represent is the push. Alumni associations should give back to their alma mater while also assisting in building each other.

The need to guide current students in building themselves in their chosen career by creating a mentor mentee relationship. Also we can assist in providing facilities that will aid learning in the institution.

**Why did you aspire to the position?**

Any opportunity that is available is what I take to give service, just like I have done in the Lions Club and various groups or organisations I belong to. Even in the political circle, I have given my service which is documented.

## I can't support Fubara or Wike, Amaechi declares

**A** former Governor of Rivers State and immediate-past Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Amaechi, says he will not support either Governor Siminalaya Fubara or the Minister of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike amid the current political crisis in the State.

Amaechi had remained silent since the beginning of the political impasse between Fubara and the FCT Minister. But speaking on Friday, during his visit to a leader of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Okorinama West, at his private residence in Port Harcourt, he said the popularity Governor Fubara appears to enjoy in Rivers State is the result of his public backlash against Wike.

"I can't stand and join ei-



ther Sim or Wike. I will not join Sim; I will not join Wike. But don't forget that the two are not big without you people, I hope you know that.

"What Sim thinks is popular today, is because he is anti-Wike. That's his popularity, not that Sim is the best man on earth. It's because he is anti-Wike and

because the state is tired of Wike", he said.

Amaechi, who encouraged young supporters to take an active role in shaping the leadership of the State, lamented that some politicians, who were his supporters, had switched allegiance due to personal interests.



R-L: Debo Akande, executive adviser to the governor on agribusiness; Seyi Makinde, governor, Oyo State and Sina Abiola Peller, former member of the House of Representatives, at the Fasola Industrial Hub, Oyo town, during the project tour by the officials of the Nigerian Guild of Editors and other media executives, Saturday.



## Feature

# Sanwo-Olu and the quest to bridge the Lagos housing deficit

**Housing and decent accommodation remain a major challenge in many urban and megacities across the world. For Lagos, Nigeria's commercial nerve centre, the surging population estimated at over 22 million people poses an even greater challenge. In this piece, Joshua Bassey writes on efforts being made by the state government to bridge the housing gap:**

**A**braham Maslow, an American psychologist and professor, is famous for his hierarchical presentation of human needs. Maslow in his theory placed the physiological needs of man at the bottom of the pyramid and argued for them to be met first before other higher needs.

These basic requirements for human survival include air, food, shelter, clothing, etc. The absence or inability to meet these basic needs can, in some cases, lead to irrational behaviours by the citizens and destabilise society if not properly handled.

Indeed, in some modern urban cities, including Lagos, such irrational dispositions have seen residents take over bridges and convert public infrastructure into residential homes which pose security threats to society and exert undue pressure on the government.

It is within this context that housing provision for the citizens is prioritised by governments around the world - either directly or in partnership with the private sector.

For example, Chapter II, section 14(2) (b) of the Nigeria Constitution 1999 (as amended), addresses the government's social responsibility to improve the quality of life of the citizens, including the provision of suitable housing.

By the sheer size of its population, Lagos, Nigeria's smallest state by land-mass, has its fair share of the housing challenge.

According to some industry analysts, the housing deficit in Lagos sits at over three million, and at the same time, this basic need is getting more expensive and out of reach to low and medium-income earners.

Taking cognizance of this challenge against the background of the state's estimated 22 million residents, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu at his inauguration on May 29, 2019, presented a six-pillar THEMES Agenda in which the drive for urban renewal and decent shelter is captured in the M Pillar: Making Lagos a 21st Century Economy.

"By investing in critical infrastructure, we will accelerate the growth of our economy and empower the private sector who are the real engines of growth.

"We must break the deadlock that shackles our power distribution, provide sustainable urban settlements that address the current deficit; while at the same time building a smart city that achieves urban harmony and sets a new bar in our nation," Sanwo-Olu said in his inaugural speech.

In keeping with this commitment, the administration has directly and in collaboration with the private sector completed and handed over several



housing estates in different parts of the state.

Among these are the 48 housing units of Greater Lagos LBIC Apartments in Ogba-Ijaiye, Agege, where 14 families whose houses were demolished for the construction of the Pen Cinema Bridge, were given new accommodation.

"Everyone will agree with me that housing is one of the basic requirements of every human being. When Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu emerged as the governor of Lagos State, he promised to build another place for us. Although we did not believe him; we are here today to collect the keys to our place.

"Today, our joy has no measure. This is clear evidence that Mr Governor will deliver his clear manifesto to the people," said Esther Ogunbanjo, on behalf of the 14 families who were allocated the apartments in 2022.

Other housing projects delivered by the Sanwo-Olu administration include 480-unit housing project in Ibeshe, Ikorodu; 774 housing units LagosHOMS, Sangotedo Phase 1; 100 housing units in Ikate, Lekki; 360 home units, comprising 120-units home in Igbogbo in the Ikorodu; 252 home units, Idale, Badagry; 84 home units in LagosHoms Lekki, Phase 2, and 132 units (88 home units and 44 home units of 3-bedroom apartments respectively) at the BRF Housing Estate, Iponri, Surulere.

The government has also completed and commissioned 120 units Courtland Villas, Igbokushu, Lekki; handed over apartments' keys to 492 beneficiaries of the Lateef Kayode Jakande Housing Estate, Igando, completed 360 housing units at Igbogbo in Ikorodu, and also completed 660 housing units at Odo-Onosa-Ayandelu Housing Scheme in Agbowo LCDA.

At the commission of the Greater Lagos LBIC Apartments in Ogba-Ijai-

ye, Sanwo-Olu said, "The handing over of this project is a testament to our commitment towards providing affordable housing to the good people of Lagos State.

"Given the significance of shelter as a basic human need, this administration has been determined, from Day One, to decisively tackle the housing challenges faced by the residents of Lagos.

"For us, this is not only about the availability of housing but also about the affordability. We are concerned about ensuring that, not only are the houses reasonably priced but that there are also creative financing mechanisms that give people the capacity and convenience to pay based on their incomes."

Beyond the government's direct involvement in housing development, the governor said his administration is also providing the enabling environment for private developers towards bridging the housing gap and bringing sanity to the Lagos built environment.

"I would like to appeal to all our agencies in the housing sector to continue to engage robustly with the private sector, as well as other stakeholders, to address the housing deficit in Lagos State.

"I enjoin us all to continue to support this administration as we strive to make Lagos State a truly 21st-century economy, a place where every resident can aspire to have adequate, safe and affordable housing options, in line with the United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 11 which aims to promote sustainable cities and communities."

The state government's latest addition to the Lagos housing stock is the 270-unit Egan-Igando Mixed Housing Estate Cluster commissioned by Sanwo-Olu on Thursday, June 6, 2024.

The journey of the Egan-Igando Mixed Housing Scheme began

in 2001, to deliver 846 housing units to sub-urban dwellers in the state. The project was later abandoned and transferred to the Lagos Building Investment Corporation (LBIC) in 2006 due to what officials blamed on paucity of funds.

However, the current administration has taken up the challenge, with the delivery of the first phase of the long-abandoned project.

At the commission on Thursday, Sanwo-Olu promised to complete the remaining 576 home units in clusters 2 and 3 of the mixed housing estate for more residents to benefit.

The governor said his government was ready to partner with the private sector to build more affordable housing estates in Lagos State.

"The completion of this project will address the urgent need for affordable housing and also foster a sense of community and belonging among our residents. This project is designed to cater to diverse economic groups, reflecting a vision of an inclusive society where everyone has a home.

"We must innovate and partner with private investors to bridge the gap, which we cannot do alone. We need to enhance our public and private investments in housing. We must continue to build decent homes. I will like to appeal to future occupants to please ensure good maintenance of these facilities."

The project, according to Moruf Akindele-Fatai, the housing commissioner, stands as a testament to Governor Sanwo Olu's commitment to providing affordable and quality housing for the residents of Lagos.

Akindele-Fatai said at the commissioning: "This significant occasion marks the completion of 270 units of 2-bedroom apartments, a vital step towards alleviating the housing deficit in Lagos, hence bringing succor to the

beloved people of the Igando-Ikotun LCDA in Alimosho LGA.

He explained that despite significant interest and financial commitments from over 924 subscribers, the project stalled again and was taken over by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure in 2013.

With very minimal progress recorded, the project was returned to the Ministry of Housing in 2016 by Akinwunmi Ambode, the former governor of the state.

"In a transformational pursuit to making Lagos a 21st Century Economy under the Year 2019 T.H.E.M.E.S Agenda of our able governor, Babajide Sanwo Olu, a holistic approach to complete the Egan-Igando Mixed Housing Scheme alongside other on-going projects began.

This led to the strategic division of the project into three clusters to facilitate its completion. It was also discovered that many buildings had failed structural integrity, leaving us the difficult but necessary decision to pull down the compromised structures and erect new ones.

"Today, we are proud to present Cluster 1, with 45 blocks consisting of 270 units of 2-bedroom apartments with complimentary infrastructure. We not only celebrate the completion of these units but also the resilience, dedication, and hard work that has brought this vision to reality," Akindele-Fatai said.

The commissioner further reaffirmed the commitment of the government to completing Clusters 2 and 3 of the Egan-Igando Mixed Housing Estate to ensure that every promised unit is delivered.

"May I, also add that Mr. Governor, in his magnanimity has graciously approved that all existing subscribers with full payment for either a unit of 2-bedroom or 3-bedroom flat be allocated this very cluster at no additional fees to the selling price. This is to appreciate their trust and commitment over time in our dear state.

"However, other subscribers with more than 50 percent commitment on the initial selling price shall be considered with an option to balance up at the current selling price," the commissioner said, adding, "Please be informed that when the clusters 2 and 3 of the scheme is delivered in due course, there will be an additional 576 homes to the housing stock in the area, thus bringing us to the original vision of the project."

The infrastructural components in the estate include a network of well-structured roads, a well-channeled drainage system, an ingestion station, ample car parks, potable water, a perimeter fence, a central sewage treatment plant and electricity transformers.



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## Farms under fire: Nigeria's food security on the brink

The breadbasket of a nation is under attack. Nigeria's agricultural sector, the lifeblood of millions and a quiet giant contributing over 25 percent of GDP, is facing a silent siege. Insecurity, a relentless enemy armed with fear and violence, has stormed the fertile farmlands, scattering farmers like frightened birds and leaving a trail of crippled food production in its wake. This is not scaremongering or hyperbole; it is a national emergency with the potential to destabilise the entire nation. The smouldering fields and empty barns are a stark warning—the time for action is now.

The evidence is undeniable, a stark message etched in the skyrocketing prices of food. The National Bureau of Statistics paints a grim picture with their April 2024 report: a staggering 40.53 percent year-on-year food inflation rate. This is not an abstract statistic; it translates to the daily struggle of ordinary Nigerians. Staples like rice, once a cornerstone of affordable meals, have seen a mind-boggling 134 percent increase within a year. These numbers represent more than just economic hardship;

they represent the rising cost of feeding a family, pushing millions towards the precipice of hunger. The empty plates on dinner tables across the nation are a stark reminder of the crisis brewing in the farmlands.

The culprit behind this devastation is clear: insecurity. It is not a nameless, faceless threat; it has a terrifying form. Farmers, the backbone of the nation, are now targeted by a brutal campaign of kidnappings and banditry. Fear hangs heavy in the air, a suffocating shroud that stifles any hope of cultivation. A 2023 UNICEF report lays bare the horrifying consequences: 25 million Nigerians, a staggering number, face hunger directly linked to this violence. The situation has become so perverse that reports of farmers being forced to pay "levies" to bandits for the "privilege" of cultivating their own land paint a horrifying picture. This isn't agriculture; it's extortion at gunpoint.

The consequences of this reign of terror are dire—a domino effect threatening to topple the house of cards that is Nigeria's food security. Take, for instance, the multi-billion-naira behemoth, Okomu Oil Palm Plc. This agricultural powerhouse, a symbol of Nigeria's potential, now teeters on the brink of closure due to relentless insecurity.

One may envision the rising consequences of such a loss: an enormous tract of fertile land going silent, its potential output fading away. This would not be an isolated episode; rather, it would be the first in a series of dominoes that could collapse, potentially devastating large-scale agriculture and causing instability in the country's food supply with potentially long-lasting consequences. Hunger, a spectre already looming large, would tighten its grip on far too many Nigerians.

The solution, though seemingly straightforward, demands a multifaceted approach. First and foremost, security is the bedrock upon which any agricultural revival must be built. Farmers need to feel safe tending their crops, not fearing for their lives. Deploying military forces to troubled regions is a crucial first step, but a sustainable solution requires more. Empowering local communities to establish security outfits fosters a sense of ownership and builds trust. Bureaucratic red tape cannot be a stranglehold on progress; decisive action is paramount.

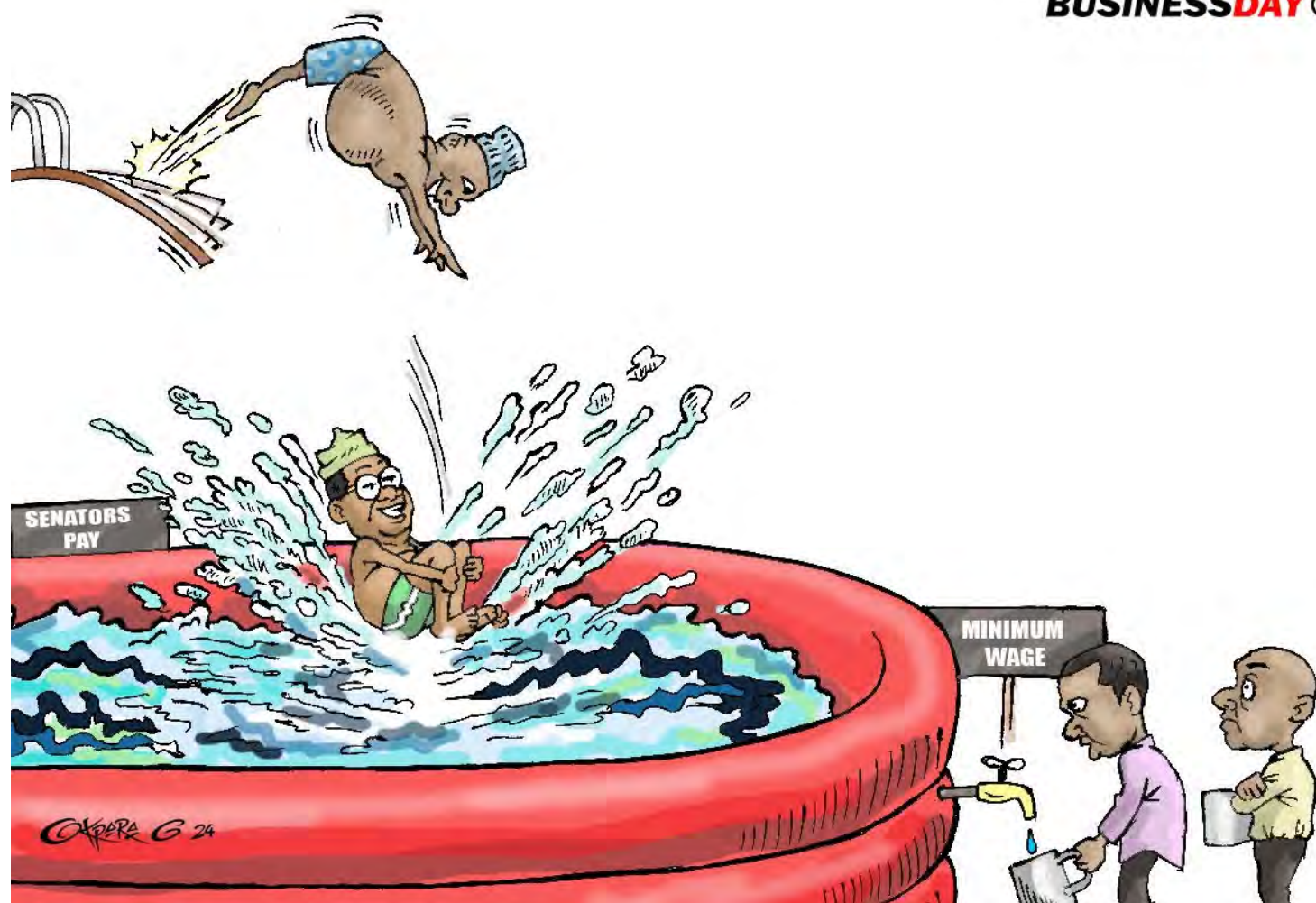
However, security is merely the first piece of the puzzle. We must reignite the spark of agriculture and make it a prospect that ignites hope, not fear. Fresh initiatives, from providing

access to modern farming techniques to establishing loan programmes with favourable terms, can breathe new life into the sector. Rewarding farmers through subsidies and tax breaks can make agriculture a more attractive proposition, a career path paved with possibility, not peril. Let's incentivize a return to the fields, not a desperate flight from them. By creating an environment that empowers and protects farmers, we can cultivate a future of food security for Nigeria.

Nigeria's agricultural potential is undeniable. Lush farmlands sprawl across the nation, a testament to the richness of the soil and the tireless spirit of its people. It's time to extinguish the fires of insecurity that threaten to choke this potential, to replace fear with hope and violence with cultivation. We must cultivate a future of food security, not just for the sake of feeding the nation but for the sake of its prosperity.

A thriving agricultural sector is the backbone of a strong economy, creating jobs, fostering innovation, and ensuring stability.

Let us join hands, extinguish the flames of this present crisis, and cultivate a future where Nigerian food baskets overflow, not with fear but with the promise of a bountiful harvest.



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# Interview

## Our cutting-edge savings application aims to mitigate negative impact of inflation - Ntumba

Acting CEO of Baobab Microfinance Bank, Eric Ntumba, in this interview with HOPE MOSES-ASHIKE and select journalists, spoke on the bank's digital savings offering, the Jollof+ app, how Nigeria can leverage technology to drive savings and financial inclusion, and other industry issues. Excerpts:

**What prompted Baobab to launch the Jollof+ products?**

Thank you for setting aside time to attend the soft launch of Jollof+. It is a best-in-class digital savings app designed to provide more convenience to our customers, allowing them to save from the comfort of their own homes, businesses, or offices. This initiative is part of Baobab's transformative efforts, as we believe banking should no longer be a place you go to whenever you need to. The goal is to empower our customers to become their bankers, managing their savings and investments independently. Additionally, digitization enables us to extend our outreach far beyond the structural limits of physical branches, helping us reach more people, tap into new segments, and serve our existing customers better. This is the key rationale behind the launch of Jollof+.

**You mentioned the interest as the icing on the cake for the app. Can you elaborate on that?**

Yes. The main driver of the application is to push for convenient savings. Saving is inherently an effort; you choose to defer an expense. Adding further effort, like traveling to a branch, can complicate this process. By removing these peripheral barriers—transport, branch location, and opening hours—we make saving simpler. Customers can fund their Jollof+ wallet and choose the best investment or savings option that fits their needs. This convenience increases the likelihood of higher savings volumes.

**Can we increase aggregate savings by liberalizing banking?**

Yes, I believe so. Technology has always been a catalyst, accelerating processes. A digital savings product can enhance the speed and efficiency of saving, leading to an increase in the overall savings of the country if widely adopted.

**Do you see fintechs replacing microfinance banking in Nigeria?**

It depends on what you define as fintech. Many fintech companies eventually acquire a microfinance banking license to gain more options. Most fintechs present themselves primarily as payment platforms. However, once they obtain a microfinance license, they can also



Eric Ntumba

Our portfolio quality has not deteriorated with the portfolio at risk below 3%, better than the industry average. We aim to ensure our customers continue to manage their debts effectively

lend. Thus, they become relevant competition as they are equipped to perform the same regulatory activities we do. Whether we are a fintech depends on the definition, but fundamentally, we are a financial institution that uses technology.

**Can you explain the options available on the Jollof+ app?**

Each option on the app has specific features and benefits:

**JollofLock:** Primarily for long-term savings, this time deposit product offers interest upfront for a predefined period. You can top up the initial amount during the term.

**Baby Box:** Designed for saving for children's future needs. You can start saving even before the baby is born and save for as many children as desired.

**Ajo+:** Can be used for individual or collective savings, suitable for individuals or groups with specific saving targets.

**Jollof Flex:** Ensures that even the balance in your Jollof wallet earns interest, providing flexibility before

deciding on a specific investment or savings option.

**Can microfinance like yours reduce the cost of savings to encourage more people to join?**

Yes, by digitizing the savings process, we remove the cost of physical transactions, making saving more convenient and cost-effective. Although some costs like internet access remain, we plan to introduce a USSD format for people without smartphones or internet access, extending our product reach to people using feature phones.

**With the current economic hardship, do you think people can still save?**

Yes, one way to combat inflation is to ensure that money earns interest between receipt and expenditure. Jollof+ allows for this, making savings relevant even in tough economic times. While some people may struggle to save, earning interest can help alleviate inflation's effects.

**Are microfinance banks ready for a \$1 trillion economy?**

It depends on how readiness is defined. Microfinance banks play their legitimate parts at different levels. At Baobab, we are financially sound and supported by a strong shareholder structure making us able to make the required investments to bring relevant contributions to the national effort.

**Do users need a Baobab account to use Jollof+?**

No, even non-Baobab customers can use Jollof+. The account can be funded using a debit card from any bank.

**Is there a need for recapitalisation in the microfinance sector?**

The regulator sets capitalisation thresholds. Only the regulator can assess and issue guidelines. For now, we comply with current requirements and are prepared to meet any future changes if and as they arise.

**Has the increase in MPR and interest rates affected loan repayment capacity?**

Our portfolio quality has not deteriorated with the portfolio at risk below 3%, better than the industry average. We aim to ensure our customers continue to manage their debts effectively.

**What are the challenges of microfinance banking in Nigeria?**

The main challenge is pushing the limit of financial inclusion. Many people remain unserved or underserved. We must be relevant to them through our product offerings and outreach. Digital solutions, including USSD, can help overcome barriers and boost sector outreach.

**How competitive is your interest rate?**

We believe we transparently offer the best interest rate - up to 21.60% net on the Jollof+ app/

**What message do you have for your customers?**

We look forward to people enjoying Jollof+. It offers convenience, options for targeted savings, and good savings habits, especially for the tech-savvy youth. The interest earned can help combat inflation, making Jollof+ a valuable tool for financial management for all.



# Interview

## AI-powered digital advertising will help businesses reach their goals more efficiently and accurately - Izugbokwe

Futuretech Media, an advertising technology company, recently unveiled a programme to empower digital advertising professionals in Nigeria. Itohan Izugbokwe, Country Manager, Futuretech Media, spoke on the company's initiative at driving AI-powered performance marketing in Nigeria. Excerpts by JOHN SALAU

There is actually AI for almost everything today; what is your take on AI in the IMC space?

Artificial intelligence is revolutionary, especially in digital advertising, where, if used properly, it can optimise ROI and reduce inefficiencies. By leveraging AI, advertisers and brands can analyse vast amounts of data to identify patterns and trends that would be impossible for humans to detect manually. This allows for more precise targeting, ensuring that ads are shown to the right audience at the right time, thereby increasing the likelihood of conversions.

Overall, AI's ability to process large volumes of data and generate actionable insights makes it a valuable tool for IMC professionals looking to create more impactful and efficient marketing strategies.

Where/how does ethical AI come into play here?

Ethical conversations in digital really come down to usage. It is important to respect privacy and provide transparency when using consumer data, data collection and safeguarding sensitive information. Additionally, safeguarding sensitive information through robust security measures is essential to prevent data breaches and misuse. By prioritizing ethical data usage, companies can build trust with their audience and maintain a positive reputation in the digital space.

There is always the fear of abuse with the deployment of AI; how do we address this fear?

Addressing the fear of abuse with the deployment of AI requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses transparency, regulation, education, and ethical practices. By implementing the right ethical frameworks, ensuring robust data privacy and security measures, organisations can address the fear



Itohan Izugbokwe

of AI abuse, build trust with stakeholders, and ensure the responsible and ethical deployment of AI technologies. It is also critical to take intentional steps such as advocacy outreaches that can reduce the fear of abuse and promote the responsible and ethical deployment of AI technologies. Futuretech prides herself in respecting privacy and data protection, we 100% comply with regulations such as GDPR & CCPA and use best in class safety partners.

What is your take on AI-powered performance marketing?

AI-powered performance marketing has revolutionised the way businesses approach their marketing strategies, offering numerous advantages that enhance efficiency, targeting,

and ROI.

I believe that AI and performance marketing is a match made in heaven, it has all the parameters for success and is a surefire way to ensure results for performance objectives in digital marketing. Put this way, Artificial Intelligence algorithms make analysing data, forecasting, optimizing campaign results better, which gives room for great results. Overall, AI-powered performance marketing is a powerful tool that, when used effectively, can drive significant improvements in marketing outcomes, helping businesses reach their goals more efficiently and accurately.

Is AI performance marketing applicable to individuals or is it just for marketing firms?

I would say that even in firms, people manage performance marketing campaigns. The individual needs to follow the right framework which includes defining clear cut marketing objectives, choosing the right platforms/DSP, audience segmentation, optimization, monitoring, and reporting. The advantage that firms like ours have over an individual running a campaign is a fully operational team behind the operations person. AI-powered performance marketing offers valuable tools and capabilities that can benefit both individuals, brands and advertisers, allowing them to leverage AI to manage large-scale campaigns and complex datasets.

What is the cost implication of deploying AI powered

performance marketing to an average client in Nigeria?

The appeal of AI-powered digital advertising lies in its focus on delivering the specific results desired by the client. The cost implication of deploying AI-powered performance marketing for an average client in Nigeria can vary widely depending on several factors, including the scope of the project, the specific AI tools and platforms used, and the level of customization required.

This tailored approach ensures that pricing is customized to meet each individual customer's needs and goals.

What innovation would it bring to the Nigerian advertising and IMC ecosystem?

In essence, the integration of AI-powered innovations has the capacity to transform the Nigerian advertising and IMC landscape. It empowers brands and advertisers to craft campaigns that are not only more personalized, efficient, and impactful, but also adept at meeting the ever-evolving expectations of consumers. This innovation is transforming the way businesses engage with their audiences and

measure the effectiveness of their campaigns. By leveraging the latest technologies and data-driven insights, Nigerian businesses can stay ahead of the competition and drive better results for their brands.

Let's go away from AI and talk a bit about your person; who is Itohan?

Itohan Izugbokwe is a seasoned leader with diverse experience especially in digital tech, marketing strategy and business management. I am the country manager of Futuretech, a company headquartered in Dubai (with offices in Lagos, Johannesburg, Capetown, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore) that provides next generation technology solutions and combines brand level studies, shoppable media and conversational ads to achieve brand outcomes for all types of clients. I am responsible for driving business growth, fostering strategic partnerships, and leading cross-functional teams to success. Additionally, I hold a certification as a Scrum Master, bringing a unique blend of leadership and agile expertise within the Futuretech team in Lagos. Also, I am passionate about driving innovation and empowering teams, and committed to sharing insights and expertise to inspire others in the advertising industry.

Within three years of launching and leading the business in Lagos, Futuretech Media has experienced significant growth, working with major players in the public and the private sector. As the country manager, I contributed to the successful market launch of other tech platforms that help brands and advertisers achieve their key performance metrics. I am also committed to empowering the youth, and has developed impactful training programs that equip them with invaluable training and mentorship for fresh graduates interested in the digital space.

**I am passionate about driving innovation and empowering teams, and committed to sharing insights and expertise to inspire others in the advertising industry**



# We won't relent on the advocacy for women economic empowerment - Dafur

Caroline Panglang Dafur is the commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development in Plateau State. In this interview with some journalists, she spoke on her achievements since she assumed office, women empowerment, and how it feels working with Governor Caleb Mutfwang. Excerpts by HAPPY ZAROKADA

It is one year since the administration came on board. How has it been since you assumed office as the commissioner for woman Affairs?

It has been a momentous journey. We are doing our best to reposition women, children, the elderly and the vulnerable in the society for better.

May we know, in specific, some of your achievements so far?

They're quite much. Through the help of the gender-friendly governor, we have touched the lives of our women and children. Notable amongst other achievements is the empowerment of 102 widows with skills, financial literacy, equipment and financial grant as starter packs. We have equally trained over 100 young ladies in Agriculture, and empowered 100 people living with disabilities with financial grants to boost their businesses. On child welfare, we have fully implemented the VAPP law, activated a joint taskforce committee against trafficking and have repatriated over 100 children back to the state with some on scholarships in educational institutions and some learning trade.

May we know the peculiar challenges facing the ministry?

Basically, it is the challenge of reliable and accurate data to work with, and the high prevalence of child trafficking and child labour.

How do you intend to tackle these challenges?

I have deployed technology to sanitize and revalidate all orphanages and homes on the Plateau, we have trained over 100 social workers and activate the research team for valuable data.

How worried are you that there is low level of women empowerment in Nigeria, especially among the rural women?

It's worrisome, but with the present administration, I'm confident we are setting the pace and will continue to do more for our women, an empowered woman is a voice, so we won't relent on the advocacy for women economic empowerment.

Some Nigerians are proposing long maternity leave for nursing mothers. What is your take on that?

Well, it depends; maternity leave is well-deserved but its



Caroline Panglang Dafur

length could vary depending on the type of job and other variables.

Can you give us an overview of the achievements of the government especially in women empowerment in the last one year?

We have achieved a lot through the support of His Excellency, Caleb Mutfwang:

On women development, we have trained 102 widows from the 17 LGAs of Plateau State for six months in vocational trainings in Tailoring, Catering and Knitting; we have also empowered them with modern equipment and financial grants for startup.

We have carried out capacity building workshops for women stakeholders, wives of the 17 LGA TIC chairmen, and the LGA gender desk officers on women economic empowerment who in turn stepped it down to the grassroots.

We trained 300 women on digital skills in collaboration with one of our implementing partners, Gieva and Zuestech with funding from Microsoft.

We have empowered 20 women in Agriculture with financial grants of 500,000 each under the RHI programme.

We distributed 1,800 bags of fertilizers, 1000 bags of maize and 1,000 bags of rice to women groups.

We won the hosting right for the 24th Regular Annual Council of Women Affairs in Plateau State.

We have carried out cancer awareness campaign and free counseling and cervical cancer screening of over 300 women on the Plateau.

We organised 16 days of Activism Against Sexual and Gender-based Violence with Advocacy to LGAs with higher prevalence and a road walk.

We empowered 100 women living with disabilities with financial grants of 100,000 each for micro business boost.

We empowered widows of our fallen heroes (Legionnaires) with N1million in each of the 17 LGAs.

We led the delegation of Plateau Women Stakeholders and National Council for Women Society Plateau Exco for National Convention in Lagos and Biennial conference in Abuja.

We led Plateau Women stakeholders delegation to New York for the 68th United Nations Commission on Status of women and returned to step down with series of workshop in the state marking the activities to commemorate the Women's International day.

We trained 100 women mediators in collaboration with the United Nations Women on Peace and Conflict Resolution.

# Seinye O.B. Lulu-Briggs: A philanthropist's day of honour

OBINNA EMELIKE

The Bible quotation: "Seeth thou a person diligent in their work; they will stand before kings and not ordinary mortals", played out on Saturday, May 25, 2024, for Seinye O.B. Lulu-Briggs, an industrialist and philanthropist, when Kelvin Ngozi Anugwo, Eze Ekpeye Logbo III of Ekpeye land, Ahoada East, Rivers State, installed her as a high chief of the kingdom.

The industrialist, with significant footprints in energy, manufacturing and hospitality, had previously stood before eminences globally and continues to do so. However, that day's recognition further confirmed her innate compassion.

Long renowned for her service and commitment to the well-being of the underserved and vulnerable in Rivers State, the South-South zone and Nigeria generally, the ex-banker turned industrialist was loudly feted that day at the king's palace where she was installed as the 'Ununwe Gwoduma Emene Ekpeye 1 of Ekpeyeland' (The Woman that cures Ekpeye People) by Eze Anugwo.

Humanitarian works

None deserved the title more than Seinye Lulu-Briggs, whose foundation, the O.B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation, has prioritised the promotion of health of the people of Ekpeyeland and elsewhere. In its 23 years of existence, the foundation, which operates in five major areas of care for life program, free medical missions, access to clean water and sanitation, education and scholarships, and microcredit and entrepreneurship, all aimed at nurturing the holistic well-being of vulnerable people in the Niger Delta region, has reached close to two million people and spent over N3 billion bringing relief to Niger-Deltans and Nigerians.

Apart from the foundation's overall work in the five areas contributing to 10 of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the free medical missions fulfils goal number three, ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages. Free services are offered during the medical missions, usually lasting five days. These include counselling/health education, outpatient consultations, general surgeries, paediatric care, dental care, vision care (including glasses and surgery), malaria testing and treatment, HIV/AIDS screening, physiotherapy, and an on-site pharmacy and laboratory.

The 39th free medical mission took place in Ahoada in April. There, Eze Anugwo revealed the kingdom's intention to confer a chieftaincy title on Seinye O.B. Lulu-Briggs for her commitment to the health and well-being of his people.

The fact that it was the second medical mission in Ahoada (4,502 people were treated from November 5 to 9, 2007, during the first edition) further explained the king-in-council's decision to appreciate a benefactor by springing a surprise title on



her when she went to pay homage to the monarch in his palace before the official commencement of the exercise.

"It is great to be back in Ahoada this week," Lulu-Briggs said in her address at the official opening of the exercise. "And with your kind support, we will once again bridge the gap, alleviate suffering, and restore the health and well-being of thousands in this community who need medical attention but cannot afford to attend the mainstream healthcare system," she continued.

The philanthropist also gave insight into why the foundation, despite the significant cost, focuses on the health and well-being of the vulnerable and underserved.

"We are all aware of the economic contractions and the cost-of-living crisis, which has caused the prices of everything in our nation to skyrocket. Many people can no longer afford to feed themselves and their families. Nor do they have the means to live in decent shelter. Let's not even mention taking care of their health, which is a people's most important asset. This, unfortunately, is particularly true of our underserved communities, hence the O.B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation's resolve to bring quality healthcare to the doorsteps of people who need it," she said.

Colourful coronation

This, therefore, was the background for Saturday's colourful coronation event for the philanthropist. Accompanied by eminent Nigerians including Patrick Dele Cole, Amaechi Okwuosa, a lawyer and member Body of Benchers, Dawari George, international lawyer, Charles Adeogun-Phillips, Tom Fabian and Mohammed Alfa, who represented the Ejeh of Ankpa, Kogi State, Abubakar Ahmed Yakubu, the philanthropist left home to be crowned as a chief but departed the ceremony as a high chief.

Eze Anugwo, who sprang a second surprise on Seinye O.B. Lulu-Briggs for her immense contributions to the well-being of the Ekpeye people and Rivers State as a whole, lauded her philanthropy and commitment to improving lives, emphasising that her work embodies the spirit of community and healing.

He then declared that the newly installed chief had been promoted to a high chief and, by her new status, had become a member of the Ekpeye Council of High Chiefs.

Displaying her inimitable compassion, the dazed O.B. Lulu-Briggs further gave back to Ekpeye land. She disclosed

that she would establish a recreational centre to cater to the vulnerable of Ahoada. The centre, to be built on three plots of land presented to her by the king during the coronation ceremony, will be a haven for the elderly and abused women.

She said, "The plan and the building model you see here are a reaction to your action. You shocked and surprised me. I received a land plan surveyed for under 3000 square metres without notice or solicitation. I was pleasantly surprised and wondered what to do with it. But the spirit of God put in my heart to open a recreational centre for the senior citizens of Ekepeye Kingdom."

"The centre will also serve as a safe shelter for battered wives and women who need immediate assistance. I have been working on this with the various societies I work with. Since the land is large enough, I decided to establish a centre like that where there will be room for someone to stay safe for the night. It is not a residential place but a shelter where battered women or girls can stay for the night. I thank the Eze Ekpeye Logbo for giving us this property, allowing me to do what I have been thinking of doing for every major city in Rivers state."

History of philanthropy

Activities at Saturday's colourful event, which featured dances and Kalabari and Ekpeye masquerade displays, further affirmed Lulu-Briggs's commitment to the underserved through the O.B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation, established to recognise the legendary giving of O. B. Lulu-Briggs, Seinye's late husband, a Kalabari High Chief, industrialist, and statesman.

Some of the Foundation's recent interventions include the relief materials given to thousands of families affected by the 2022 devastating Nigerian floods in two Rivers communities, Akinima in Ahoada West Local Government Area and Elem Sangama, a Kalabari Kingdom island in Akuku-Toru Local Government. The foundation fulfilled its humanitarian mandate by distributing relief items worth over N120 million to the people in both communities. The relief items included food, toiletries, medication, treated mosquito nets and wrappers. The foundation's medical team also attended to thousands of people with health challenges.



# Interview

## 'Africa must leverage best practices in medical technology to solve health challenges'

Today, people are increasingly suffering from burnout occasioned by financial stress, and the development is resulting in a high rate of mental illness. These issues not only affect human productivity levels but also pose a threat to human health. In this interview with select journalists, **Nelson Ajulo**, chief executive officer of 15 Wins and Zarttech Ventures, a Dutch venture builder that facilitates collaboration among investors, gave insight into the role of technology in addressing mental illness. He said globalisation and technology are helping to bring healing closer to the people as his company recently developed a new tech platform that addresses current and future problems as it relates to mental and spiritual wellness for people. He also spoke on key challenges and opportunities in the FinTech ecosystem, especially for Nigerian startups. **AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE** brings the excerpts:

**C**an you share insights on how technology helps to deliver holistic wellness?

Technology plays a very crucial role in ensuring physical and mental wellness in people because using technology we can connect best practices in Africa to European audiences. We can also bring best practices in Europe to the African audience. We can bring best practices in Asia, North America, and all over the world to people in other clime.

There are already best practices in spiritual solutions that help connect people to the source of pain to heal them better in a much more sustainable way without the use of medications.

So, this is the role that technology brings: we can now connect instantly through our app and see the best practitioners or the best solutions from different parts of the world. Individuals can join a forum on the platform and communities where people share testimonies about their experiences with different practitioners as they use technology to find the needed solution.

**You recently rebranded from KoKo to Heilen. Could you talk us through the motivation behind the change and what customers should expect?**

It is interesting because we only launched KoKo in January this year. Initially, KoKo showed a lot of potential due to our facilities and growth. However, as we went to market, we realised the service offering was too broad. As an organisation under the 15Wins venture, we aim to create technology that solves real-life challenges and helps people, contributing to humanity and equality.

Our goal with Heilen is to address current and future problems, focusing on holistic wellness. We saw that people are increasingly facing burnout and confusion in a modernised world, leading to gaps in family values, ownership, and mental health. We decided to make our services more specific, helping people find answers, access holistic healing, and contribute to community fulfilment.

Heilen, a German word for healing, will be a platform where people can access healing services at their fingertips. We are bringing the best practitioners onto our platform to connect them with those in need of healing solutions, focusing on holistic wellness, which involves the mind, body, and spirit.

**How do economic factors in Africa and Europe impact the**



Ajulo

**pricing and accessibility of your product?**

There will be price differences due to currency disparities, but we promote international trade by allowing users to access services globally. This bilateral approach benefits both local and international practitioners and users, ensuring sustainability and accessibility. Local users can also access services within their regions at affordable prices, based on community reviews and conversations.

**What is your growth projection in the African market compared to the European market over the next five years?**

In Europe, spiritual healing is already a significant topic. In Africa, there is still a stigma, but we aim to change perceptions by introducing spiritual healing as a complement to traditional practices. We believe Heilen can contribute to economic growth by connecting local experts to international audiences and promoting trade and collaboration.

**Where does Heilen fit into the startup ecosystem?**

Heilen is categorised under the

MedTech platform and also a FinTech platform that provides solutions to connect experts to people, payment settlements, and service bookings. The track that has been moved on our platform is spiritual medicine.

So, within the startup ecosystem, Heilen is considered a startup. We are about to launch a fundraising effort for \$1.4 million in seed funding because the technology is ready, and we want to use the funding to scale the products into the market.

We are looking at utilising dual scaling approaches. The first step is to scale the product starting from the Netherlands, which will likely help us to extend to other neighbouring countries in Europe such as Germany, Belgium, and the UK. At the same time, we would scale in Nigeria.

This strategy will help us test and compare both markets to get the best from both places. Based on the traction that we get in both places, we would decide to double down or to have a focus area over time.

Additionally, it would help us understand how Heilen would perform in a developed economy compared

to a developing economy. If we were successful in Nigeria, we would have already learned how to introduce the same solution in other developing economies in Africa, Asia, or other parts of the world.

**Based on your experience, can you take us through an overview of the Nigerian startup ecosystem in terms of value?**

There are lots of opportunities in Nigeria. The country is a huge economy and also a buying economy with a vast population of young who can utilise technology.

Nigeria is in a very interesting place to maximise its potential. Nigeria and indeed Africa have been overlooked and undermined by developed countries as a place with no or few possibilities, but that is not the case.

The reality is that there are a lot of beautiful opportunities in African expertise; the continent needs to understand how to leverage those best practices and help educate the global ecosystem about this opportunity as well as its value.

An example of how we will do this is through platforms like Heilen, where we will introduce some of the best practices of spiritual healing in Africa to the rest of the world for the first time.

**What measures have you put in place to ensure a positive reception of the platform in the Nigerian market?**

Policies will always affect any business, which is why we as entrepreneurs and innovators always lobby to ensure stakeholders understand what the platform is about and the solutions that we bring to the forefront.

Heilen is quite different because it is not replacing traditional medicines, hospitals, doctors, or nurses; rather, it is a place for spiritual healing. It is a complementary solution to traditional medicines.

On the platform, we have 11 verticals, and the last one is prayer, so indeed, Heilen is a place for holistic healing. It is a place where individuals can find different forms of healing at their fingertips; a place where, within the privacy and comfort of their homes, they can get connected to a whole community of like-minded people and find a solution that can help make them whole again.

**As an expert in the FinTech ecosystem, why has Nigeria not produced Unicorns in the past five to seven years? Where is the disconnection or con-**

**straint?**

As someone in the industry, I think sometimes unicorns are not the best. The idea of a unicorn is to pump in money, ramp up the business, and then exit. The whole aim is to exit and then sell the business to much bigger organisations from the United States of America or Europe.

We have not had many unicorns in Africa specifically in Nigeria in recent years. With my knowledge and familiarity with a lot of upcoming companies and some of our portfolio companies, I think it is just a matter of time before some of these organisations become unicorns. Definitely, within the 15Wins portfolio, we have unicorn material platforms within the ecosystem.

**What are the criteria you use to select the startups and ventures that you support?**

In terms of selecting a startup to support, we look out for products and solutions that impact society because when you invest in solutions that create a social impact, by default, you make a profit.

Innovation is not only about solutions to make money but about solving societal issues. So, we are always looking for solutions that solve societal issues and move humanity forward, not backwards.

Our investment portfolio includes solutions that impact society positively, driving both profit and social good. We foster collaboration by leveraging each venture's infrastructure and expertise, ensuring they support and enhance each other's growth. This interconnected approach strengthens the ecosystem by promoting sustainable development.

If you look at our investment portfolio, almost all of them are on the same vertical, so they can all inter-change in terms of technology infrastructures, human capital, process, and administrative support.

**What do you see as the future for ventures like Heilen in Nigeria, considering the economic challenges?**

Heilen can stimulate economic growth by connecting experts with those in need of healing, promoting both local and international trade. This connectivity fosters community well-being, enabling people to work better and collaborate more effectively. We believe Heilen will contribute to Nigeria's economic prosperity by addressing holistic wellness needs and fostering human connections.



# Interview

## I commit to Censors Board that will move away from censorship to classification – Hussein

Since assuming office on March 11, 2024 as the new Executive director, National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), **Shaibu Hussein**, a PhD holder, has hit the ground running, starting with the push for the replacement of censorship in NFVCB with classification, new regulations on smoking, tobacco products and money rituals and ritual killings in movies, among others. In this interview, the NFVCB's boss bares his mind to **OBINNA EMELIKE** on topical issues, especially new regulation, why it will not stifle artistic creativity, his mandate and new work mode at Censors Board, among others. Excerpt:

**A**s the new executive director, what is your mandate at the Censors Board?

I did not come to the Censors Board to mark the register. I came to do what the Censors Board is set out to do, I will not go out of it and I will not do short of what Mr. President and Hannatu Musa Musawa, the Minister for the Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, want me to achieve.

Also, I commit to a Censors Board that will move completely away from censorship to classification, I commit to a Censors Board that will move from analogue classification to digital, I commit to a Censors Board that will be responsive to itself, to the society, to the stakeholders and to the federal government that set it up.

**Why the request to remove 'Censors' from NFVCB acronym?**

The first thing I did immediately when I took over at the Censors Board was to go to the Minister to tell her that all over the world, the word censorship is associated with dictatorship and with the military. I asked if we could do away with that word and she said yes, go ahead and that we have our bill in the National Assembly and that I should make sure that the change takes effect. So, I met all the people in charge of bills, I told them what we wanted and I succeeded in convincing them. They removed the word censorship in it. So, when the bill comes out, censorship will not be there again.

**Why the proposed regulation?**

The whole idea is for us to have a healthy screen and we are committed. The regulation is not about one step forward, one step backwards. It is not about me. It is about everyone, about the young people, about our children and the future of our children.

I really want us to understand that I did not ban smoking scenes and I did not ban ritual scenes in our movies.

There are aspects of our culture you need to display and they are called necessary scenes.

What we are saying is that if you have to play a necessary scene for historical accuracy, for educational purposes and to correct a negative lifestyle, you must warn people to know that these things are not real and they are not a lifestyle for you to emulate.

The other argument is that we at NFVCB don't watch films to the end and that if we do, we shouldn't need to make regulations. I asked those putting up the argument what they meant.

They said in the end of their movies, there used to be consequences. But the problem is that for some



Hussein

enlightened filmmakers, the consequences may be very high. But the bulk of the consequences I have seen, they don't compare to the act. I will give an example. A man killed seven people in a movie, he cut their heads to become rich, with a convoy of cars and tormenting people in the village and all that.

And after sometime, one of the ghosts starts pursuing him, others join later and he becomes a mad person and starts picking things from the dustbin to eat and the next thing is "To God be the glory". But what is the consequence of killing seven people compared to the killer who later died?

So, we need stakeholders to understand what we are doing, especially the media that reports the sector.

**Can you give examples of unhealthy scenes in films?**

Before I became ED of NFVCB, there were certain depictions I saw on social media, and I went to their DM or I have their contacts and I sent them a message saying, what is the moral of this genre you have shown us?

There are so many depictions like the one that I always talk about is in a skit where a man sent a 7-year-old boy to buy him a cigarette. Of course, it is wrong to send a child to buy cigarettes for an adult.

In the above case, not only did the man send the boy to buy cigarettes, but asked him to tell 'Malam', the seller, to light it for him.

The seller lit the cigarette according to the instructions and while the boy was coming back, he branched in an enclosure to puff a little from the burning tobacco.

When the seven-year-old boy came back, the brother called him Abel, where are you? The boy coughed and replied, I am here. At that point the man should have queried why the boy was coughing, instead he collected the cigarette and asked why it was

short and that the boy should go back and ask the seller.

When you are watching skits, the skit makers will unusually put parody-like laughter to make you think that it is funny. What is funny in the above case study is that the boy is so short and has a big belly (sorry for body shaming). He went to the 'Malam' to make an inquiry and the 'Malam' asked him to ask the 'otondo' (stupid) boy. He pursued the boy and fell down and that was the end of the skit and we laughed. So, what is the message or moral of the skit, if I may ask?

There are so many of them like that. So, when I saw the regulation, I said we must take responsibility as filmmakers.

I believe that once an artiste takes responsibility, once he does something that does not undermine national security, he does not corrupt or injure people and the rest of them, we have no need to begin to say go and cut this or that in a film.

**Are there film industries across the world where the regulations are in place?**

When I was telling people that this is a global practice, they were arguing, so I went and downloaded instances.

India has done it, Hollywood is a self-regulated industry, but they have also done theirs.

What they first did was that the big studios said there must not be smoking in any content for young people and even if there is going to be smoking, they will write a scene around it to discourage smoking. Maybe an actor in the film will say, "Are you still in this habit", and the guy will say "Ahhh", and the actor will say "You got to stop it, it is bad." Then he coughs, this is among the effects.

They write it in the scene to correct it. Hollywood has done it and they now use more props.

Also, UNESCO said Nigeria is the

second largest film producer in the world after India. India has given us an example and I downloaded Indian films and showed them. The joy for me was that one person who was saying that the regulation is law against the society and that the society will not obey it, called me two days later to ask me if I want them to do all these warnings and I asked him where he got the warnings from.

He noted that he just watched one film on Netflix and they stayed for one minute talking about warning and that there is a place in the movie where they said, don't try this at home.

So, these things are global practice and things we should know about, which some filmmakers are ignorant of.

We are going to ensure that we pass the law, once it comes out from the Ministry of Justice, we will re-engage the platform owners. Already, some of the platform owners have told us that if there are those unnecessary scenes, they normally demobilize the content.

We are still going to meet them to tell them that this is the law in the country and you must obey the law.

**What about the allegation from some quarters that the regulation is self-serving and anti-creativity?**

So, the regulation is not anti-creativity and self-serving, if not my bosses would have called me to order. Each time they call me, I explain what we are doing, the level we are in pursuing that and they are excited.

There is nothing self-serving, nothing anti-creativity or suppressing creativity about that regulation. I cannot be in the Censors Board as an artiste and also suppress creativity.

People are hiding under home movies now to advertise. You will see a dustbin inside a restaurant that is donated by a tobacco company, so we need to watch out.

**What are the challenges you envisage with the regulation?**

The challenge we will have is monitoring capacity. But I have gone to the minister and she is helping us to see how we can address the challenges.

I promised you that we are moving from analogue to digital. This is to enable us to monitor these films because they are so many, they are everywhere, and even online.

We are going to work with CAPA too. I don't want money, just give me the equipment, give me smart phones, laptops and others, let me give to my staff members to enable them work optimally from anywhere so that we can continue to look at those screens to monitor films to ensure a healthy screen.

**Do you also seek media support for your job?**

Yes, I need media support to fur-

ther create awareness of the benefits of the regulation, especially the Art and Entertainment Writers because they are very enlightened. I have also been part of these incredible writers and I know what their writing can do.

Things are happening already in that respect. I was excited at the Tribune Newspaper's editorial on the issue of smoking and ritual scenes in our films. For me, this matter is topical and that was why Tribune did an editorial on it. I expect that we will have informed commentaries on it.

**What is the role of CAPA in the regulation?**

I was appointed in January 2024, but I did not take over till March. Before then, I got a letter from Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA), requesting to pay me a courtesy visit. They kept asking when I was going to resume, and I told them that I had not collected my letter of appointment.

On March 11, 2024, I resumed and the CAPA team came the following week. Before they came, I had read about what they were doing and I aligned myself to it because I teach in University of Lagos as an adjunct lecturer and I found out that most of the projects that my undergraduate students even Masters students are doing are mostly influence studies; influence of this on behaviour, influence on this and that. At that point, I discovered that this thing is something we must take seriously.

So, when the CAPA team came and said that there is a regulation and that the problem is that we need to pass the regulation to the Honourable Minister for approval, I studied the regulation, studied what is happening in other parts of the world, looked at the whole industry and also put myself as an artiste, which I am.

At that point I decided that we need to take the regulation, let's clean it up and I am sure when I said let's set up a committee, CAPA thought that it was another kind of those committees. I told them that I want this out in a week. It worked. When I got to the board, it was a civil service setup, but we don't work like civil servants now.

Those who followed me at the National Troupe where I worked will find out that I was working 24 hours. Maybe that was what endeared me very much to Professor Ahmed Yerima, who kept me as his personal assistant for over 10 years.

I told them at the board that this thing must come out and immediately it came out I wrote a letter to Hannatu Musa Musawa, Honourable Minister for the Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy and said Ma, let's show example in Africa, India has done it, Hollywood is a self-regulated industry, but they have also done theirs.



# Sunday Magazine

## How infrastructure deficit in federal, state varsities boosting Open University's fortunes

INIOBONG IWOK and JOHN SALAU

In recent years, enrollment figures of students at the National Open University (NOUN) have increased significantly in Nigeria.

Many Nigerians are now seeking admission into the distance learning institution due to the admission crisis in the country and the lack of capacity by many of the federal and state universities, BusinessDay Sunday observation has shown.

For many students, especially those seeking to combine working and schooling, it is an opportunity to further their education and at the same time pursue their career.

"After writing JAMB three times I was simply tried, I am a lady, there is no need continuing to waste my time, I wanted to further my education and when I realised I can also do it here, I embraced the NOUN route, Esther Okon, a NOUN student said.

Okon's story is just one of many NOUN students who were frustrated due to inability to secure admission in the conventional universities.

For many, it is a sigh of relief, considering that it is an alternative system away from the conventional institutions, and the hybrid nature of learning makes it further attractive.

Since part time programmes have been banned by the Federal Government in the conventional universities, and with the current high fees charged especially by private universities, many say their dreams of higher education could have been dashed if not for NOUN, since they are sponsoring themselves.

"I work and school because there is no one to sponsor my education; I stay with my senior sister and she is not ready to sponsor me. My mummy and daddy are late.

"I had to pursue my academic dreams through NOUN because; it is easy and straightforward. We receive lectures online and at the centre, for some of us that work, we can join the class anywhere we are.

"I don't have the time to write JAMB, but with them, I just bought a form and applied. Although there needs to be adjustment in the lecture procedure, but in all, I like it," Tayo Odunayo, a NOUN student, said.

Although Nigerians did not fully embrace the idea of Open University when it was established by Olusegun Obasanjo's administration more than twenty years ago, many admission seekers now see it as a last resort.

The recent Federal Government's decision to allow law graduates of the institution to attend law schools, while also approving graduands to be part of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme have also attracted more admission seekers to the distance learning institution.

In Nigeria, many federal universities are lacking the necessary infrastructure for more intakes as lecture halls are filled; hostel accommodation has become very problematic to the extent that "squatting" has become the order of the day.

Over the decades, each year about two million candidates sat for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), but less than quarter of that number ends up securing admission.

Experts say about 10 percent of this number are also able to secure admission to study their preferred course at the end of the day.

Although the problems of tertiary education in Nigeria are multifaceted, stakeholders have

identified infrastructure deficit, inconsistent policies as parts of the reasons why it is increasingly difficult for many youths to realise their dream of higher education.

### Rise in enrollment figures

According to reports, currently the institution has over 250,000 students across its study centres in the country.

Within the last ten years, admission numbers have increased significantly in NOUN; for instance, in 2022, 16,000 new students were matriculated into its study centres across the country. The new entrants, comprising 11,851 undergraduates and 4,808 postgraduate students in various faculties, will join the over 150,000 returning students of the university.

Similarly, in 2021, 14,953 fresh students were matriculated at the 21st ceremony of the institution.

While, at the 26th matriculation ceremony in 2024, the Vice-Chancellor of the institution, Olufemi Peters, a professor, revealed that the total number of new intakes is 21,026 students for undergraduate programmes and 7,460 are postgraduate students. This figure shows a significant rise in enrollment in recent years.

Michael Ohia, a graduating student of NOUN, who studied Mass Communication, said he had to embrace the institution after writing JAMB about three times and was unable to get admission in conventional institutions across the country because of the admission process that was not transparent.

According to him, "It is sad the way the admission process could be, if one is not lucky or does not know anyone, one may not get admission in the universities these days.

"After spending four years at home after writing JAMB three times, I had to enroll at the Open University, it came after much pressure.

"I yielded to my sister's suggestion and went to the Lokoja study centre of the University to make enquiry about the school.

"I was convinced about the University system of operation and applied for admission, and to the glory of God, I was given admission to study Mass Communication.

"Out of over 53 Courses, I didn't record carryover in any of those courses. My first GPA was 3.68 and in second semester year 1, my CGPA stood at 3.8.

"When I started, many thought that I won't graduate from the University but to the glory of God, I have graduated; in fact; with 2.1."

Joy Oti, an Accounting student in one of the centres in Lagos, said she embraced the institution because as an entrepreneur it allows her to have time for her business.

"I could not have gone to everyday or every



morning class in the conventional institution because my business would suffer," she said.

Oti, however, noted that the Federal Government should do more by investing in infrastructures in the study centres to aid learning especially for science courses.

Speaking on the relevance of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) at this year's matriculation for new intakes, Vice Chancellor of the institution, Olufemi Peters, noted that it was quite different from a conventional university system where one must always attend lectures in a classroom or auditorium.

"It enables you to learn at your choice of place and pace, whatever your social or religious status and other engagements, such as a vocation or employment. It does require you to create the time and discipline for a copious amount of self-study," he said.

He assured the new entrants that they would have access to a number of facilities necessary for their study, including physical and e-library facilities which provide over 40,000 titles of books and journals, facilitation rooms, science laboratories, halls for in-person and e-exams,

and in some special centres, incubation facilities for entrepreneurship-minded students for their training and development at their study centres.

Similarly, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) conducts the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) annually, with over 1.7 million applicants, but only 400,000 get admitted into universities, leaving over one million young people without access to higher education.

Also, the National Universities Commission (NUC) regulates university education in Nigeria, and over 90 percent of students enrolled in public universities in 2022, highlighting the need for improved infrastructure to accommodate the demand.

Furthermore, Nigeria's higher education system operates below its carrying capacity due to inadequate infrastructure, including classrooms, hostels, laboratories, and libraries. The gross total enrollment rate in Nigerian universities is 12 percent, lower than the world average of 47.06 percent.

However, some educationists posit that expanding the number of institutions alone is not a solution, as existing public universities need to optimise their carrying capacity by being adequately staffed and equipped.

Accordingly, they said that the presence of tuition-free institutions across the country has also not done enough to alleviate the challenges. It is believed that despite tuition-free higher education, students face challenges in accessing quality education due to

inadequate infrastructure and facilities.

Also, the infrastructure gap across federal and state-owned tertiary institutions have resulted in staff shortages. The academic staff strength in Nigerian universities is approximately 100,000, resulting in a student-teacher ratio of 21:1, which has negatively impacted academic performance.

Similarly, it is believed that the staff strength in some universities could be weaker; resulting in a ratio that can be as high as 30 students per lecturer, affecting the quality of education.

Closely related to the student-teacher ratio is the poor research quality which is directly linked to lack of modern facilities and infrastructure that hinders research quality by academics, contributing to the absence of Nigerian universities among the top 800 globally.

According to the Times Higher Education World

University Rankings 2024, only two Nigerian universities feature among the best 1,000.

Similarly, the universities attribute the recent increment in fees to the meager government funding and rising operating costs, including energy prices and security challenges.

However, the recent increases in fees for registration, laboratory, and hostel accommodation have been met with protests by students, who may struggle to afford the new charges; resulting in the 'chicken and egg' situation – which comes first.

While university administrations are struggling to meet on-campus infrastructure demands on the back of the poor budgetary allocation from the government; students are also finding it extremely difficult to meet the high cost of education on the back of the dwindling economic activities.

However, while on-campus infrastructures continue to push students to accept the off-campus lifestyle, the incessant security concern across the country is making life difficult for most university students.

Currently, Nigerian universities face security threats from Islamic jihadists (Boko Haram) and armed bandits, leading to kidnappings and tensions on/off campuses. However, to ensure student and staff safety, universities must invest in effective security solutions, which are adding to their financial burdens.

In 2009, the federal government signed an agreement with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) to address infrastructure deficits, staff remuneration, and autonomy. However, the government's failure to fulfill its obligations has led to protracted industrial actions, including the eight-month-long ASUU strike in 2022.

"To address infrastructure deficits, Nigerian universities can explore alternative funding sources, such as public-private partnerships, corporate sponsorships, research collaborations, and grants," Badru Saleh, media specialist and proprietor, The Source Schools, Lagos, told BusinessDay Sunday.

According to him, the government can increase funding for public universities, to align with UNESCO's recommendation of allocating at least 26 percent of the total budget to education.

Communication, Caleb University, Lagos, told BusinessDay.

According to him, Open University provides an opportunity for learners to upgrade their academic qualifications without giving up their jobs or relationships, and allows working-class individuals to acquire knowledge, skills, and techniques relevant to their present work situation or future career prospects.

Corroborating Adewale's position, another Ibadan based media specialist told BusinessDay that NOUN's ease of admission process contributes to the main reason more Nigerians are beginning to embrace Open University.

"In August of 2022, I applied to NOUN and another private university for my masters in mass communications. NOUN offered me provisional admission within 24 hours, while it took the other university about four months to even respond to my application."

According to him, NOUN is providing opportunities for learners to upgrade their academic qualifications and acquire knowledge, skills, and techniques relevant to their present work situation or future career prospects.

Currently, NOUN is the largest university in Nigeria by student enrollment and national spread, with 103 study centers across the country, providing flexible, open, and distance learning to learners in Nigeria.

Similarly, Iconic Open University, a privately owned open, distance, and e-Learning university approved by the NUC to provide advanced educational opportunities for prospective students hoping to get a degree in an array of courses.

Accordingly, Iconic Open University's vision is to be a 21st-century institution focused solely on open and distance education, and its mission is to make learning accessible, flexible, and available for learners at all times, in any place, and at their pace.

In 2011, NOUN had about 57,759 students and all courses offered by the university are accredited by the NUC. By its nature as an ODL institution, NOUN does not provide lectures to students in normal classrooms except some certain study centres. The study centre in Lagos for instance provides lectures to all the law undergraduates and supplies course materials to all students after the payment of tuition fees.

Also, the Act of Parliament which established the university prohibits any form of union for staff or for students, which makes NOUN immunity to strikes. This has made the university unaffected by strikes such as the ASUU strikes (which lasted for eight months), which have the effect of extending the duration of students' studies.

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The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), with its flexible and accessible model of education, is becoming an increasingly popular choice for individuals seeking to upgrade their skills, enhance their knowledge, and improve their career prospects.

As the demand for quality education continues to rise, NOUN is stepping up to fill the gap, providing a beacon of hope for many Nigerians who thought higher education was out of their reach.

In keeping to the vision of providing a world-class open and distance learning (ODL) institution, the Federal Government in 2001 established the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to provide access to high-quality education, and its mission was to make learning accessible, flexible, and available for learners at all times, in any place, and at their pace.

NOUN was initially established on 22 July 1983 as a springboard for open and distance learning in Nigeria. It was suspended by the government on April 25, 1984. However, former President Olusegun Obasanjo resuscitated the establishment on April 12, 2001, with a pioneer student enrollment of 32,400 at the takeoff of the university.

Many more Nigerians are now seeking admission into the Open University, BusinessDay Sunday has discovered. The reason being that the Federal Universities are lacking the capacity to cater to the increasing number of candidates seeking admission on a yearly basis.

Many Federal Universities are lacking the necessary infrastructure for more intakes as lecture halls are filled; hostel accommodation has become very problematic to the extent that "squatting" has become the order of the day.

"To overcome the infrastructure deficit, the government should improve funding, adopt public-private partnerships, and encourage private sector participation. Universities can explore innovative funding mechanisms, update their academic briefs, and prioritise research excellence to attract grants. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can enhance access to quality higher education and improve its global competitiveness," Saleh said.

According to him, Nigerians are embracing Open University due to its efficient and cost-effective means of enhancing access to education without compromising quality, flexibility, learner-centeredness, and high-quality teaching and learning interactions, all without constraints on time and space.

"Open university is flexible in terms of operations and somewhat affordable. It gives the opportunity to work and study simultaneously," Charles Adewale, lecturer, department of Mass





# Perspective

## Viewpoint

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AFOLABI ABIODUN

## From brain drain to brain gain (Part 2): Funke Opeke's journey and the future of Nigeria's tech industry



In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a significant surge in technological advancements, driven by a new generation of tech entrepreneurs and innovators. This progress is not limited to Nigeria alone; Nigerian Tech Actors are making waves across Africa. One of the critical drivers of this success is the return of Nigerians who travelled abroad two decades ago, armed with new ideas, skills, and a determination to solve local problems. Notable figures such as Iyinoluwa Aboyeji, co-founder of Andela and Flutterwave; Tunde Kehinde, co-founder of Jumia and Lidya; and Prosper Otemuyiwa, among others, have demonstrated the immense potential and impact of this "JAPA" phenomenon. Funke Opeke, a renowned tech entrepreneur, embodies this trend. Her journey from Nigeria to the United States and back, and her subsequent achievements, serve as a testament to the immense potential and impact of the "JAPA" phenomenon on Nigeria's tech landscape.

The exodus of Nigerians to countries like the US, UK, and Canada over the past two decades has created a pool of highly skilled professionals who are now returning home to drive innovation and economic growth. This trend is expected to bring exponential benefits to Nigeria and the whole of Africa in the next decade. Just as India leveraged its diaspora to become a global tech giant, Nigeria is poised to follow a similar path, capitalizing on the expertise and entrepreneurial spirit of its returning citizens. This transformation is illustrated by the success of individuals like Opeke, whose work in telecommunications has significantly enhanced Nigeria's digital infrastructure.

### Funke Opeke's Journey from Nigeria to the World

Funke Opeke's story begins in Nigeria, where she was born and raised. She pursued her undergraduate studies at the Obafemi Awolowo University, earning a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering. Motivated by a desire to deepen her expertise, she moved to the United States to obtain a Master's degree in Electrical Engineering from Columbia University. This educational background set the stage for a remarkable career in telecommunications.

In the US, Funke gained extensive experience working for several companies, including Verizon

Communications, where she served as the Executive Director of Performance Management for the wholesale division. Her role at Verizon provided her with invaluable insights into managing large-scale telecommunications infrastructure, skills that would later prove crucial in her entrepreneurial ventures (Harvard Business School) (Arise News).

### Returning to Nigeria: Competing at the Highest Level

In 2005, Funke made a pivotal decision to return to Nigeria. She joined MTN Nigeria as the Chief Technical Officer, where she played a significant role in expanding the company's network infrastructure during a period of rapid growth. However, her journey was not without challenges. Transitioning from the structured environment of the US to Nigeria, where infrastructure and systems were less developed, required innovative thinking and a pioneering spirit (Harvard Business School).

After her tenure at MTN, Funke worked on the privatization of NITEL, Nigeria's national telecommunications company. Despite facing significant obstacles, including entrenched corruption, she was determined to make a difference. This experience further solidified her resolve to address Nigeria's critical infrastructure needs.

### Founding MainOne: Transforming Nigeria's Digital Landscape

In 2008, Funke founded MainOne, a bold initiative aimed at addressing the broadband infrastructure deficit in West Africa. MainOne's flagship project was the construction of a 7,000-kilometer undersea cable from Portugal to Nigeria, which became operational in 2010. This

project, costing \$240 million, was a game-changer for the region, significantly increasing internet bandwidth, reducing costs, and improving reliability (Harvard Business School) (Arise News).

MainOne's impact extended beyond providing internet connectivity. The company also built state-of-the-art data centers, such as the MDXi data center in Lagos. The company provided the critical digital infrastructure necessary for other tech startups in Nigeria to grow, including firms like CcHub and Andela (Arise News).

### Competing and Winning in a Male-Dominated Industry

The telecommunications industry, particularly in Nigeria, is predominantly male-dominated. Funke Opeke's success in this field is a testament to her exceptional leadership and expertise. She not only competed but excelled, breaking barriers and setting new standards. Her achievements have inspired many young women in Nigeria and across Africa to pursue careers in technology and engineering.

### Expanding Internet Access: A Regional Impact

MainOne's undersea cable and data centers have had a profound impact on internet access in Nigeria and beyond. The increased bandwidth and improved connectivity have facilitated the growth of numerous tech startups and businesses, contributing to the overall development of the digital economy in West Africa. Companies like CcHub and Andela, which rely on high-speed internet, have been able to expand their operations and scale their businesses, thanks in part to the

infrastructure provided by MainOne (Harvard Business School).

### Leveraging International Exposure: The Equinix Acquisition

Funke Opeke's international experience and exposure played a crucial role in MainOne's acquisition by Equinix, a US-based digital infrastructure company, in 2022. The \$320 million deal was a strategic move to ensure MainOne's long-term sustainability and growth. Funke's ability to navigate complex negotiations and secure such a significant investment underscores the value of her global perspective and expertise (Arise News).

By integrating MainOne into Equinix's global operations, Funke has positioned the company to leverage international resources and expertise, further enhancing its service offerings and expanding its reach. This acquisition not only validates MainOne's achievements but also highlights the potential for Nigerian companies to compete and succeed on the global stage (Arise News).

### The Future of Nigerian Tech: A Promising Outlook

The success of individuals like Funke Opeke, Iyinoluwa Aboyeji, Tunde Kehinde, and Prosper Otemuyiwa demonstrates the transformative power of international experience and the "JAPA" phenomenon. These individuals have returned to Nigeria with new ideas, skills, and a commitment to solving local problems. Their contributions have not only advanced Nigeria's tech industry but have also positioned the country as a burgeoning tech hub in Africa.

### A Tech Actor Worthy of Celebration

Funke Opeke's journey from a university student in Nigeria to a leading tech entrepreneur is a story of resilience, innovation, and impact. Her contributions to Nigeria's telecommunications industry have transformed the digital landscape, providing critical infrastructure that supports economic growth and development. Her success in a male-dominated field serves as an inspiration to countless others, and her ability to leverage international experience for local impact demonstrates the immense value of the "JAPA" phenomenon.

As Nigeria continues to expand its influence in the tech space, the experiences and contributions of individuals like Funke Opeke will be instrumental in shaping the future. Her story is a powerful example of how returning talents can drive innovation, create opportunities, and contribute to the broader development of the continent. Indeed, Funke Opeke is a tech actor worthy of celebration, and her achievements are a testament to the potential and promise of Nigeria's tech ecosystem.



# Perspective

## National Anthems: Purpose and practice

DAN S. IZEVBAYE, KUNLE  
ADENIRAN and JOHN A. AYOADE

A National Anthem is one of the instruments of modern government. The lyrics are typically approved by the government and people as correctly expressing their history and national aspirations. It normally serves as an embellishment of the national personality to create national pride and endear the nation to the citizens. It is sung on important national, sub-national, sports and school events. It lends importance, credence and solemnity to such events. Citizens sing it standing reverently and respectfully usually with their right palm on their left breast as a sign of meditative communion with the nation. A National Anthem amounts to the music of a national secular faith. The lyrics and music are therefore at the very heart of the nation. Ideally, a National Anthem is a patriotic song aimed at galvanizing national patriotism by socializing the citizenry and thus producing patriotic citizens. National Anthems are therefore not mere symbolic national cosmetics, but essential national spiritual instruments for national edification. Even the monarchy-centred British National Anthem which was adopted in September 1745 aimed at the edification of the nation using the monarchy as the rallying point.

National Anthems became very prominent in the 18th century. Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle wrote the poem of the French National Anthem in 1792. He also composed its music, which was adopted as the French National Anthem on July 14, 1795. It was a war song during the French revolution. It is no surprise, therefore, that Anne-Marie described it as “bold, catchy and revolutionary”. It is a celebration of French chivalry and the popularisation of the French revolutionary triad of ‘liberty, equality and brotherhood’. Similarly, the American National Anthem was inspired by the victory over the British at Fort McHenry during the war of 1812. The Anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner” is a song based on the poem “The Defence of Fort McHenry”. No wonder it celebrates what is often described as elements of American character, namely: independence, bravery and heroism in such phrases as ‘land of the free’ and ‘home of the brave’. It was also Scott Key, the lyricist, who supplied the tune of a popular British song for his poem, which was officially adopted as the American National Anthem in 1931.

### The Nigerian saga

The British acquired different parts of Nigeria either as colony or protectorate, by conquest or by treaty and coalesced them into Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. In 1914, the two were amalgamated into one country called Nigeria. The name Nigeria was coined by Flora Shaw, the girl-friend of Lieutenant General Frederick Lugard, a boisterous officer,



who was deployed to colonial service. After a stint in Uganda in which he introduced indirect rule, he was posted to Nigeria where he effected the amalgamation that was aimed at colonial balanced budgets rather than the integration of the two halves of Nigeria. He then assumed the title of Governor-General although there were no Governors. In 1959, a year to the date set for Nigeria's independence from colonial rule, an advert was posted for contestants to produce the National Anthem. Over five hundred Nigerians submitted entries but paradoxically the lyric submitted by a British expatriate, Lilian Jean Williams was selected as the winning entry while the music competition was won by a British ballet musician, Frances Brenda. As one would expect, Ezekiel Mphahlele recorded the criticism of Nigerians that the winners of the National Anthem were both Britons rather than Nigerians. It is contradictory, some people argued, that a very significant document for the independence of Nigeria from Britain was British-brewed. It was therefore not an autochthonous document, which is a serious charge in independence matters as it would appear to detract from the independence of those who claim preparedness and readiness for independence if they could not prepare their own national Anthem. By that date (1959), Nigeria had produced such literary giants like Chinua Achebe who had published the globally successful “Things Fall Apart” and Wole Soyinka who had published and staged many plays including, in fact, the Independence Play, “A Dance of the Forests”. It could not have been that Nigeria, which went ahead to produce a Nobel Laureate in Literature and more than two hundred entries annually for the Nigerian Prize in Literature could not have produced a winning entry for the National Anthem. As it were, they were Britons who made the statement, “Nigeria We Hail Thee”.

The Anthem was in use from Independence in 1960 till 1978 when the military administration of General Obasanjo replaced it with “Arise O Compatriots” which was written by four Nigerians – John A. Ilechukwu, Eme Etim Akpan, Babatunde A. Ogunnaike, O Sola

Omoigui, and P. O. Aderibigbe. The music was written by a Nigerian, B. E. Odiase. The second Anthem lasted forty-six years.

### Changing the change

President Ebele Jonathan convened the 2014 National Conference which approved the recommendation of its Committee on Political Restructuring and Forms of Government that Nigeria should revert to the old National Anthem or what some people term the ‘Original National Anthem’. The Conference based its submission on two main grounds. First, it was of the opinion that the old Anthem is a better symbol of unity, peace and prosperity without substantiating how it does. Second, the Conference argued that the change would assist Nigeria to achieve her goal of building a fully integrated nation. The two grounds sounded good to the ear but are hardly plausible. At best, they are general political platitudes. They also, more or less, form the basis of the adoption of what the Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio, termed the “up-dated National Anthem.” The protagonists argued that “Nigeria We Hail Thee” connects “more to our core with a deeper meaning.” This is still in the realm of generalisations. Candidate Tinubu had promised to revert to the old Anthem during his presidential campaign, claiming that it “describes us much better” because “it is about service, commitment and nation-building.”

There is no prescribed amendatory process for a National Anthem because it is not specifically written into the Constitution. The change is therefore technically not an amendment to the Constitution. It could therefore be handled as a bill which is what was done in this case. Democracy demands a participatory process which normally involves a public hearing. At the public hearing, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice of the Federation, Mr. Lateef Fagbemi (SAN) argued that public hearing is necessary but not sufficient for the proposed amendment. For him, “it should be subjected to a wider consultation” to reflect the general wish of Nigerians. The Senate Majority Leader, Senator Michael Opeyemi Bamidele, is quoted to have

said, on the same subject, that “if considered necessary, further consultation would be had on the matter”. It turned out that no further consultation was had on the matter. The ‘original Anthem’ was therefore brought back without subjecting it to any editing. This is the point of departure for the next section.

### Editing the change

The term “up-dated National Anthem” by Senator Akpabio is not borne out by even the minutest editing of the Anthem. It was reproduced completely with the most offensive derogatory line of the lyric which states “Though tribe and tongue may differ; in brotherhood, we stand.” The derogation is proved by the fact that the term ‘tribe’ is reserved for Africans, Indians and Native Americans and not for peoples in similar circumstances in Europe and the United States. Chinua Achebe in his “Things Fall Apart” had referred to the penchant of colonial officers and European anthropologists for denigrating colonial peoples as tribesmen. We rely on the definitions of two eminent Dictionaries of the English Language to demonstrate discriminatory attribution of the term to Africans and in this particular instance to Nigerians. The Oxford English Dictionary defines tribe as “an aggregate of people in a primitive and barbarous condition” just as the Century Dictionary defines it as “a division of a barbarous race of people.” To retain this in the National Anthem will be the worst and unfortunate intentional self-denigration in the twenty-first century. Even worse than that is the fact that the colonial metropolis deliberately applied the word ‘tribe’ as a justificatory phraseology for colonialism and its attendant atrocities. It inflicts a double jeopardy on colonial peoples and neutralises the right of independence. To retain it in the National Anthem is to accept that self-determination is a concession for which Nigerians should show gratitude. Self-determination is a right.

The conjunction ‘Though’ that begins the third line of the Anthem suggests that the differences caused by ‘tribe and tongue’ are major obstacles to unity but moderated by brotherhood as a solvent. The role of brotherhood as solvent for the differences of tribe and tongue is counter-intuitive because differences would not have been noticeable and/or worrying if brotherhood is an efficacious solvent in the first place. Even if brotherhood were efficacious, the word brotherhood has become suspect as sexist in matters of this nature. It is better avoided in critical matters like the National Anthem.

In conclusion, we want to put on record the speed with which the ‘original’ Anthem was brought back to life. It shows that the National Assembly can speedily attend to issues. In this same spirit, we implore the National Assembly to set in motion the process of expunging the offensive words so as to relieve all Nigerians of the memories of colonialism in our National Anthem. We also want to use this occasion and medium to remind Nigerians that colonialism is alive and well. It comes now in the form of loans, grants, and the establishment of military posts. In the words of the arch colonialist, Cecil Rhodes, “colonialism is philanthropy with ten percent.” It is not only the Greeks that give Greek gifts.

• Izevbaye, Emeritus Professor of English; Adeniran, Professor of Linguistics and Ayoade, Emeritus Professor of Political Science, write from University of Ibadan, Nigeria



# Perspective



KUNLE SOMORIN

Ogun State governor, Dapo Abiodun, last week demonstrably showed his commitment to prioritizing action over words in governance. By celebrating his 64th birthday and the first year of his second term in office by sharing the dividends of democracy, he has shown that he is focused on tangible results and impactful decisions over and above his people's penchant for owambe. This approach is a hallmark of effective leadership, emphasizing the importance of concrete actions over mere rhetoric and empty promises.

In governance, action should speak louder than words. While dialogue and communication are crucial elements of leadership, service above words, actions, and policies implemented by government officials are truly the essence of democracy. Adopting these principles dictates the need for leaders to move beyond mere lip service and actively work towards achieving positive outcomes for their constituents. This requires a proactive and results-driven approach to addressing pressing issues, enacting necessary reforms, and fostering sustainable development.

Governor Abiodun's quiet diplomacy with Abuja has also yielded results, as evident in the federal government's commitment to exploring oil production in Ogun State. The Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Heineken Lokpobiri, and other stakeholders in the oil industry have acknowledged the state's potential for discoveries. This development is a testament to the governor's proactive approach to addressing the state's economic needs.

Understanding the need to speak less means more with hindsight within the constellation of challenges for a politically sophisticated nature of the state. There have been more hues and cries over infrastructural development and the roads in a state of disrepair would make the lilly-livered to throw in the towel after an intriguingly explosive first term. But DA's posture on the development of road and rural infrastructure is achieving inclusive and sustainable growth, empowering communities, fostering economic development, and paving the way for a more equitable society. Nigerians would have less reason to groan and insult the political class that is fast losing its honour and relevance. As the world moves towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the focus on rural infrastructure will remain a key priority, with the potential to transform the lives of millions living in the rural communities.

The principle of action above words serves as a reminder of the responsibilities and accountabilities of those in positions of authority. While political speeches and promises can generate enthusiasm and hope, it is the concrete steps taken by leaders to uphold the rule of law, promote social justice, and foster economic growth that truly reflects their dedication to the well-being of society. By translating words

## Abiodun: When actions are above words



into action, government. Furthermore, action above words in governance encourages transparency, accountability, and ethical behaviour from public officials. By prioritizing tangible results and transformative policies, leaders can ensure that their actions are aligned with the needs and aspirations of the people they represent. Moreover, a commitment to action over rhetoric also necessitates the efficient utilisation of resources, the prudent management of public funds, and the avoidance of empty gestures that serve as mere political posturing.

The governor's decision to commission roads across four local government areas and two senatorial districts, without fanfare, is a demonstration of his commitment to delivering the dividends of democracy. The commissioning of newly constructed roads, particularly in rural communities, sets him apart from his peers. His focus on rural road infrastructure is a deliberate attempt to ensure inclusiveness and address long-standing challenges in these areas.

The commissioning of the Sagamu-Iperu-Ode-Sapade Road has opened up the Remoland to Lagos, Ibadan, and the rest of the country, reducing travel time and improving connectivity. The approval of new road projects in six councils, including Ijebu East, Ogun Waterside, Yewa South, Ikenne, Ijebu North, and Odogbolu, is a testament to the governor's resolve to ensure all-inclusive transformation and infrastructure development across the state.

Governor Abiodun's commitment to infrastructure development is evident in his efforts to address the infrastructural deficit in Ogun State. His focus on road infrastructure is a key economic enabler that attracts investors to the state. The commissioning of the Ilaro-Iwoye-Owode Road, which had been in a deplorable condition since 1991, is a significant development for the Yewa people. The reconstruction of the 63km Ado-Odo/Abeokuta expressway - I guess the governor is talking about death-trap called Sango-Ota (the industrial nerve centre of the country) to Abeokuta the state capital - which is the second busiest road in the country, will also have a positive impact on the economy of Ogun West, Ogun Central, and the entire nation. Ota is the industrial nerve centre of the country.

The governor's focus on rural road in-

frastructure is a deliberate attempt to ensure inclusiveness and address long-standing challenges in these areas. As he commissioned the Ilaro-Iwoye-Owode Road, he stated, "This road was chosen as part of the celebration to mark the five years of our administration... Our focus on infrastructure is due to it being a key economic enabler that attracts investors to the State."

To this, an excited Olu of Ilaro and paramount ruler of Yewa, Oba Kehinde Olugbenle sang a new song. The first-class monarch who last year lamented that the people of the area had not felt the impact of the government in the last 10 years, had said: "I was not always happy with the last government whenever I was invited to other places to come and inaugurate projects. While here, it is only turning of the sod for eight years. I will go and dance with them in other places, while nobody has come here to dance with me to inaugurate a project." But, today, Oba Olugbenle, lauded the Dapo Abiodun administration for listening to the yearnings of the Yewa people as the people rejoiced at the inauguration of the road project which attracted the crème-de-la-crème of the political and business classes, including, former Governor Olusegun Osoba and the chairman Senate Committee on Appropriation, Senator Adeola Olamilekan.

By prioritizing action over empty rhetoric, Governor Abiodun has demonstrated his commitment to delivering the dividends of democracy to the people of Ogun State. As he stated, "We have just awarded the Ado-Odo/Abeokuta Road... It will be the most expensive road this administration has reconstructed." This approach is a testament to his resolve to ensure all-inclusive transformation and infrastructure development across the state.

The governor's approach to governance is a reminder that action speaks louder than words. By prioritizing tangible results and transformative policies, leaders can ensure that their actions are aligned with the needs and aspirations of the people they represent. The principle of action above words serves as a reminder of the responsibilities and accountabilities of those in positions of authority.

Gov Abiodun has prioritized agriculture, recognizing its potential for economic growth and job creation. He launched the Ogun State Agricultural Development Strategy (OGADS)

aimed at modernizing farming practices, improving productivity, and enhancing farmers' livelihoods. The strategy includes initiatives like mechanized farming, irrigation systems, and access to credit facilities. These efforts have attracted investors, created jobs, and increased food production, making Ogun State a model for agricultural development in Nigeria. Indeed the anchor borrowers' scheme has produced more than 40,000 agripreneurs. The youths are also bubbling and when the state holds the National Sports festival later this year, more talents would be unveiled.

The governor has addressed the housing deficit in Ogun State by launching the "Building Our Future Together" initiative, with over 4,000 houses delivered across disparate social classes. This programme aims to provide affordable housing units for residents, particularly low-income earners. The initiative includes partnerships with private developers, provision of infrastructure, and creation of a mortgage finance system. As a result, many families have accessed decent housing, improving their quality of life and stimulating economic growth. The avant-garde agro cargo airport is also a beneficiary of the middle-income earners with yellow roofs, dubbed Prince Court estates.

Gov Abiodun has demonstrated a commitment to education, recognizing its role in human capital development. He has implemented various reforms, including the establishment of the Ogun State Education Development Fund to improve infrastructure, teacher training and recruitment, and student welfare. More than 25 years after students in tertiary institutions now earn busaries and indigent pupils also got some palliatives. The governor was the first to introduce digital learning platforms, expanded access to vocational education, and promoted literacy programmes. These initiatives have enhanced the quality of education in Ogun State, preparing students for a competitive future.

The governor has transformed the civil bureaucracy in Ogun State by introducing reforms aimed at promoting efficiency, transparency, and accountability. He has digitized government processes, reducing bureaucracy and enhancing public service delivery. The governor has also implemented a performance management system, recognizing and rewarding outstanding public servants. These reforms have improved the overall effectiveness of the civil service, making it more responsive to the needs of citizens. Indeed, on Friday, five deserving bureaucrats were made permanent secretaries without "knowing the governor or people who know people that know the governor" which was the practice in the days of yore.

Warts and all, Governor Abiodun's commitment to action above words is a fundamental principle that underscores the critical importance of tangible results, proactive decision-making, and meaningful change in the realm of leadership and public administration. By prioritizing action over empty rhetoric, governments can chart a course towards a more just, equitable, and prosperous society, where the well-being and interests of the people take precedence over mere political grandstanding.

• Somorin, a doctoral fellow at Crescent University, writes from Abeokuta



# Food&Beverage

## Food security: Lessons from the best countries



Ayo Oyoze Bajé

In Nigeria, in Africa and some drought-ridden, freaky weather-scoured and war-torn parts of the world there is hunger in the land. A serious one at that. Simply put, they are suffering from food insecurity.

In fact, according to the World Food Program (WFP) about 26.5 million Nigerians are currently food insecure. That the figure has risen by 213% up from 18.6 million as at the end of 2023 gives cause for serious concern. But what really is food insecurity challenge, the root causes, and what should we as policy makers, communities and individuals be doing to stem the raging tide of

acute hunger in the land? Those are the critical questions, hungry for thirst-quenching answers.

Based on the 1996 World Food Summit food security is defined as a situation or condition "when all people at all times has physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preference for an active and healthy life". That explains why experts on agricultural practices insist that no one has food security until everyone has it.

Over the decades the success of leadership has been linked to the capacity to feed the people they claim to lead. Food insecurity challenge has therefore, been significant when there was food crisis during the Roman Empire, the bread shortage that sparked the Arab Spring and of course, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It has always led to social unrest triggered by the people's anger. But one hopes that it does not rare its ugly head under the "Renewed Hope" agenda of the current President Ahmed Tinubu-led administration. So, what really is the way forward?

The answer lies in the fact that lessons have to be learnt from the global perspective. For instance, according to the 2020 Global Food Index (GFSI) the world's food insecurity has started nose diving. It

is deteriorating because of factors such as reduction in affordability, availability, quality, safety and natural resources/resilience. These are caused by rising demand due to population explosion, diversifying diets, scarcity of land and water, as well as climate volatility.

When the indices on food affordability, availability, quality, safety and natural resources were measured across the globe, Finland came first on food security with 85.3%, followed by Ireland with 83.8% < the Netherlands scoring 79.9%. Austria and the Czech Republic had 79.4% and 78.6%

amongst the top five countries. Though the ASEAN countries did not rank in the top positions it was discovered in 2020 that the demand for food there was going to rise by 40 % over the decades up till 2050. By the way, ASEAN stands for Association for Southeast Asian Nations.

One lesson to learn from the member countries is that the regional integration is responsible for increase in food export by 15% and the capacity to create 4.5 million new jobs by 2025, as projected. So impactful their efforts have been that they have been able to reduce the chronic hunger and malnutrition, with the noble aim to become the food basket of the world. But Nigeria has the potential to even do much better.

So, our leaders can borrow a fresh leaf from the ASEAN countries by frontally tackling the monster of insecurity, so that our fertile fields in such states as Plateau, Ondo and the Benue, the acclaimed "Food Basket of the nation" can produce food again.

Furthermore, we should learn from the past interventions by the federal government such as Operation Feed the Nation, (OFN), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the Agricultural Revolution as led by Dr. Akinwunmi Adesina while he was

the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. It is worthy of note that he was able to get the local farmers actively engaged in forming groups to accelerate their knowledge of modern farming. That was in addition to doing away with the fraudulent fertilizer middle men, and of course, highlighting the agric potentials available to the different geo-political zones.

Such focus on the local farmers who work on less than two hectares of land, produce between 28% to 31% of the crops and contribute to 30%-34% of food supply will go a long way to changing the narrative with regards to food security in Nigeria. But of increasing importance is that of embracing innovations in agricultural practices by deploying modern technology.

With that and the involvement of the private sector with financial inclusiveness Nigeria can rise again to rub shoulders with Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands and the ASEAN countries in the next three decades. All it takes is having the right policy makers and those who implement them in the right places, as round pegs in the right holes.

Ayo Oyoze Bajé is Nigeria's first food technologist to practice as a journalist. ayobaje@yahoo.co.uk; 07068638066

**We can only achieve global food security by giving financial, climate and technological security to those who grow food.**

**- Jai Shroff (Chairman and Group CEO, UPL)**

## Business

### LG Electronics excites Lagos community, Abule-Osun, with solar-powered borehole

...Targets more local communities

BRIGHT IMOH

LG Electronics, a consumer electronics, technology and innovation company, says it plans to provide more local communities in Nigeria with access to clean drinking water in 2024 with the commissioning of a solar-powered borehole at Abule Osun community in Lagos, Nigeria.

The company said that the commissioning of the project marked the second similar project in Nigeria, demonstrating the company's commitment to addressing the pressing issue of access to clean drinking water in local areas.

Hyong Sub Ji, managing director of LG Electronics, while speaking at the commissioning of the project said that access to clean water was a fundamental human right, adding that the company is committed to ensuring that communities like Abule Osun have access to this basic necessity.

"We have already given a community in Abuja a solar-powered borehole, and here today we are doing likewise. I am assuring Nigerians that before the end of this year, we will give as many as possible to several communities both in Lagos and other states of the federation," he said.

The solar water pumping system reaches a depth of 120m and has a pumping capacity of around 40m<sup>3</sup> per day, equipped with advanced

treatment technology to guarantee safe drinking water. Moreover, a 3000-litre tank ensures a continuous 24-hour water supply for the residents of Abule Osun, significantly improving their daily lives.

Ji further said that the solar-powered borehole was a vital initiative aimed at delivering clean and safe drinking water to the community, in line with LG Electronics' unwavering dedication to environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

He further said that by harnessing

solar energy, this borehole not only ensures access to quality water but also plays a crucial role in mitigating the spread of waterborne diseases, thereby fostering better health and well-being within the community.

"LG Electronics' commitment to this project signifies a significant step towards creating a healthier and more sustainable future for all those involved," he said.

Mohammed Fouani (Jnr), Factory Manager of Fouani Nigeria Limited,

said the donation of the solar-powered borehole is a key component of LG Electronics' ongoing endeavours to support sustainable development and enhance the well-being of individuals in Nigeria. According to Mohammed, the company's admirable commitment to giving back to the communities it serves is evident in this gesture, showcasing LG Electronics' long-standing dedication to corporate social responsibility.

"This donation underscores the company's focus on making a positive

impact on both the environment and society, by providing clean, dependable water access through solar-powered technology and thereby enhancing the quality of life for Nigerians.

"The donation made by the company showcases its enduring commitment to enhancing the communities it serves. This gesture highlights its steadfast dedication to promoting positive change for the environment and society. Through this act of giving back, the company reaffirms its significant impact and influence on the world," he said.

On his part, Kasali Abiodun, chairman of the Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN) Abule Osun lauded the company for its commitment to promoting health and vitality.

Abiodun said that the provision of clean water was pivotal to enhancing the everyday existence of the community and securing the well-being of lives of people within the community, adding that the project will aid access to clean water in promoting healthier lives and nurturing stronger communities.

According to him, the borehole project will not only bring happiness but also enhance health and stimulate economic development for future generations within the community.

The community leaders, landlords, and association members were delighted by this act, knowing it would greatly enhance residents' access to clean water.



L-R: Hari Elluru, head, corporate marketing of LG Electronics West Africa Operations; Hyong Sub Ji, managing director, LG Electronics West Africa Operations; Kasali Abiodun, chairman of the Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria RTEAN Abule Osun; Mohammed Fouani (Jnr.), head, Fouani Nigeria Limited Factory Abule Osun, and other members of the Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN) Abule Osun, at the commissioning of the LG Life's Good CSR Initiative solar-powered borehole for the Abule Osun Community in Lagos.



# Tribute

## Kumuyi at 83: Beyond the preacher's cassock

BANJI OJEWALE

**T**here comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor polite, not popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him he is right.—Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) American churchman and civil liberties defender.

In his book, 'An Outline of the History of the World,' Herbert Abraham Davies relates the epic story of how a cleric put himself in the path of potential backlash to deliver ancient Rome from annihilation at the hands of an all-conquering army of barbarians. The predators were already in the regions of the Roman Empire; all the soldiers needed was an order from their leader, Attila the Hun, to move in and overrun Rome. From this she was saved (so it was said), "by the earnest entreaties of Leo, Bishop of Rome, who entered Attila's camp and warned him not to risk the vengeance of heaven by plundering the city, and the Hun leader was so impressed with the bishop's sincerity and intensity of purpose that he withdrew his troops."

This event has gone into history as one of the rare demonstrations of the intervention of religious leaders during times of crisis in the state. Although God establishes His Church strategically to prepare His people for Heaven, He expects them to first live here on earth righteously, ethically and honorably so their intercessory prayers would receive attention before His Throne. The Church and its leaders then are to produce faithful representatives who would plead for Heaven to step in when the people face dreadful consequences for their wrongdoings. The marauder was moved by the bishop's translucent candor, not his sacerdotal gear, to concede to him.

Heaven won't attend to people simply on account of their hood or cassock. God looks for men and women of incontestable integrity, humility and credibility who wouldn't deceive the world by an exhibitionist and pietistic profession of salvation. Of such was the man whose "sincerity and intensity of purpose" God honoured to rescue Rome.

Of such also, by the reckoning of many here in Africa and beyond, is Pastor William Folorunso Kumuyi, General Superintendent of Deeper Christian Life Ministry, DCLM, and convener of the international Gospel brand, Global Crusade with Kumuyi, GCK. He has stood on the unpopular ground that one's Chris-



Kumuyi

tianity (salvation) would remain inchoate, incomplete and insular, until its only identity feature blazes holiness through and through. The pastor takes God's demands on holiness at face value. You can't try to run circles around God on this condition. You're not to resort to a 'white lie' to save your life or to escape an embarrassing twist of events. You must not also aim at replaying Uzzah's fatal heroics in the Bible by breaking God's laws in order to 'help' His work.

For Kumuyi, the strength of a man and his society lies in their God-inspired integrity. Mankind needs it more than his physical food. Take it away, and all you have remaining is a hollow vessel, vain, vulnerable and valueless. He once spoke of holiness in terms of being gifted a car without its engine. He said: "If you say you love me and you give me a car, but you take away its engine, the gift is useless. So is Christianity without holiness."

That is the state of all men and women alienated from the laws of their Creator.

These are the principles Kumuyi

has taught and practiced since he got the new birth of salvation on April 5, 1964, six decades ago this year. Like Samuel, the kingmaker centuries ago in Israel, Kumuyi isn't troubled that he might be ambushed for some dark deeds to knock him down from his high horse. Samuel challenged his com-

**But as Pastor Kumuyi turns 83 on June 6 2024, a look at his life brings up a man whose plea is that we are free to strip him of his ecclesiastical trappings and assess him on the basis of what we find**

patriots to bring forth evidence of any abuse of office or inappropriate act of his, if they had one.

Last week, a video recorded years ago surfaced in the social media suggesting that Pastor Kumuyi and his wife had 'fled' to the UK, after he had reportedly counseled Nigerians to pray for Nigeria and the government and to patiently bear with the authorities' attempts to fix the polity. Those who viraled the spent clip sought to deflate the large image of the revered Deeper Life Bible Church leader and move Nigerians to conclude that Kumuyi, after all, is a man who could easily abandon his holiness pursuit and surrender to the urge of the flesh. They asked, "what kind of preacher is this Church leader who would forsake his challenged flock and seek refuge in the cloying luxury of Europe?" But, Kumuyi's stay in London at the time of the interview in the footage was short-lived. He has been resident in Nigeria since. There's been no relocation. Indeed, when the story was hitting the phones the man of God was in neighbouring Cameroon for the May edition of his GCK. It held in

the city of Douala for six days.

But as Pastor Kumuyi turns 83 on June 6 2024, a look at his life brings up a man whose plea is that we are free to strip him of his ecclesiastical trappings and assess him on the basis of what we find. In other words, he's saying, 'don't spare me because am a pastor or denominational founder; don't also go cultural by being awed by my age.' If we accept the challenge, what do we get? We would be facing a man feeding on a credo that his relationship with Jesus Christ has taught him that a leader in society must be so disciplined and committed to selfless service that he must seek the comfort and welfare of the led above his own person or family. He can't go to sleep until his subjects have first gone to bed.

He teaches us to disregard those who mask their villainy with their position in religion and politics. They believe they are above the law once they're cloaked in authority. They remind us of a job-seeker who had his pastors as his guarantors. His prospective employers told him that they wanted assessment from those who knew him outside the Church. They wanted to know his character without religious props.

There are lessons from Kumuyi. Our land will come out of the woods when leadership takes the way of integrity not derived from shallow religion (cant cassock, hollow hood) but from God, Who reciprocates with answers to their prayers for healing for the nation. In this wise, Kumuyi's ministry has recorded spectacular marvels. Inveterate sinners have been saved; the dead have been brought back to life; a child born without genitals had these vital members created by Heaven following the prayers of Kumuyi at the just-concluded Douala GCK. There's more: a watchful followership gets the message of their mentor and bond with their leaders to deliver a godly and prosperous society.

That's what's been happening in the Church Kumuyi pastors. Years ago when he visited the fledgling Deeper Life Bible Church in Ghana, Kumuyi sold his car to support the assembly. He recalls: "...because of the sacrifices I made in those early days, our pastors and other workers also followed suit and made sacrifices...sometimes when a leader does something, and even without compelling others... they just do it."

Happy Birthday, beloved Pastor Kumuyi!

Ojewale is an author and journalist at Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.



## Travel

# African youth push boundaries in tourism with innovations at AYTIS

OBINNA EMELIKE

There is no better way to describe the 'Africa Rising' phenomenon in Tourism than the success stories generously told by young innovators at the Africa Youth in Tourism Innovation Summit platform every year.

For six now and running the AYTIS has consistently spurred healthy rivalry among African youth in tourism and the continent is happier for it with the numbers telling the story better.

Since inception in Durban, South Africa in 2019, the AYTIS has brought together over 2500

African youth and over 500 tourism and affiliated industry professionals and policymakers from over 40 countries, physically or virtually.

Credit goes to Africa Tourism Partners (ATP), the convener and organiser of the summit, who through strategic partners such as UN Tourism, BTO, MILLVEST and AfCFTA, has delivered value on the continent's tourism value chain through the innovations of Africa's youth tourism entrepreneurs in the last six years.

This year is not different as ambitious African youth took their innovations in tourism a notch higher, offering the industry tech-driven operations that have eased challenges they hitherto faced.

Also, this year, Namibia hosted the summit at Windhoek, its enthralling capital city, ending a three-year hosting right.

After a rigorous screening and pitching process, Top 5 finalists emerged at the Windhoek summit.

Of course, they are Africa's best in terms of innovative

tourism entrepreneurship.

They include, in no particular order, Itaagi Devin, CEO, Canine Safaris Ltd Uganda; Joseph Owiredu, CEO, Fihankra ComTech Ltd, Ghana; Ajena Jafar, founder/CEO, Tour Plug, Uganda; Kedumetse Liphi, founder/chief engineer, Ked-Liphi (Pty) Ltd, Botswana and Gerald Muema, co-founder and technical advisor, ReNew-Gen Tech Ltd, Kenya.

The five brought their A-game from the first day of the 2024 edition to the screening process and to the ultimate pitching sessions at the AYTIS on May 29, 2024 in Windhoek, and were able to convince the judges with their innovations in tourism.

As well, the summit has helped Namibia, the host country, in discovering young tourism talents across the three years it hosted African youth entrepreneurs.

This year, Namibia's Rosalia Haufiku Laudika, a student of NUST, Namibia; Sarah Ang-huwo, founder, Africikoatizay, Namibia and Sarome Hamata, also a student of NUST, Namibia, emerged Top Finalists in the AYTIS 2024.

As ATP, the organisers celebrate yet another successful summit, Africa awaits a winner from the Top Five at the annual Africa Tourism Leadership Forum (ATLF) and Award later in the year.

Describing Africa as one of the most dynamic and diverse regions in the world and being the youngest continent globally, with 60% of its population under the age of 25, Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary General, UN Tourism, in his forward message at the summit, noted that Africa holds immense potential for tourism development and economic growth.

"Through our various initiatives and partnerships, UN



Tourism is dedicated to promoting sustainable tourism practices, fostering economic empowerment, and preserving Africa's rich cultural and natural heritage," the UN Tourism Secretary General said.

Expressing his excitement to be honoured at the 6th summit and the professional team bring to bear in the organising the event, Pololikashvili declared that, "This summit serves as a testament to the transformative power of youth engagement and innovation, both of which are integral to UN Tourism's vision for the future of tourism in Africa."

Also speaking at the summit on the UN Tourism platform, Elcia Grandcourt, Director, Africa Department UN Tourism, noted that the summit exemplifies the commitment and vision of the organisers in fostering the growth and development of Africa's tourism sector.

"The AYTIS serves as a vital platform for spotlighting key priorities that are crucial for the advancement of the African region. From education and youth empowerment to digital transformation and attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), these are fundamental

areas that resonate deeply with the vision of UN Tourism and the UN Tourism Agenda for Africa – Tourism for Inclusive Growth," Grandcourt said.

According to her, investing in and capacitating future generations is paramount for paving the way forward in the evolution of tourism.

"As the youngest continent in the world, Africa's youth will play a pivotal role in transforming the tourism sector and serving as ambassadors for Brand Africa. UN Tourism is fully committed to supporting these efforts," she concluded.

But the most excited in the successful 3rd edition of AYTIS is Namibia, the host country. Pohamba Penomwenyo Shifeta, MP, Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Namibia, couldn't hide the excitement, while describing the African Youth Summit as a platform for young people to explore and develop actionable solutions that will shape the future of Africa's tourism sector.

"In the context of travel tech and tourism innovation, as the Ministry we stand on the brink of an era filled with boundless opportunities by providing the necessary support, insights and actionable solutions that can drive forward the Namibia

tourism sector.

"The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism under my leadership has successfully and proudly hosted the last three editions of this auspicious event which aims to empower the African youth in tourism with the necessary skills as we move toward the 5th industrial revolution," the minister said at the summit, while urging Namibian and African youth to take space in the tourism sector especially technological innovation and embrace the continental trade initiative.

Toeing the same line at the summit, Deputy Minister of Sport, Youth and National Service, Emma Kantema-Gaomas, reiterated the government's commitment to empowering young people in the tourism and hospitality industry.

"This gathering is testament to the dedication of the government of Namibia through the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism and various partners that investment in youth is both a moral imperative and an economic necessity," Kantema-Gaomas said.

She noted further that tourism is a crucial sector for Africa, offering significant oppor-

tunities for economic growth, cultural exchange and sustainable development; hence the summit aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on decent work and economic growth, as well as goals focused on innovation and infrastructure development.

The Deputy Minister also acknowledged the challenges faced by youth in tourism, such as access to industry education, training and resources.

The focus on youth leadership, according to her, reflects a growing recognition of the immense potential young Africans hold and by equipping them with the tools and resources they need to succeed, she believes that the summit can play a crucial role in shaping a more prosperous and sustainable future for African tourism.

"Let's all remember that our collective efforts today will shape the future we desire. Let's commit to taking bold steps and drive sustainable change. Our journey does not end here. It is only the beginning," the deputy minister urged at the 6th AYTIS in Windhoek, Kantema-Gaomas urged.

From a partner's perspective, Christelle Grohmann, Director, BDO Advisory Services, South Africa, commended the role that African youth play across the tourism value chain.

She described youth as tourists of today and tomorrow, current and future employees, hence the need to foster good work environments that attracts and retains youth in the industry, creating opportunities for young entrepreneurs to enter and succeed and become established operators and stakeholders that will operate responsibly to leave a sound industry to be proud of in the future.

## AviaDev Africa 2024: Namibia Tourism Board to host delegates

AviaDev Africa, the continent's platform dedicated to growing connectivity to, from and within the African continent, is for its maiden event in Windhoek, Namibia.

The top tier aviation event is expected to gather airlines, tourism authorities, governments and industry suppliers under one roof to explore ways to help create a seamless travels in Africa.

The Namibian Tourism Board, the country's national marketing agency will host the over 200 aviation industry players to an evening of exciting Namibian hospitality

nued in style.

Delegates to Namibia will have the opportunity to experience some of the incredible and immaculate

beauties of the land of the brave.

Holding on the evening of June 18, 2024, the NTB is looking to give the marquee

aviation event the headstart it deserves to set the stage for what could become the new benchmark for future host.

Bonnie Mbidzo, acting

CEO of Namibia Tourism Board, says, "Namibia is ready to showcase our diverse and amazing tourism offerings to the key decision makers

in the aviation and tourism industries. It is an honour for us to be hosting this major event and the sector will do its best to ensure the warm Namibian hospitality is felt."

He added that the event is not ordinary as it recognizes the cardinal role of the aviation sector in the growth and development of the tourism sector.

Mbidzo also underscored the importance of partnership with key stakeholders as NAC being the host of this year's event in Windhoek.

"Experience the tastes, flavours, sights, and sounds of Namibia at our informal welcome reception," he urges.





## Arts

# PieceUnique launches in global art scene with Contact Zone, inaugural exhibition

Stories by OBINNA EMELIKE

**P**ieceUnique, a new agency dedicated to African art, has launched into the global visual art scene with an inaugural exhibition at Cromwell Place, London.

Titled 'Contact Zone', the exhibition opened on June 3, 2024 with a private view, which equally marked the inauguration of PieceUnique, a new artist agency dedicated to supporting and empowering African artists.

The exhibition features new works by Oluwale Omofemi, Elfreda Fakoya, and Blebo, each offering a unique perspective and a powerful message that delves into the concept of intersubjectivity: the exploration of the intersections of an artist's experience, sentiments, and perspectives of the world they live and create in. Through their own unique interior language Omofemi, Fakoya, and Blebo all embody a recognition of authorship, knowing that their work is both a preservation of the individual self and a conservation of collective identity.

Omofemi presents three new paintings, featuring Beauty, a painting, which is part of a series that poignantly explores the inherent grace and resilience embodied by African women. Omofemi elaborates: "I delved into the duality of beauty and pain, intertwining the profound struggles and triumphs experienced by African women. By portraying the natural beauty



of African women, the artwork serves as a powerful ode to strength, dignity, and the enduring allure of the human spirit."

Blebo is a Ghanaian artist who resides and works in Ada-Accra. He is fascinated by his environment, as he draws inspiration wherever he finds himself, from cities, urban centres, villages, markets, lorry stations. He investigates nature, the memory of the material, natural architecture, and humankind's relationship with the environment. Primarily working with drawing, painting, sculpture, and installation as a point of entry into his exploration of geological formation and architecture, he raises questions about how artwork is viewed. For this exhibition, he presents works that delve into the concept of biomimicry, using it as

a lens to explore the textures of the skin and their connection to the passage of time and memory. Through a unique process inspired by childhood play, Blebo taxidermizes the skin, employing techniques such as printing and frottaging on paper that has been placed on ruined architecture. The method serves to spotlight, preserve, and document the collective memory or "skin" of his community. Elfreda Fakoya, a London-based multidisciplinary artist, anchors her work in figurative textile art, drawing from extensive research delving into diasporic cultures, identities, and geography. Her evolving artistic approach combines textiles, repurposed clothing, and acrylics creating a unique "topographic aesthetic".

Through intricate lines, shapes and patterns mirror-

ing physical map features, she reflects on the emotional and physical journeys across landscapes; encapsulating narratives surrounding family, labour, self-exploration, and travel.

For this exhibition Fakoya presents three new textile works from the series Seeds of Becoming, featuring natural colours found in botanical gardens with organic lines of stitching echoing the topographic effect that runs through all of the artist's works, signalling the idea of a diasporic self in constant motion yet never displaced. Each work in the series embodies a different chapter in the process of quiet growth and development, presenting a narrative of self-discovery and transformation.

PieceUnique is founded by Oluwale Omofemi, renowned

Nigerian artist and Bayo Akande with the aims of uncovering and spotlighting talent from Africa and bringing it to new audiences worldwide, fostering connections and cultural exchanges in and out of the continent. It also offers an all-encompassing consultancy that provides the tools needed for artists to reach their full potential, while preserving their artistic integrity.

Oluwale Omofemi was born and raised in Ibadan, Nigeria and has gained international recognition for his paintings that showcase African identity, fashion and culture. In the UK, he is additionally known for his painting of Queen Elizabeth II, which was the last painting of her to be commissioned before her death.

As a visionary artist, Omofemi is committed to using his art as a tool for social change and empowerment. He was inspired to establish PieceUnique with co-founder Bayo Akande, with the mission to uplift and amplify the voices of African artists.

The new agency will offer tailored mentorships and training programmes for artists and host curated exhibitions, both locally and internationally. Omofemi and Akande aim to disrupt the traditional gallery model, enabling artists to take advantage of a wide range of opportunities and working with them to build a strong brand with artistic activations and collaborations that cut across art, fashion and lifestyle.

PieceUnique will release limited edition artist designed collections through its website, with the first drop due to take place in summer 2024. More details will be announced soon.

In addition to the exhibition, Omofemi is currently hosting a residency at his studio in Ibadan, South West, Nigeria, for young artists.

Speaking about the new art agency, Omofemi, artist and co-founder, PieceUnique, said, "I am proud to launch PieceUnique, a new agency dedicated to supporting African artists. With PieceUnique, we aim to empower African creators, showcasing the richness and diversity of African art to inspire global change. We are thrilled to present our first exhibition in London, bridging cultures and bringing African art to global audiences."

Also speaking on the latest art agency, Bayo Akande, co-founder, PieceUnique, said, "It is with incredible excitement we announce the launch of PieceUnique and our opening exhibition with three exceptionally talented artists. Together we look forward to welcoming you all. We are eager to engage audiences in conversations that challenge perceptions, break barriers, and foster a deeper appreciation for the transformative power of African creativity."

'Contact Zone', which opened on June 3, 2024 runs until June 9, 2024 at Cromwell Place, London.

## Meet Fejiro Praise Oruoghor: Self-taught artist, creative entrepreneur

**I**f you have ever encountered Fejiro Praise Oruoghor, you will admire her passion for the arts, particularly visual art.

The trained accountant turned artist, followed her passion for art and today she has grown entrepreneurial lines across her visual art career.

From being a self-taught artist, painting from her heart, she developed herself to become a sought-after art instructor by private schools and concerned parents.

As well, the ambitious artist is also a curator, with many successful creative shows to her credit and also runs an art brand called Artformng.

Tracing her journey in the art, Fejiro gives credit to her sister, a Fine Art graduate, who usually brings home her class assignments and projects and asks her to help out, though after putting her through on it.

"I ended up helping my sister to do her assignments. With that I began to pick interest in art and see it as something in-

teresting and that I want to do," Fejiro says.

She also lives out the axiom 'catch them young' with her special way of getting around with children, helping them to pick interest in art at a tender age.

The above speaks volume of her passion and job as an art instructor. She works with many top notch private schools as an Art Instructor, teaching Art, inspiring young ones to become creative from a tender age and coaching the pupils and students in mastering drawing and painting skills.

Her skills are being appreciated by schools such as The Netherlands Embassy in Ikoyi, Pink & Blue in Victoria Island, Lextorah in Lekki, among others.

According to her, being an Art Instructor is also rewarding financially, job fulfillment and passion wise.

"Aside from painting, I teach the children the basis of art, colour mixture, different media and the rest.

"So far, the children can

paint on t-shirts, drawing on canvas, I instruct them on how to hold the paint brush, how to manipulate and all that," she notes.

Apart from schools, her art instructing skills are also sought-after by corporate organisations, which often invite her to spice their corporate timeouts with her creative impartation.

The impact and bounding created during her painting session with Cadbury West African staff members are still being felt till date by the company.

Parents also contract her

for drawing and painting sessions during their children's birthdays, to make the occasions remarkable.

She did the same at Imade's birthday, first daughter of Davido, ace musician, among others, where she uses her artistic skills to inspire children to love art, draw and paint their environment.

With Artformng, (Artform Nigeria) her art brand, she does a couple of events both for adults and children, helping them to learn more about art such as painting and drawing, different techniques of art and how to ex-

plore them.

One of such events is collaboration with Tunde Onakoya, founder of Chess In Slums Africa.

Speaking on her work as an art instructor, Fejiro explains that she did not have a formal training as an art teacher, but has perfected that through her extensive research on art and art instructor specifically.

"After my extensive research, I started working with different schools as an art instructor. My work as an art instructor is to help channel out the creative side of children, their artistic skills and help them to confidently bring it out," she explains further.

While she has practiced art and been an art instructor for over seven years, she has also been a curator for three years now.

"I have curated a lot of exhibitions. There is one I did at the National Museum. I have also done a couple of assistant curatorial work at the Tree House Lagos. I worked there as a dance

coordinator.

"The space is an experimental art space for artists to do their artistic work more like a residency and art exhibition space. I was the coordinator and assistant curator of the space."

She also has good working relationships with a couple of artists. "I do studio visits with them to see their works," she says.

Fejiro has also worked in some galleries such as; CCA in Sabo Yaba, TreeHouse, Tiwani, Bloom Art and Art X Lagos.

However, bearing in mind the need to get formal training in art, she took time to learn from some art masters.

"I did a training of about five years with an art practitioner before I started working with children," she says, while also working on getting a certification in Art Curating from QDot, a four-month programme.

But having been an art instructor for close to a decade, her joy is to see more of her students that will pursue art after their school.





# Book Review

## ‘Fighting Corruption Is Dangerous’

By Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

Number of pages 139

Published 2018

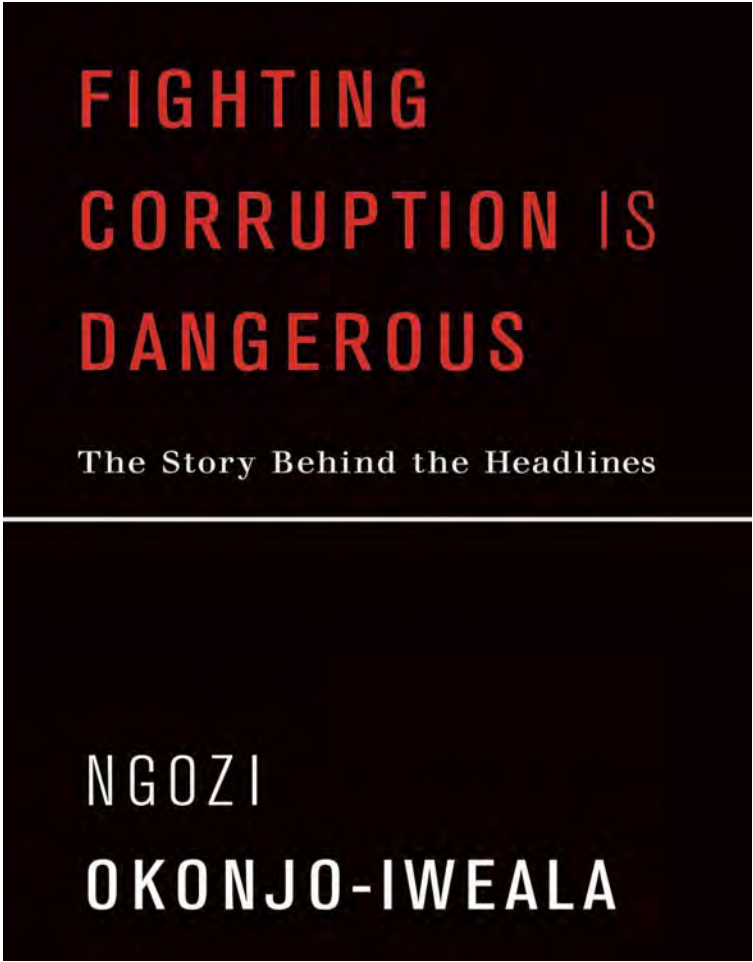
By MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts London, England

Reviewer: Kenneth Athekeame

In ‘Fighting Corruption Is Dangerous’, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has written a guide or primer for those working to root out corruption and disrupt vested interests. Drawing on her experience as Nigeria’s finance minister and that of her team she talked about the wave of the real sector reforms in the Nigerian economy, she describes dangers, pitfalls, and successes in fighting corruption. She provides practical lessons learned and tells how anti-corruption advocates need to equip themselves. The book offers an interesting insider account of what it means to work as a senior official in the Nigerian government. This exposé details her time during the Goodluck Jonathan era which was from 2011 to 2015. During this period, she was not just the Finance Minister but also held a special position as the Coordinating Minister of the Economy (CME) — the first of its kind in the country. The first thing that hits you in this book is the level of impunity in the Nigerian government. It just seems to me that there are forces whose life mission is to ensure that Nigeria is kept in perpetual underdevelopment.

The book starts with the story of the kidnapping of the author’s mother. Her mother was kidnapped and held for five days by people she suspected to have been sent by oil marketers whom she admits she had a big fallout with and those involved in the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) who (wrongly) felt she was responsible for their delayed payments. On the sixth day, for more than two hours, this eighty-three-year-old grandmother ran, jogged and walked in the forest to safety. At one point, she had to slide down an incline to a major highway. By the time she got to the bottom, she was covered with scrapes, bruises, mud, leaves, and grass. She said that she must have looked like the mad men and women that one often sees in Nigeria wandering by the roadside or muttering to themselves in the market square. The rest of the book dealt with how the author got herself into this position. But even before she accepted the ministerial position from President Jonathan, she was visited by Donald Duke, a former state governor, who said he carried a message from a group of concerned Nigerians whose advice was that she should turn down the offer. Why? She asked. His response was that her acceptance would “give Jonathan and his government credibility” and he did not deserve that. This to me shows that some Nigerian elite do not care if the country burns to the ground if they do not have their way.

She also noted her challenges with the media, especially Sahara Reporters. She referred to a research which shows



that of forty-one articles that Sahara Reporters published about her in twenty-five months, only one was positive. Her conclusion is that she could not be this bad and that there must be bias against her.

Okonjo-Iweala details the numerous ways in which corruption can divert

resources away from development, rewarding the unscrupulous and depriving poor people of services she also talked of stories of widespread public-sector corruption around the world-from Nigeria to south Africa, Brazil to Argentina and Venezuela, Ukraine to South Korea.

“Telling my story is risky,” Okonjo-Iweala writes. “But not telling it is also dangerous.” Her book ultimately leaves us with hope, showing that victories are possible in the fight against corruption.

While this may be true, she was also quick to admit that if there was one way the government she was a part of failed, it’s in the area of communication. A case in point was the sudden subsidy removal of 2011 which led to widespread protests in several cities in Nigeria with particularly well-organised large turnouts in the opposition stronghold of Lagos. As nationwide protests engulfed the country, no one in government came out to defend the government or explain the basis for the ill-timed policy action.

While Okonjo-Iweala and her team had called for patience and strategic phasing out of the petroleum subsidy, it was the governors who had urged the President not to delay any longer but to announce the subsidy phase-out at the beginning of the year. It was incredible that none of the governors

came to the rescue when the policy roiled the nation. And of course, this would not be the last time a serious lack of communication happened in the administration.

It happened with Sanusi Lamido. The story of how his leaked letter of the missing \$50 billion caused pandemonium in the country is quite interesting. Okonjo-Iweala’s narration of his unprofessional conduct is to be believed, then he deserved to be removed as the CBN governor. It’s even more interesting that a while before Sanusi raised the alarm of the missing funds, Sanusi was being investigated for “financial recklessness” ostensibly linked to the Central Bank of Nigeria’s problems with the Financial Reporting Council. But again, lack of communication made the country feel like Sanusi became a martyr for looking out for the country. In 1978, under Minister Muhammadu Buhari of the Petroleum Ministry, there was a missing \$3.5 billion not remitted by NNPC to the treasury.

NNPC is a basket case. The amount of public funds unaccounted for in that agency is mind-boggling. Instead of serving the country, it looks like the country is serving NNPC. A situation where its Group Managing Director challenged the right of the Finance Minister’s right to ask for information on production volumes and sales of crude oil or even to try to hold NNPC accountable to deliver the needed volume of funding is one that causes one to shudder.

There is also the matter of the National Assembly which to me is the most interesting chapter in the book. Nigerian legislators exist to budget as much money as possible to themselves. The budget process is one which every Nigerian should read about. Perhaps it will cause us to hold them more accountable. There is a reason they earn one of the highest monetary benefits in the world. Our budget system is flawed.

It’s disheartening to see that people like Oshiomhole, Amaechi and Fashola whose decisions to stop the country from savings leading to untold hardship to Nigerians were and are being rewarded with ministerial and high level political appointments. These people, through their actions, literally plunged the country into a needless recession. And the way Nigerian states borrow recklessly is another alarming part of the book. She took a swipe at Muhammadu Buhari as well. He knew that Nigeria had little savings yet did not appoint ministers for six months. When he appointed them, he embarked on disjointed monetary and exchange-rate policies which damaged investor confidence and capital flight. Flat out wrong economic policies led to the first economic contraction for two decades in Nigeria.

The different scams perpetrated by those in the civil service is also a highlight. Look at the judgement scam. It typically arises when a government ministry, department, or agency defaults on a contract and is sued by the contractor or service provider, who often wins the case and receives

the original disputed amount owed by government plus interest and a fine. The gist is that civil servants

gang up with contractors for their agencies to be sued. Because they are obviously in the wrong, the judge will rule in the contractor’s favour. The contractors get paid many millions and the ‘loot’ is shared with the civil servants. And you know it’s not the agencies that pay these fines but the federal government from taxpayer’s money. She said these judgement debts increased from N8 billion in 2006 to N80 billion in 2012. There is also Apapa port where NPA is making \$6 million a year and the federal government knows not that such even exist.

What gets me the most in this book is the lack of institutional building at all levels. There are systems like the IPPIS, GIFMIS and TSA, sure, under development as far back as the Obasanjo administration (for emphasis, the Buhari administration did not come up with these systems), but their implementation is not across board.

As much as the author tried to protect the person of Goodluck Jonathan, it’s painfully obvious that while a courteous and liberal president (his unprecedented peaceful handover of power to the opposition is to be acknowledged), he did not punish wrongdoings. This led to a feeling of impunity on the part of vested interests who felt they could get away with corrupt acts. People got away with ‘murder’. No system in place to get rid of corruption. My heart sank when Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala discussed Nigeria’s economy with Jonathan and he kept saying he did not know economics. Anyone who does not know economics should not be in charge of the economy of any state or nation. The knowledge of how the economy works should be the minimum.

This lack of systems and controls is even worse at the state level. None of the three systems above exist at the state level. Considering state and local governments constitutionally control 48 percent of all national revenues, that’s a lot of money unaccounted for.

No system to integrate women in politics too. A paltry 5% representation at the National Assembly for a population made up of 50% women is simply unacceptable.

A major drawback about the book is that she withheld so many names of actors who played negative roles in the book. If she’s scared of lawsuits, why bother about the book at all? A good example was a senior presidential adviser who made her access to the Presidential Villa difficult during the visit of Christine Lagarde, current President of the European Central Bank, who was then at the IMF. The author didn’t mention the name of this person. The book also felt as if all the decisions made under her at the Ministry of Finance turned out well. It begs the question, were there any decisions by her in four years that didn’t go as intended? In that way, it could read as a one-sided account.

Overall, this is a captivating book that’s well written and easy to read. It is guaranteed to make you sad about the state of the country, considering that the situations described become even worse under the Buhari administration.

As much as the author tried to protect the person of Goodluck Jonathan, it’s painfully obvious that while a courteous and liberal president (his unprecedented peaceful handover of power to the opposition is to be acknowledged), he did not punish wrongdoings



# FashionTalk

## Economic downturn: How to create a budget stylish look

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

As the average Nigerian would say, 'the economy is no longer smiling,' so is our budget for fashion and looking trendy. It can be really challenging to keep up with the latest fashion without breaking the bank. However, with a little creativity and smart shopping, you can achieve a stylish look on a budget. Whether you're a student, a young professional, a business man or woman or someone who simply loves fashion, this guide by Yellowbrick will provide you with valuable tips and tricks for budget styling.

### Start with a Capsule Wardrobe

One of the keys to budget styling is to build a versatile wardrobe with essential pieces that can be mixed and matched effortlessly. A capsule wardrobe consists of a few high-quality, timeless items that can be styled in multiple ways. Invest in classic pieces like a well-fitted blazer, a little black dress, a pair of jeans, and a white button-down shirt. These staples will serve as the foundation for your budget-friendly outfits.

### Thrift shopping

Thrift stores are a treasure trove for budget-conscious fashionistas. You can find unique and stylish pieces at a fraction of the price compared to retail stores. Take the time to explore thrift stores in your area and discover hidden gems. Keep an open mind and experiment with different styles and sizes. You never know what you might find!

### Second-hand shopping

In addition to thrift stores, consider shopping for second-hand clothing online. Websites and apps like Poshmark, Depop, and

thredUP offer a wide range of pre-loved fashion items at affordable prices. You can find designer pieces, vintage clothing, and trendy accessories without breaking the bank. Just be sure to carefully read the descriptions and check the seller's ratings before making a purchase.

### Do it yourself

Get creative and give new life to old clothes through do-it-yourself (DIY) projects. You can transform a plain t-shirt into a trendy crop top, add patches or embroidery to denim jackets, or distress jeans for a cool, edgy look. Upcycling not only saves you money but also allows you to express your unique style. Look for inspiration on social media platforms like Pinterest or YouTube, where you'll find countless tutorials and ideas.

### Rent for special occasions

If you must put on a fabulous outfit for that occasion but can't afford it, then rent! Renting formal attire, such as cocktail dresses or designer gowns, can be a cost-effective option. Websites like Rent the Runway offer a wide selection of designer dresses and accessories for a fraction of the retail price. You'll look stunning without spending a fortune.

### Shop off-season sales

Timing is everything when it comes to budget styling. Take advantage of off-season sales to score great deals on clothing and accessories. Retailers often offer significant discounts on winter wear during the summer months and vice versa. Plan ahead and shop for items out of season to get the best prices. Just remember to choose timeless pieces that can be worn year after year.



## Dabota Lawson shares strategies on how makeup artists can harness tech to amplify earnings

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

Dabota Lawson, the CEO of Dabota Cosmetics, recently shared invaluable strategies on how makeup artists can harness the power of technology to amplify their earnings.

With her wealth of experience in the beauty sector, Lawson illuminated the path for aspiring entrepreneurs, emphasizing the importance of embracing digital innovation to expand their reach beyond

borders.

She took center stage at the Pan-African Makeup Empowerment Summit powered by EATOW Global, captivating audiences with her insights on leveraging technology to thrive in the beauty industry.

Dabota was also announced as the spokesperson for Pallet to profit a groundbreaking platform reshaping the makeup landscape globally. A platform that is aligning beau-

ty professionals with tech by enabling them to create digital products.

She was a keynote speaker at the summit hosted by the esteemed Eryca Freemantle.

The Makeup Empowerment Summit, a gathering of industry leaders and aspiring makeup artists alike, featured a lineup of influential voices including BeautybyAD, Ifeoluwa Agoro, Joyce Jacob, Bolaji Olatoye, and many more.

A defining moment of

the event was the launch of Lawson's debut ebook, "From Likes To Launch," a comprehensive guide packed with proven monetization tactics for aspiring beauty moguls. This milestone publication offers a roadmap for transforming passion into profit and building a thriving beauty empire in the digital age.

In her address, Dabota Lawson remarked, "Nigerian makeup artists have the potential to achieve global success by

embracing the various opportunities presented by artificial intelligence. Beyond traditional handwork and physical products, the future of beauty lies in the realm of digital innovation."

The summit concluded with resounding applause from attendees, who expressed gratitude to Dabota Lawson for her generosity in sharing her invaluable wisdom gained from her journey of building Dabota Cosmetics. Attendees left

the event empowered and equipped with actionable strategies to propel their careers to new heights.

Dabota Lawson is a beauty entrepreneur; the CEO of Dabota Cosmetics & House of Beauty, an online skincare and makeup store. She provides services such as semi-permanent lashes, waxing, laser treatments, and IV infusion and also produces non-toxic make-up products particularly for sensitive skin.



# Health

## Improve healthcare, immunization for Nigerian children - UNICEF Rep

To improve the health and survival of children in Nigeria, Christian Munduate, UNICEF representative in Nigeria, has called attention to the critical need to enhance primary health care services and increase immunization coverage across the country.

This urgent call aims to address the significant health challenges facing Nigeria's children and ensure their right to a healthy start in life.

"First, we really need to amplify the primary health care attention," Munduate emphasised. "This focus is necessary not just from the government, but from communities, religious leaders, and traditional leaders. It's imperative they step in and demonstrate that they can take action so that children can receive preventive health care. Immunization is the most important element, alongside proper nutrition for mothers."

Accessible health facilities play a pivotal role in ensuring that children receive timely and effective medical attention. The absence of nearby clinics often results in many Nigerian children missing out on vital health services.

"Parents should not be forced to undertake long

journeys to access primary health clinics. We must ensure that children can readily receive screenings and treatments for any health issues they face," Munduate said.

Nigeria grapples with substantial health challenges, particularly at the primary health care level. With a population exceeding 200 million and an annual birth rate of approximately 8 million babies, the existing health infrastructure is under immense strain. The dearth of health centers at the ward level exacerbates the difficulty in accessing essential medical care, amplifying the urgency of the situation.

"For a country with a population of 200 million, witnessing 8 million births annually, the current health services are grossly inadequate. Accessible primary health care and comprehensive immunization coverage are indispensable for the survival of our children," Munduate emphasised.

Nigeria's immunization coverage ranks among the lowest globally, primarily due to misinformation and vaccine hesitancy.

According to UNICEF data, Nigeria bears one of the highest rates of under-five mortality worldwide, with

117 deaths per 1,000 live births recorded in 2023.

Immunization coverage for diseases such as measles remains alarmingly low at approximately 54%, significantly below the World Health Organization's recommended threshold of 95% required to prevent outbreaks.

Only about 40% of Nigerian children receive all the recommended vaccines by their first birthday, as reported by the Federal Ministry of Health.

**It is imperative that communities understand the critical role of primary health care facilities in ensuring children receive timely immunizations**

The ramifications of underutilizing immunization services are dire, leading to outbreaks of preventable diseases such as diphtheria, measles, and cholera, which significantly contribute to child mortality rates.

Munduate emphasised, "Without access to these essential services, children are left vulnerable. It is imperative that communities understand the critical role of primary health care facilities in ensuring children receive timely immunizations."

The media emerges as a pivotal player in disseminating accurate information and mobilizing stakeholders. Munduate stated, "The media plays a crucial role in informing and mobilizing all segments of society. The recent diphtheria outbreak among unvaccinated children underscores the importance of disseminating accurate information to parents."

UNICEF's call to action stems from the multifaceted challenges confronting Nigeria's health care system, including a scarcity of health centers and widespread misinformation surrounding vaccinations and traditional medicine.

Munduate reiterated, "Traditional medicine can-



not cure diseases like cholera, diphtheria, measles, or chickenpox. It's imperative that the media helps in disseminating accurate information to underscore the importance of modern medical interventions."

UNICEF urges all sectors of Nigerian society to take immediate action to address the pressing health challenges facing the country's children. Munduate emphasised, "We cannot afford to wait while children's lives hang in the balance. Urgent implementation of plans is

paramount."

UNICEF remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting Nigeria in improving child health outcomes and calls on all stakeholders to join in this critical mission.

Through collaborative efforts, encompassing government commitment, community engagement, and accurate information dissemination, we can forge a path towards significantly reducing child mortality rates and securing a healthier future for Nigeria's children.

## COPA 2024: Sanwo-Olu, Afolabi to lead conference on optimising laboratory analytics

Babajide Sanwo-Olu, executive governor of Lagos State, alongside chairman, board of Trustees, Society of Testing Laboratory Analysts of Nigeria (SoTLAN) Oladapo Afolabi, will host the 6th annual Conference of Public Analysts (COPA), 2024.

The event, themed "Optimising Laboratory Analytics and Quality Assurance in the Present Economy," is scheduled to take place from May 11 to 13, 2024, in Lagos.

COPA 2024 will gather professionals, students, and healthcare exhibitors to explore best practices in the laboratory and testing sector in Nigeria.

The conference aims to address the critical need for maintaining high standards in commodity testing, which is essential for ensuring food security, reducing the prevalence of low-quality products, and boosting life expectancy.

Speaking about the

**We hear of people putting petrochemical products in the production of plaintain chips to ensure that the plaintain chips are crunchy**

conference in Lagos, Olugbenga Ogunmoyela, president, SoTLAN, stated that the event was birthed in response to the need to maintain best standards in testing of commodities is the



Governor of Lagos state Babajide Sanwo-Olu

market place.

According to him, it is crucial to achieving food security in the country, stemming the tide of low quality products and boosting

life expectancy for the general populace.

He noted that as a meeting point for professionals, will be an opportunity to educate the public on the need for

statutory laboratory testing of products, serve as a platform for inter-tertiary institution discussions and debates on industry issues with prize awards, and culminate in the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the association.

"We emphasise the fact that every product that goes into the market must go through the process of laboratory testing and validation.

"We hear of people putting petrochemical products in the production of plaintain chips to ensure that the plaintain chips are crunchy. They don't know that they are poisoning the consumer," he said.

"The theme for this year's conference is: Optimising Laboratory Analytics and Quality Assurance in the Present Economy. The Chief Host of the 3-day event is the Executive Governor of Lagos State, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu, who is expected to be assisted by the Chairman of our Board of Trustees, Oladapo Afolabi as Host."

Ogunmoyela added that if the public are better educated, standard will be brought to the marketplace and consumers will gain greater health dividends when they purchase quality goods.

He further explained that the customer is at the mercy of the information available to him from the public and strengthening conversations on food testing and consumption is important to breeding healthier societies.

"Consumer education is crucial. Until we have people willing to support and ensure and promote information across different languages groups in the country, people will take anything they can find. When people do not have information, they are not aware, they are not sensitised and they are not educated.

"It is when our consumers are aware of what the challenges are that they will begin to asked questions. This is not just a SoTLAN issue, this concerns all of us."





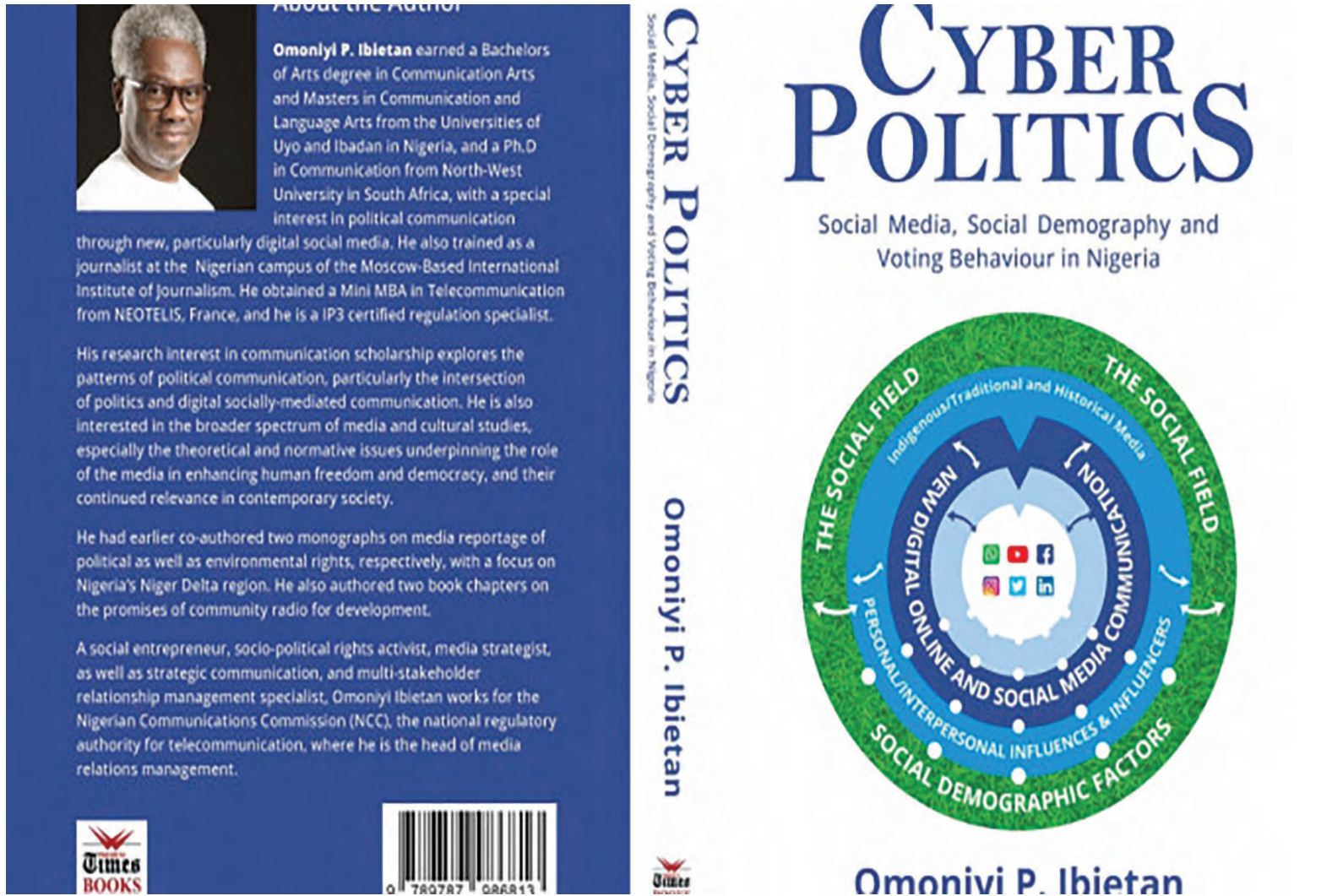
# BOOK REVIEW

## Dimensions of political communication in the digital age

Omoniyi Ibietan (2023), *Cyber Politics: Social Media, Social Demography and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria*. Abuja/Washington: Premium Times Books. ISBN: 978-978-798-681-3. 426 pages.

The nexus between communication and democracy is a central theme in Omoniyi Ibietan's book "Cyber Politics: Social Media, Social Demography and Voting Behaviour in Nigeria". Ibietan argues that communication is essential for the functioning of democracy. It allows citizens to access information about political issues, to form opinions, and to hold their government accountable. Social media has transformed the way that people communicate about politics. It has made it easier for citizens to access information from a variety of sources, to connect with politicians, and to mobilise support for their causes. However, social media has also been used to spread misinformation and disinformation and to interfere in elections. Cyber Politics is akin to the elephant the blind men described from various angles. Readers of a 20-20 vision will see many tips and vistas of this richly textured exposition of political communication from the lens of the digital media and the Information Age. Across 426 pages, Cyber Politics contains 12 chapters, a foreword, commendation, introduction, and preface. Prof Umar Garba Danbatta, immediate past Executive Vice Chairman of the Nigeri-

an Communications Commission, wrote the foreword. Okeifufe Frank Jnr Nweke, an Obasanjo-era Minister of Information under whom Ibietan served, wrote a commendation. Dapo Olorunyomi, publisher and CEO of Premium Times media group, did the Introduction. Premium Times Books published this work in Abuja and Washington. A starting point is understanding political communication as the pillar of the work. Political communication studies and practices how information is created, transmitted, and processed in a political context. Political communication is an integral part of any democracy. It helps ensure citizens have access to the information they need to make informed decisions about their government and leaders. It also helps to facilitate public debate about important issues and to hold politicians accountable. Ibietan explores the following key aspects of the nexus between communication and democracy in the context of cyber politics in Nigeria: The role of social media in promoting political participation and engagement among citizens. The use of social media by politicians to communicate with voters and mobilise support. The impact of social media on the electoral process, including voter registration, turnout, and candi-



date selection. The challenges of regulating social media to minimise its negative impact on democracy. Chapter Seven, "Social Demographic Factors and Voting Behaviour", is at the heart of the discourse with relevant data, charts, and maps. Radio was a dominant source of political information in the 2015 election. Radio accounted for 35.4%, Billboard 20.96%, Grapevine 19.8%, Television 8.91%, and Newspaper/Magazine 6.68%. Interestingly, respondents to the survey identified several possible explanations for their voting behaviour. Pp 189-261. These were the personality of the candidate, social media campaign messages, campaign messages on Newspapers, Radio and Television, and "my family and friends prefer the party". The book presents several key findings, notably that less than ten per cent of voters in the 2015 election cited social media as a significant influence on their decision-making. However, it highlights the potential for social media to shape voter behaviour mainly through the influence of opinion leaders and peer groups. Other scholars may examine the influence and role of social media in subsequent elections in 2019 and 2023. The anecdotal narrative is that social media influence has increased exponentially since 2015. True or false? The following are 12 core learnings

from the book. 1. Social media has become a powerful tool for political communication in Nigeria. It provides a platform for politicians to connect with voters, share their messages, and mobilise support. 2. "WhatsApp was comparatively the best of the three social media networks (Facebook and Twitter) in terms of influence on the voting behaviour of respondents to the research on the 2015 presidential election" p. 261. 3. Both politicians and voters use social media to spread information, misinformation and disinformation. This can be alternately positive and harmful to the electoral process and Nigerian democracy. 4. Politicians use social media to target specific groups of voters, such as youth and women. This can lead to a more segmented and polarised electorate. 5. Social media can suppress voter turnout, particularly among marginalised groups. 6. Social media can be used to monitor and manipulate public opinion. This can be done by tracking user data and using algorithms to target users with specific messages. 7. The use of social media in Nigerian politics is influenced by several factors, including the country's social demography, digital literacy levels, and political culture. 8. "Nigerians used social media to facilitate and enhance the effectiveness of election observation". By

2015, the enriched social media were "virtually at par with the mainstream media". P60 9. Social media has had a significant impact on Nigerian voting behaviour. It has made it easier for voters to access information and connect with politicians. It has also made it easier for voters to mobilise and organise themselves. 10. A strong and positive correlation exists between social media networks, social and demographic variables, and voting behaviour. Facebook influenced the voting behaviour of young people (18-39). 11. Religion as a social and demographic factor also influenced the voting behaviour of the respondents. Ninety-six per cent of Muslim respondents voted for a Muslim candidate, and 55 per cent of Christians voted for a Christian candidate. 12. Hashtags can expand the reach and accessibility of political information. Stakeholders in electoral, social, political, and democratic culture renaissance should adopt or increase their use of hashtags in political and other communication campaigns. Cyber Politics has received deserved media accolades and mentions since its market entry. Scholars in the social sciences (mass communication, political science, sociology, psychology, and geography) will find Chapter Five on "The Place of Theory" stimulating and worth interrogating.

### BOOK NEWS

## National Library offers international eBook resources

This exciting information from the National Library caught my attention during the week: Exciting News! Access to ProQuest Ebook Central is Now Available! Dear Library Patrons, We are pleased to announce that the National Library of Nigeria has subscribed to ProQuest Ebook Central. This comprehensive online resource provides access to thousands of ebooks from renowned publishers. With this subscription, you can now enjoy unlimited access to Proquest Ebook Central from your home or within the National Library of Nigeria premises. This database resource is perfect for students, researchers, professionals, and Nigerians looking to expand their knowledge and stay up to date with their fields' latest developments.



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### Quotes on books and reading

"Today, a reader, tomorrow a leader." – Margaret Fuller

"A word after a word after a word is power." – Margaret

"Atwood One glance at a book, and you hear another person's voice, perhaps someone dead for 1,000 years. To read is to voyage through time." – Carl Sagan

"Show me a family of readers, and I will show you the people who move the world." – Napoleon Bonaparte.

"When I look back, I am so impressed again with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today, trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young" – Maya Angelou



## Cover

# Governors' comment on N60,000 minimum wage offensive, insensitive – Nigerians

OBINNA EMELIKE, INIOBONG IWOK & ANTHONY AILEMEN

The Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) has been criticised over its comment on the proposed N60,000 minimum wage, which has been a contentious issue between the Federal Government and the Organised Labour.

Some Nigerians, who spoke with BusinessDay following the collective response of the governors to the minimum wage, said that the state chief executive officers were both oppressive and self-serving in their posturing.

They also accused George Akume, Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), of hypocrisy over his stand on the controversial minimum wage.

Benson Upah, head of Information at the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), said: "We are very worried that history is about to repeat itself. Nigerians are very angry and we have tried very hard to hold them back. But we advise the President to be weary of these governors."

According to him, "We are alarmed by the statement credited to the Nigeria Governors Forum that state governments cannot even afford to pay N60,000 as minimum wage as a few states will end up borrowing to pay workers every month."

"We do believe the governors have acted in bad faith. It is unheard of for such a statement to be issued to the world in the middle of an on-going negotiation. It is certainly in bad taste."

Push further said: "As for the veracity of their claim, nothing can be farther from the truth as FAAC allocations have since grown from N700 billion to N1.2 trillion making the governments extremely rich at the expense of the people."

"All that the governors need to do to be able to pay a reasonable national minimum wage (not even the N60,000) is cut the high cost of governance, minimise corruption as well as prioritise the welfare of workers."

Auwal Musa (Rafsanjani), executive director, of the Civil Society and Legislative Advocacy Center, chided the governors. He drew copiously from reports of the Debt Management Office DMO which show that states had enjoyed more resources since the fuel subsidy removal by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

According to Musa, "A report in February this year, showed that the states received over 50 percent higher revenues since June 2023, after the fuel subsidy was



removed."

The civil rights activist wondered what the states are really doing with these funds, apart from living large cabinets, siphoning funds abroad and spending lavishly on their families.

"We know that about 13 states are said to have borrowed N226.8 billion from the domestic and external sources, for the period between June and December, 2023."

"This is despite the fact that they have also enjoyed an increase in the distributable revenue from N786.16 billion in May 2023 to N1.9 trillion in June 2023 and it doubled in July 2023."

"These are states that also got N2billion each as fallout of the fuel subsidy removal approved for them by President Bola Tinubu in July, to help in meeting payments of salaries and pension arrears."

According to him, "These states cannot claim that they do not have the money to pay their workers. They have never had it so good. For example, but for the investigations by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigerians would never have known that Yahaya Bello, the former Kogi State governor paid \$845,852 as school fees for his children, from the coffers of the state funds, from September 2021, until the bubble busted in 2024."

"Reports also show that 16 other state governors received loans totalling N509.3 billion with domestic and external debt of N243.95 billion and \$298.5 million."

"The states, which include Benue, Cross Rivers, Katsina, Niger, Plateau, Rivers, Zamfara, and the Federal Capital Territory, got N115.57 billion from domestic creditors, while governors of Ebonyi, Kaduna, Kano, Niger, Plateau, Sokoto, Taraba and Zamfara states borrowed \$125.1 million (N111.24bn) from external sources."

An aggrieved young civil servant, who spoke on condition of anonymity, wondered "Why is there always a fight when it comes to the welfare of the masses, while nobody hears when the rich are given oil wells? Who knows how much the legislatures earn despite the figures being bandied."

What seems to form a majority opinion is that if you consider the fact that prices have quadrupled in the last one year, due to the persisting inflation woes, yet most earnings are static, a concerned person will marvel at how the low-income earners have survived."

Even with the government's proposed N60,000 minimum wage or the N105,000 alleged to be presented to Mr. President by Wale Edun, minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, the realities of the time are not captured by those making these proposals.

Yet, Nigerian governors are insisting that workers should not earn more because there is no money to pay such salary increments.

"We appeal that all parties involved, especially the labour unions, consider all the socio-economic variables and settle for an agreement that is sustainable, durable, and fair to all other segments of the society who have a legitimate claim to public resources," a statement issued by Nigerian Governors Forum read.

Expressing his anger over the governors' stand on the minimum wage, Ademola Bakare, a corporate executive, decried the governors' complaint that they would have to use all the monthly allocation from the Federal Government in paying salaries.

"With the price of a bag of rice above both the N30,000 old minimum wage, and the N60,000 insisted by our governors today, it will be callous and inconsiderate on the part of the government to

allow workers to continue to earn peanuts as minimum wage."

"That amount is 100 times lower than the allowances our governors give their children. So, funds meant for development are wasted or diverted to private pockets. Let the governors use the federal allocation to pay good salaries, if that is the only thing workers will gain from being Nigerians," he said.

In his argument against those in support of the governors and those citing imminent rise in inflation as major reason for the inability to pay the N60,000 proposed by the governors, Onyewuchi Akagbule, a senior lecturer with the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, noted that the poor has always paid the cost of most of the economic policies of the different administrations in Nigeria and not this time.

"There is hunger in the land and you refuse to pay workers realistic wages, while still unable to explain why you cannot pay them. The action of the governor will pitch the workers and citizens against them and will result in sabotage of their efforts across the states."

"With N60,000 minimum wage proposed by the governors, Nigerian workers will still be hungry and angry," Akagbule noted.

## Bogus appointments

A survey by the News Agency of Nigeria in 2016 had revealed that 100 aides on average serve state governors with the highest paid receiving close to N500,000 monthly.

But the number of appointees has tripled in this administration with Umo Eno, governor of Akwa Ibom State, raising the bar with the appointment of 368 personal assistants.

The governor broke a record as the appointment was the first time in the history of the 36-year-old state that a state governor would

pick such a number of aides at once.

Abba Yusuf, governor of Kano State, trailed behind Eno with the appointment of over 300 aides, including 94 social media influencers as media aides.

Defending the large number of appointees, Darius Ishaku, former governor of Taraba State, noted while in office that, "We need to create job opportunities through these appointments because we have a state that is purely a civil service state."

Another governor from the South-South zone, explained that he enlarged the number of appointments in order to spread welfare to the citizenry.

But Akagbule argued that about 90 percent of the governors' aides had neither portfolios nor schedules of duty, yet they earn more than average workers in the states.

Speaking on the presumed hypocrisy of the governors, which has manifested in the minimum wage saga, Chijioke Umelahi, an Abuja-based lawyer, decried that the governors keep giving out a large number of appointments to political supporters and spending billions monthly on their salaries and allowances, that would have gone into workers' welfare and development projects.

"If the governors can pay their numerous aides above N200,000 monthly, they cannot insist on N60,000 minimum wage for workers. That is unreasonable. They can reduce the number of their aides or use the workers to do the jobs of the aides without paying them additional salaries. This will save billions being wasted on aides' salaries and allowances every month," Umelahi, who was also a former Abia lawmaker, said.

## Okupe, others react

Speaking on the issue, a former campaign director general of the LP presidential candidate, Doyin Okupe said that state governors should decide the new minimum wage they can pay to workers.

Okupe faulted the National Minimum Wage Act which mandates governors to pay a uniform minimum wage to the workers in their various states.

Okupe said: "We should not make laws that are encompassing, that makes it compulsory for all governors in the federation to obey them. They are sub-nationalities on their own."

"I mean for instance, if you pay a minimum wage in Lagos, why should I pay that in Sokoto? Let every governor decide for his own state by his own people that this is what I can afford."

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## Governors' comment on N60,000 minimum wage offensive...

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Ladipo Johnson, Publicity Secretary of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), said that the governors must seek a solution that leads to some form of equitable equilibrium, bearing in mind the high cost of living.

"The governors must seek a solution that leads to some form of equitable equilibrium, bearing in mind the cost of living and the possible resultant increase in inflation.

"However, the medium to long term solution is in government doing its very best to drive down inflation and generally bringing a positive turn around in the economy.

"State governors must also make their states more investment friendly and create a conducive environment for local businesses to pickup and thrive, amongst other things."

Tade Ademola, former Lagos State chairman of inter-party Advisor Council (IPAC), said several states could pay good reasonable amount as wage to workers, but that some of the governors were extravagant and living above their means.

"You can imagine a governor spending N5 billion on helicopter in few months, they travel on private jet and see their cars in their fleet. So what are they complaining about?"

"The current minimum wage those not reflect the economic reality in the country, it is unsustainable for now. How much is a



bag for rice?

"But Labour and the federal government must be careful on the increase to checkmate the repercussion of wage increase to the economy," Ademola said.

He further blamed President Tinubu for initiating reforms without a concrete plans in place to check the effects on the economy and the citizens.

Omoyle Sowore, former Presidential candidate, lambasted Nigerian governors and others claiming that the state cannot afford to pay reasonable minimum wage above N60,000 to their workers.

He said that several of the governors spend billions on refreshments and others, but noted that

claims that paying a good minimum wage would caused inflation and cripple the economy was not true.

Tope Musowo, public affairs analyst, said a lot of the states in the country can pay more than N100,000 to their workers if they harness the potentials in their domain and use it to generate revenue.

He pointed out that the problem with most states was that the revenue and allocations are looted and misused by officials.

"I am not surprised with what they are saying, what we see here is that poverty is used as weapon against the masses to oppress the people. If they pay good money people would not come to them

begging during elections.

"They are not interested in fighting poverty, infact they are even happy you are poor. It is a calculated attempts, check how much they spend as salaries for their personal staff," Musowo said.

### The genesis

Recall that the NGF, working in tandem with some top government officials, on Friday scuttled efforts by the organised labour to get a better deal for the workers, on their quests for a living wage

BusinessDay Sunday gathered that based on President Tinubu's directives to Wale Edun, minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, the federal government team was

considering a minimum wage proposal of between N75,000 and N80,000

But just a few hours into the submission of the government figures on Friday, the NGF issued a statement that seemed to have thrown a spanner, saying that "the N60,000 new Minimum Wage, proposed by the federal government is unsustainable," as it was too high.

The new proposals, expected to be submitted to President Tinubu this week, will go through the Federal Executive Council (FEC).

Halimah Ahmed, acting director, media and public affairs of the NGF, made the position of the governors known.

The NGF position, coming on the heels of a similar comment by George Akume, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, that he cannot afford N100,000 for each of his four drivers, may have provided clear indications for the reasons why the negotiations dragged endlessly.

At the end, a sharp disagreement forced the Organised Labour and federal government team to recommend different figures of N250,000 and N62,000, respectively.

Prior to the NGF statement, Nkeiruka Onyejeocha, minister of State for Labour and Employment, had, while speaking with journalists in Abuja las Wednesday, hinted that the delays in arriving at an acceptable minimum wage, was not from the federal government, but the governors and the organised private sector.

## 184 patients get free surgery in Rivers, Bayelsa at NDDC medical...

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gramme, the NDDC Managing Director, Samuel Ogbuku, said that the free healthcare mission was organised in partnership with Ecclestine Concept Limited to bring healthcare to the door-steps of rural dwellers.

The NDDC Chief Executive Officer, who was represented by the Commission's Director, Rivers State Office, Okezie Ule, noted that over 18,000 patients have benefited from the free health outreach in Akwa Ibom, Imo, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo and Ondo states.

Ogbuku stated that the Free Healthcare programme, which had been providing healthcare services to medically underserved rural communities in the region, was one of several health programmes of the Commission, targeted at changing the health situation of Niger Deltans.

"The free medical outreach has been one of the flagship programmes of the Commission, serving the medically needy communities, with documented evidence and abounding testimonies of its beneficial impact in enhancing the quality of life of the rural poor in the region.

"Between that first intervention until the free health mission was suspended in 2019, over 2.18 million Niger Deltans, who had little or no access to modern health facilities,



Health officials attending to patients during the NDDC free medical mission at the Diete Koki Memorial Hospital in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

were treated of all sorts of ailments. These ranged from minimal consultations for things such as malaria or upper respiratory tract infections or children who had little cuts, to cogent cases such as fibroid, eye and dental surgeries."

Speaking after inspecting the various units at the Ogu General Hospital, the NDDC Director, Education, Health and Social Services, George Uzonwanne observed that a lot of successes had been recorded since the beginning of the medical outreach on April 15, 2024.

Uzonwanne said "The free health

missions reflect our commitment not only to address immediate health needs but also invest in the long-term well-being of our people.

"In the first phase of the free healthcare mission, we have taken the programme to seven states in the Niger Delta region. We will also be visiting Owaza in Abia State and Akamkpa in Cross River State next week."

The Chief Medical Director, Rivers State Hospital Management Board, Bright Ogbondah commended the NDDC for providing a platform through which the healthcare needs of the people could be addressed.

He thanked the NDDC for the gesture and charged residents of the state to avail themselves the medical services.

In his remarks, the Chairman of Ogu Council of Chiefs, Adokiye Chuku, expressed appreciation to the NDDC for the health programme. He noted, however, that the one-week duration for the programme was not enough to take care of all the needy patients.

The Chief Consultant of Ecclestine Concept, Warri Andrew, congratulated the NDDC "for relaunching this people-oriented project. It is my hope that future boards will continue and improve on the programme."

### Present NDDC has changed story of the region – Bayelsa monarch

Meanwhile, the King and Chairman, Bayelsa State Traditional Rulers Council, Bubaraye Dakolo has commended the NDDC for organising free medical outreaches across the Niger Delta region.

The monarch, who spoke during the NDDC free medical mission at the Diete Koki Memorial Hospital in Yenagoa, said that the current board and management of the Commission had changed the story of the region, following its numerous development projects and programmes.

He said: "The present board of NDDC has carved a niche for itself as a result of its strategic and innovative projects. The impact is very huge and felt by everyone, not only in Bayelsa State, but the entire Niger Delta region."

The monarch appealed for higher frequency of the medical outreaches because it is about saving lives.

"Everyone that has benefitted from this intervention today will ever remain grateful to NDDC as a saving grace because if not for this programme, a lot of deaths would have been recorded."

In his address, the MD of NDDC said that the medical mission which provides health care services to medically underserved rural communities in the region was one of the several health care programmes of the Commission aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and President Bola Ahmed Tinubu "Health for All, Time for Action" proclamation at the 2023 World Universal Health conference.

In his remarks, the Deputy State Project Coordinator of Derums Global Services, the Medical Consultant of the outreach mission, Oboidhe, explained that 69 general surgeries, 18 obstetrics and gynecology, 434 dental procedures, 79 ophthalmology procedures, among other services were provided.



# Angst, anxiety mount over news of fresh...

Continues from Page 1

This development is not going down well with Nigerians after the ugly experience suffered by many when the organised labour grounded the economy for two days – Monday 3 and Tuesday 4th June.

## Nigerians recount experience

During those two days, businesses were affected, government-owned hospitals were shut, seaports and airports were grounded and the national grid was shut leading to a total blackout across the country.

The strike started at midnight Sunday and early morning Monday, with the workers shutting down the national grid, throwing the nation into a total blackout for two days.

This put serious pressure on homes and businesses particularly small businesses that depend on power.

For instance, Yinka Abiola, a Lagos-based maker of healthy fruit juice including tiger nut and zobo drinks, said she recorded over N200,000 in lost due to the power supply cut during the two-day labour strike.

Abiola said she usually prepares drinks the night before and that over 100 bottles of the tiger nuts and zobo juice she prepared on Sunday night soured the next morning due to power failure even as she found it difficult to sell the good ones because they are drinks that are served while chilled.

"I lost a lot of money during the last Labour strike because I didn't know that there would be a power cut from that night and went ahead to make drinks that Sunday evening. First, there was no fuel to power my generator that night, which is not out of place because we always have an uninterrupted power supply in my area - 22 to 24 hours daily.

"So, that night took me by surprise and before I could get petrol the next morning, it was around 1pm because many petrol stations shut down and the few that opened experienced long queues due to high demand," said Abiola.

According to her, she was also forced to put the business on hold till power was restored on Wednesday after that horrible experience on the first day of the strike.

"I spent over N30,000 on fuel to power my generator to be able to work for three days due to power



cut," said Shola Adeyemi, a fashion designer.

The fashion expert, who specialised in unisex tailoring, said he had orders that were nearing their delivery dates and that he must work for those three days that were blackout in his area to be able to meet up.

"It wasn't easy for one to run the sewing machines on a generator because petrol is very expensive to buy at the pump price of about N630 per litre. If I spend such an amount on fueling the generator alone, how would be my profit at the end of the day? This is why I don't want a repeat of what happened last week and I urge the government to agree with labour to avoid such," Adeyemi pleaded.

Also, many government-owned hospitals were shut down as the labour task force barred people from accessing healthcare.

BusinessDay Sunday understands that health workers and out-patients were prohibited from getting into hospitals in various parts of the country while the available ones were only providing skeletal and emergency services to patients.

This development threw many into agitation over the fear that the situation could deny people access to healthcare, thereby resulting in the unfortunate death of many.

"I am always agitated any time the organised labour threatens to go on a nationwide strike because I know such action would have serious consequences on people like us that receive healthcare

from a government hospital," said Obi Ezeagu, a pensioner.

Ezeagu said that going to a government hospital on a normal day is not a palatable thing not to talk of when workers are on strike.

"If you ever have the opportunity to be in one of the health facilities owned by the government, you would be saddened by the way these nurses and health workers treat their patients as if the services are rendered for free and people's lives don't matter to them.

"So, you can imagine their behaviour when workers down tools. Lives would be lost because many people who need healthcare may not have the resources to transfer their loved ones to a private clinic at that point," Ezeagu said.

## Utomi charts path for negotiation

Pat Utomi, a political economist, urged the organised labour to demand for a slash in the cost of governance and for the government to request for increased productivity on the part of workers.

Utomi told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Friday that Labour must insist on a dramatic slash in the cost of governance and investment of the savings made in production programmes and infrastructure.

"This is to facilitate and sustain the value chain of the output based on our latent comparative advantage from strong factor endowments while the government should establish what it is paying for to determine if it is paying for welfare or productivity. Output

targets need to be established and hard consequences for abuse of positions like corruption and begging on the job from customers," he said.

He said that there was a need to establish a benchmark for civil society monitoring of both parties with clearly outlined consequences.

According to him, the government also needs to come up with bold initiatives that drive the transition to production in the way Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) attempted to do in the mid-1970s.

He said that future adjustments to minimum wage weighed heavily on productivity improvements.

"Once a proper framework is established, the template to plug in productivity gains should be activated," Utomi said.

Anthony Anamelechi, a senior citizen, said that rather than demand for an increase in wages, labour should mandate the government to put the economy back on track.

Pointing out that increase in wages will not solve the rising cost of living crisis in Nigeria, he said that government needed to fix the refineries to reduce pressure on the naira and also cut down the cost of governance.

## Worsening hunger and cost-of-living crisis

In the past one year of President Bola Tinubu, Nigeria has been facing an economic crisis that has led to an escalating cost-of-living crisis due to galloping inflation and uncontrolled food prices that have left households in pain.

Tinubu's administration introduced economic reforms that led to the removal of petrol subsidies and foreign exchange liberalisation that failed to help the economy.

As a result, Nigeria's inflation accelerated to 33.69 percent in April while food inflation rose to 40.53 percent in April, compared to the 24.61 percent reported in the same month last year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

The soaring food prices have left households in hunger as families spend a chunk of their salaries on food alone and these led the organised labour to agitate for a minimum wage that reflects the current economic realities in Nigeria.

## Nigeria joins Somalia as hunger hotspot

The United Nations in its recent report listed Nigeria among 18 nations that are experiencing acute food insecurity which is projected to worsen in magnitude and severity.

"Since the previous edition of the Hunger Hotspots report (October 2023), the Central African Republic, Lebanon, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Zambia have joined Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Malawi, Somalia and Zimbabwe in the list of hunger hotspots, where acute food insecurity is likely to deteriorate further during the outlook period," the report revealed.

The report also emphasised the alarming compounding effect of simultaneous and overlapping shocks on acute food insecurity.



# Cover

## Military takeover of civil policing signals Nigeria's worsening...

Continues from Page 1

the Army; the luminaries said it was not the constitutional duty of the Army to investigate murder cases, but the Police's.

Obono Obla, a constitutional lawyer, senior advocate of Nigeria and former aide to ex-President Muhammdu Buhari, explained that the Army has no statutory duty to investigate a case of murder.

"The constitutional or statutory responsibility of the Army is to defend the country against external aggression or anything that would compromise the country's territorial integrity," he said.

But the Army is going ahead with the investigations of the murder case, a civil job that the Police is empowered to do.

This is not the first time the Army is taking over civil jobs from the Police, especially internal security.

Chijioke Umelahi, a former Abia lawmaker and an Abuja-based lawyer, differed with his senior colleagues on the Army taking over civil policing, while arguing that if the police had been living up to its responsibilities, the Army would not have stepped in.

While that is worrisome to civilians, Umelahi noted that the escalating insecurity in the country requires the might of the Army to tame it.

"Yes, constitutionally civil policing is the responsibility of the police, but the level of insecurity in the country now is almost like in a war time and during war, the constitution is naturally suspended.

"So, the Army is giving the insecurity situation the treatment it requires, though the success has not been what most Nigerians expected from the Nigerian Army that is dreaded for its feat at ECOMOG wars and peacekeeping missions," Umelahi said.

Nowadays, across the country, the Army mounts roadblocks as if the country is in a full-fledged war. Their presence intimidates civilians.

In some parts of the country, travellers complain of too many roadblocks, amid delays and unprovoked disciplinary actions meted out to erring drivers and even passengers by the soldiers.

The sad development, according to some security experts, points to Nigeria's worsening insecurity resulting from the inability of the Police to optimally perform its civil security duties.

"Our Police men and officers are ill-equipped and poorly motivated. The two are part of the reasons they lag in protecting lives and property in the country and that is why the Army is often stepping in to help," Bem Hembafan, a retired police officer said.

He noted that the presence of the Army is being felt more out-



side the barracks these days because the insecurity menace is escalating beyond civil policing and beyond the power of police, which is short-staffed and ill-equipped.

In August last year, Kayode Egbetokun, the then acting Inspector-General of Police (IGP), disclosed that Nigeria must recruit an additional 190,000 officers to secure the country adequately.

Egbetokun, who was newly appointed then, regarded his request as one of the ways to address the escalating insecurity situation in the country.

Objectively, with a police officer to citizen ratio of 1:540, below the United Nation's recommended ratio of 1:450, many security experts insist that Nigeria lacks the required number of police personnel to ensure security of lives and property across the country.

"At present, we have less than 400,000 police officers and men to police a country of over 200 million people with a land mass of 923,768 square kilometers.

"That is not reasonable, the police is overwhelmed," the retired police officer said.

With the above persisting lapses, the Army has always come to the rescue, and unintentionally maintaining its influence after 25 years of civil rule in the country.

Available data also points to the worsening insecurity in the country and the reason the military is

taking over civil policing from the Police.

Nigeria ranked 143 among 163 independent nations and territories in the 16th edition of the Global Peace Index, courtesy of the Institute for Economics & Peace Measuring. It moved three places up on the log from the 146th position it was ranked in 2021.

Sadly, Nigeria ranked 144 (after Israel) among 163 independent nations and territories, according to the level of peacefulness in the 17th edition of the 2023 peace index.

As well, a report by Statista, a global data and business intelligence platform, which measured the Risk of genocide in Nigeria between 2017 and 2024, revealed that Nigeria is the fifth country in sub-Saharan Africa at risk of genocide. Worldwide, Nigeria ranked 12th as of 2024. The risk percentage of mass killing stood at 3.2 percent, dropping from 7.9 percent in the preceding year, according to Statista.

Moreover, media reports revealed that 6,931 people were killed across the country in the first year of President Bola Tinubu, the deaths included 17 soldiers, and no fewer than 50 people reportedly killed in the Okuama crisis.

In view of the growing rate and new dimensions of insecurity in the country, Ifeodor Ogala, a retired naval officer, noted that

whether internal or external, security should be given priority, else the country's sovereignty would be threatened.

"The Army is doing well and if it requires going outside its constitutional responsibility to ensure security, Nigeria will be better for it. For me, it does not really matter which security agency that is mounting the roadblocks, what matters is achieving the expected results.

"If the Army retires to the barracks and Nigerians keep dying every day in the hands of terrorists, what is the gain? It is a let-down for us because we have families and relatives who don't live in the barracks," Ogala said.

The retired soldier, who owns an indigenous hotel brand as well as lectures part-time at the National Open University, Port Harcourt Study Centre, noted that whatever progress the country has made in the fight against insecurity is possible because of the military, which has also suffered the most casualties.

"I have colleagues who have lost relatives and even sons in the fight against insecurity. I lost one of the boys who I helped to get into the Army to an ambush by bandits. When a soldier dies, someone has lost a son; someone has lost a brother, a husband and a father. So, praise the soldiers for taking the maximum risk of securing the country. We are not taking over

the responsibility of the police but heavily complementing it," Ogala concluded.

Pius Obiozor, an Aba-based industrialist, appreciates the Army for risking the lives of its men and officers on Nigerian highways and difficult terrains in order to safeguard the citizenry, but said that the way they go about the security was the issue.

"There are too many Army roadblocks in the country, especially in the South-South and South-East axis of the country, as if Nigeria is at war with itself.

"The officers, especially younger ones, turn themselves into mini-gods at these roadblocks and can punish motorists and passengers any way they like including elderly people. The intimidation is too much," Obiozor lamented.

Offering ways of returning to the era when the police and not the soldiers policed the country, Hembafan noted that all the security agencies in the country should join forces in taming insecurity now and when it gets to a minimal level, the Army can withdraw and the police can take over from there.

"For now, the situation is almost getting out of hand and we need the Army to show its might.

"But the police also need to improve and do their best with the little they have because most Nigerians think police will compromise unlike the Army. But we have many professionals in the force," Hembafan said.

In his opinion, Mutiu Adedeji, a strategy and protocol manager, in a blue chip company in Lagos, urged the Inspector General of Police to recall a large number of his men and officers attached to private businessmen, large companies, corporate organisations, government officials and VIPs.

"The IG complained that he needs more officers to adequately carry out the civil policing role, but he and his predecessors have allowed a good number of the officers to idle away and run errands for the VIPs they guard.

"Some police officers are even used as drivers by the people their guard to pick children from school and other errands a gun-wielding man should not run.

"You cannot leave an insignificant number of police men to ensure peace and protect lives and property of the citizens, when the majority are idling away in air-conditioned cars and houses and expect the Army not to step in to cover up those lapses," Adedeji said.

Meanwhile, with the look of things, the insecurity situation is not a day battle and is beyond the capacity of the police, hence the Army is likely going to live among civilians for long, mounting more roadblocks and possibly having altercations with civilians from time to time.



# Entrepreneur

## We need government's help to supply all pharmaceutical firms in Nigeria with snail slime - Ukaha

Visu Ventures Nigeria Limited, an agriculture firm with many sections. One of the sections is the snail- farm. The farm is located at Afaha Nsit, Nsit-Ibom Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, with over 60 million snails can produce over one million snail slime to feed the pharmaceutical industries in the country if the right assistance is provided by the government. JASPER UKAHA, chairman/CEO of the country spoke to SABY ELEMBA on the success of the business and the need for the state and Federal Government to provide the necessary equipment. Excerpts:

**K**indly take us through this large snail farm?

Visu Nigeria Limited is an agric firm with many sections, such as cassava, vegetables, fruits and crops, etc which are located outside this area. This snail farm was established seven years ago but before that time, we had started business here in 2014. Initially, this place was a poultry farm but as the cost of getting poultry feeds became so high, we decided to move into snail farming because the cost of running snail business is cheaper. In snail rearing, you find out that the profit is high when compared with the poultry business. And that is why we went into snail farming business.

**Could you tell us how much you have so far invested in this business?**

First, we have quarters where workers live; the place took not less than N20 million to build it then. The next structure will not take less than N30 million and we are not talking about 50 plots of land we have procured for expansion. And for the snail-rearing, we have invested over N50million.

**How much loan and assistance from the government have you received?**

We have not received any loan from any bank or assistance from the government. Because we found out that it is difficult to obtain loans. Government doesn't give out loans except those who are closely attached with or related to the people in the government.

**When you say that the government does not give out loans, are you saying that you have applied before and did not get?**

Yes, we have applied to the Bank of Agriculture (BOA). I have every document; I have a storey-building that was valued over N60 million then as security. They said they needed Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) and other documents and we gave them,



Jasper Ukaha

yet we were not considered worthy to be given the loan. Anything leading to the government, if you are not highly connected with the people in government, you cannot get it.

In this part of the country, we only hear about government assisted programmes in the radio, it is not done in this area in the real sense of it for the benefit of the people.

If you hear that government is giving out agric loans, it is only meant for a particular set of people in that government and to their relatives, it cannot come to us. But the people they will give the loans do not have farms

but you that have farm, you will not be given, that's just the truth. They only give the loan to politicians and they share the money.

They give to political imaginary farmers, they are not physical farmers and that is why we are having shortage of foods in this country. Because the people that actually do the farming work do not have access to the loans. But the people that get it stay in their offices and get millions of naira meant for the real farmers, and they do not know what to do other than to buy expensive cars and drive.

**In this case, what should you suggest to the government?**

On the 23 April, 2024, the former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan visited this Visu Ventures Nigeria Limited snail farm, when he heard about it. He walked round the farm, and was shocked at what he saw. It was a very big encouragement to us.

Now, if the government actually wants to give loan to farmers they should visit that farm. The former president Jonathan was able to visit this place, entered the pen, picked the snails, and others he wanted by himself. In Akwa Ibom State here, we want the state commissioner for agriculture to do so by visiting Visu Ventures Nigeria Limited and other farmers. And the government should ensure that real farmers get the loans,

foods and agric products will be coming out in abundance.

Like here in Akwa Ibom State, we have a good Governor, Pastor Umo Bassey Eno. He is really encouraging farmers. Every Friday he will direct that all the workers should go to their different farms to work. And he is working to provide farmers with seeds and seedlings, and empower them.

**How do you ensure that your workers who are not skilled attend to the snails effectively?**

Here in Visu Ventures Nigeria Limited, at Afaha- Nsit Ibom, in Akwa Ibom State, we not only produce snails and other agric products, but we are also into training of workers. The snail farming needs passion, and you will study it before you enter into it. Snail farming is something that takes care of the health sector and cosmetics sector of the country.

**How rewarding is the snail farming business?**

It is a rewarding business, but we want the government to visit here and help us to scale up investments. We are not only rearing snails for commercial and health purposes, we also train students and those who want to go into snail farming.

**How do you get the feeds?**

**Looking around, one can see that the workers are very busy, how do you feel helping to reduce the unemployment in Akwa Ibom State?**

We actually feel happy when we employ people to work with us in Visu Ventures Nigeria Limited. But remember that we have other arms of Visu Nigeria Limited where we have employed workers also.

We strongly believe that very soon, we are going to employ up to 30 workers more.

**What does it take to establish a flourishing snail farm?**

In this particular farm, we have not less than 60 million snails. In a flourishing snail farm business, there are machines to extract the snail slime. You will have the machines that will dry the meat of the snails. And with this farm alone, working optimally, the pharmaceutical companies in this state will not import snail slime. If the government's help is available to us, and more snail farms are established, the pharmaceutical industries in this country would not want to import snail slime again.

What we need is the equipment and not cash. With the equipment, we can produce one million litres of snail slime every three months. What we need the government to do is to empower us and we will feed all the



We import only high breeding baby snails; we produce the feeds; we feed them with pawpaw leaves, plantain leaves, pawpaw seeds, potatoes, vegetables, cassava leaves, there are so many other leaves, including bitter leaf. We plant all these leaves in our farms.

pharmaceutical industries in the state. As at now, we have over 60 million snails at Visu Ventures Nigeria Limited and we are going to expand it. Currently, India is into snail farming business, also Germany, China is also stepping into the production of snail and snail slime.



# Inspiration

## I am music's messenger – Yemi Alade

Popular singer, Yemi Alade, has said she sees herself as a messenger of music. The Johnny crooner said she loves music so much and that is the only way she can explain what the art means to her.

"I love music. It is the one thing that I'm incredibly gifted at. I am deeply rooted and connected to music. For me, it's therapy, life and it has chosen me as a messenger. That's how I can explain it."

Indeed, her love for music would be her driving force as Yemi has remained relevant in the industry against all odds and she said she is going to remain relevant, no matter how tough it gets.

She said, "The reality of the matter is that the music industry has always been tough. Even before I showed any interest in music, it was tough and will continue to be tough. But you know what they say about tough situations, only the strongest will survive."

Indeed, Yemi doesn't slack. Even with her hit songs that have gained her popularity, the young woman has remained unstoppable, dishing out new vibes all the time, with her latest called Tomorrow.

Talking about the new song, Yemi said, "Tomorrow" is a special song to me. It is a dance/conscious oriented song that reminds us of the endless possibilities and a second chance that "Tomorrow" gives every one of us. It was borne from bare melodies that manifested into words that everyone can relate to. I am glad that the song gained

massive acceptance since its release and the whole world is dancing to it.

"Growing up, African Pop music was a mixture of music that carries messages and helps us through different situations in life. This album is a blend of what my playlist consists of right now; the new and old pop music that cuts across generations and boundaries. I am generally known as someone who has always charted her own course and walked the path less travelled.

"I am a true rebel in words and in action. So many albums tend to have monotony in genre and style and it bores me easily most times. This album has something new, old and borrowed. I want to emphasize to you that every song is unique and a capsule of my thoughts and melodies and truck load of nostalgia.

Yemi is one of the most travelled musician in Nigeria that makes one wonders how and when she finds time to record and write new songs.

She explained by saying, "There will always be time for the things that are most important and writing music is something I always do with ease on the road as I make voice notes very frequently and later create the production. "I like to visit new food spots that have excellent reviews and when I feel like I need new stimuli, I go to a new country and get a villa to myself with a personal chef and a view that's breathtaking. It relaxes me immensely."

Away from her music,



Yemi hardly talks about her personal life.

When asked if she was in a relationship she said, "I would like people to continue to focus on the things that I am willing to share with them, which is the music. The focus is my music. Please run up the numbers people."

But when asked what fame has deprived her of she said, "My Personal space and sometimes freedom of expression without being judged."

Yemi also said she doesn't have any worry at the moment both in her life and career because, "All my worries have been cast on God."

## I have been through a lot – Halima Abubakar

Halima Abubaka, the Kogi born Nollywood actresses has said she has been through a lot in recent times. The actress who has been trailed by some controversies again and again, said she is down with an ailment, which has caused her a lot of turmoil.

Using her social media account to talk about her dilemma, Halima said the devil has tried to harm her but God has seen her through.

She said, "I thank God that what the devil means to harm me, God used it to keep me alive so that I can see and learn and be thankful for being alive. What I have seen in my life is not what I can share. My face is really worse than this. I am not here for pitty patty I am just saying God is good, I just want to be thankful and say God has saved me.

While thanking God for being with her, Halima said she



is grateful to some friends and fans who didn't abandon her.

She said, "What I have been through, only me can say it. I just want to use this opportunity to thank all those who have been there for me. There those that didn't run or reject me or criticize or judge me because it could have been anybody.

"Those that didn't check on me, I am sorry. I just realized that I am not the only one with problems; everybody is dealing with one thing or the other. To those who have reached out to me, I am grateful. I do not wish this for anybody."

## OAK Business School unveils CBT center

A new Computer based training center has been launched in Oak Business School, Lagos recently.

The chairman and rector of the school, Dr. Lance Elakamah said the initiative is aimed at ensuring that students are able to score, report, provide access to result and ensure increased efficiency.

"We believe we need to create more of this state of the art center where student can come and write their external exams. When they come here, they are likely to choose our school as one of their institutions of higher learning.

"We are not focusing so much on theory. We want students to have hands-on knowledge and experience when they come here. That is why we teach them both theory and practical. We place more emphasis on practical and we send them to factories where they can know what entrepre-

neurship is." Elakamah advised youths to think of what they want to do for themselves as the era of just going to school to get a degree is fading out. He also urged FG to encourage private initiative in whatever they do by providing power, road network and security as these will mitigate banditry and kidnapping.

The principal of Oak international college, Hajiah Nana Elakamah said she encouraged teamwork among heads of departments and staff members to bring the chairman's dream into actualisation.

One of the panelist who is also part of the project team, Habib Haruna said, "This initiative is to make sure students come to write WAEC and JAMB in the school as Federal government has stated the next West Africa School Certificate Exam will be CBT.

## St. Finbarr's Old Boys celebrate Pa Kpotie Legacy

Saint Finbarr's College, Akoka Old Students Association has challenged Nigerian leaders to emulate the lifestyle and leadership quality of the late Principal of the school, Pa Aloysius Kpotie.

They made the call during an evening of tribute ceremony and novelty match played in honour of the principal who died on April 26, 2024, at 90. He was the longest-serving college principal who headed the school from 1977 to 1998.

The old students also promised to immortalize him and extend the same treatment they showed him to other persons who have headed the school.

Speaking at the occasion held in the school

premises in Akoka, Chairman, St. Finbarrs College, Akoka, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), Dominic

Malagu, said: "Pa Kpotie impacted us in so many ways. He ensured balance in everything. If you look

at the history of the college, it has produced some of the greatest men anyone can think of in Nigeria, cutting

across various strata and all these are as a result of the impact of Pa Kpotie. He was more of a father than a teacher and Principal.

When asked about what the old students will do to immortalise him, he said: "We have some projects going on in the college and we will institute an award in his honour at our annual prize giving award. We will name some structures coming up after him.

"The old boys have taken over the burial of Pa Kpotie, and before his death, our President, Patrick Doyle supported his welfare and the welfare committee took care of his medication, gave him a stipend, and Malagu who spoke on behalf of the President of the Old Boys Association, Patrick

Doyle, advised that leaders at every level live a life to be emulated and that such will make those coming after them celebrate them.

His son, Robert Kpotie said: "My father was an enigma. Baba touched so many lives and touched many lives; we are gathered here to celebrate his good works and I pray that we all his children will be able to follow his legacy. I doubt we will be able to fill the shoes he left behind.

When asked about what leaders can learn about him, he said: "Listen to people; Pa Kpotie listened to his teachers, the gatemen, he sat with everyone and listened to their issues so, if our leaders can do that, our country will be better."





# War against piracy

## Nigeria reassures international maritime community of Deep Blue Project sustainability

•As NIMASA reveals another batch of advance combat experts heading to the sea

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Nigeria has reassured the international maritime community that the highly effective Deep Blue Project (DBP) which has won respects around the world is being sustained.

This is as Nigeria through the Nigerian Maritime Management and Safety Administration (NIMASA) has unveiled the 2024 batch of advanced combat experts who would immediately head out to the territorial waters.

The much-needed reassurances came from the Minister of Defence, Mohammed Badaru Abubakar, Thursday, June 6, 2024, at the Military Base in Elele near Port Harcourt where another batch of combat operatives were flagged off to the sea.

Nigeria's waters became a huge concern to the international maritime community due to frequent attacks by sea pirates. This led to several sanctions including listing Nigeria in the Hot List (danger zone) and slamming of the dreaded War Risk Insurance (WRI) which makes freight to Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea very expensive, thus making goods coming to Nigeria higher in price than anywhere else around the world.

Nigeria launched the DBP in 2019 to fight back and this led to steady reduction in number of attacks. Nigeria through NIMASA began to press for a review to delist Nigeria, but the international community was said to be apprehensive of sustainability of the fight as change of administration (2023 elections) loomed near.

It was gathered that the international community viewed Nigeria as a place where mere change of administration could halt well intended policies and programmes. Sources in NIMASA were said to have tried to reassure them on this and they too may have been apprehensive.

Now, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is said to have demonstrated huge desire to sustain the gains of the DBP and even do more. The successful conduct and graduation of another batch to join the over 300 operatives at sea seems to create huge excitement in the security and maritime community in Nigeria and thus reassured the international community.

Many say shipping is no local matter because it hooks up interests and assets of many countries at same time from goods ownership, ship ownership, staff on the vessels that may be citizens of different countries, insurance matters, etc.

Understanding the dreaded Deep Blue Project:

Before the coming of the Deep Blue Project, the fight was said to be uncoordinated as each security agency took command from its headquarters, making prompt reappraisal very difficult. The idea was endorsed to create a central command with men drawn the Navy, the Air Force, the Army,



Ministers, security chiefs, and maritime chiefs inspecting security assets at Elele in Rivers State at graduation of 2024 batch of the Advanced Combat Training

the Police, and the Directorate of State Security (DSS). They were provided with the best of equipment anywhere in the world in ships, aircraft, fast boats, choppers, and the best communication systems.

It was designed to provide a solution that enables them to manage, control, and protect the valuable resources of Nigeria and to allow Nigeria control the entire maritime domain and Nigeria's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and prevent any illegal activities. The DBP approach is said to be based on timely and accurate detection of suspicious activities in the marine and coastal environment and immediate reaction and intervention in case of a threat.

The DBP is based on the unique predictive maritime analytics system, providing comprehensive monitoring of the entire EEZ, generating alerts on potential events thereby providing complete situational awareness for its users. The integrated solution enables both the protection of the country from illegal and piracy activities as well as the protection of Nigeria's EEZ.

The C4i Command and Control Centre located at NIMASA Resource Center in kirikiri is said to be responsible for the presentation of an integrated maritime situation picture of the Nigerian waters from the coastline and

the shallows and up to the EEZ boundaries and beyond it.

The system integrates all available information collected from all surveillance sensors as well as external systems and compiles the maritime situation picture and analyses the situation in order to provide alerts and threat assessment. The system provides a user-friendly interface providing a clear and coherent presentation of the maritime situation picture and enables querying of information by NIMASA. With the intelligence and information gathered from the protect assets, the response to the threat or the illegal activities includes the intervention of the Maritime Security Unit, the unit is dedicated to conduct unconventional and counter-guerrilla warfare enabling it professional level with minimum exposure. It is said to help to create quality targets for operation based on Intelligence; and above all enhance the safety of lives and property at the maritime environment, and enhance the enforcement capabilities of NIMASA to generate revenue.

Some of the deadly assets of the DBP include the special force Maritime Security Unit (MSU) with 337 highly trained and well-equipped operatives; two Special Mission Aircraft (SMA) with Airborne Surveillance Intelligence and Observation System; three Special Mission Helicopters

(SMHa) for search/rescue and intervention by the Maritime Security Unit; 16 Armored Vehicles for Maritime Security Unit; 17 Interceptors for Maritime Security Unit; and many more.

Nigeria still ready - Minister of Defence:

The readiness of Nigeria to continue to uphold and upgrade the DBP was reassured by the Minister of Defence (Abubakar) during his keynote address at Elele when he noted that the event was not just a graduation ceremony but also a testament of hard work, dedication, and commitment to securing the nation's maritime domain. He reminded the graduates that they have the responsibilities of safeguarding the waters and ensuring that they remained safe, secure, and free from all forms of threats.

He said the event was not an ordinary one and reminded the graduates that the training equipped them to be competent to tackle illegal bunkering, smuggling, illegal fishing, and to guard against environmental injuries.

Saying he followed and monitored the training, the minister said he was satisfied, adding that maritime security was a collaborative venture. He said the DBP was an important matter in the Renewed Hope Agenda of the Tinubu administration which is about protecting Nigeria's territorial waters.

On this, he said, the highest demands are made of the advanced combatants who were trained by foreigners. He enjoined them to use their training to defend Nigeria and its economy.

Tinubu is resolute about sustainability - Minister of Maritime and Blue Economy

The reassurances desired by the international maritime economy came more from the Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Adegboyega Oyetola, who said President Tinubu is resolute about the sustainability of the project. He said the president was ready to provide whatever was needed to keep Nigeria rating on security in the Gulf of Guinea so as to sustain the high rating Nigeria has achieved. He said blue economy is all about safety and security at sea.

He also said the Deep Blue Project was pivotal in strengthening the national security and ensuring safety of Nigeria waterways.

He maintained that the project was initiated by the Federal Government and championed by NIMASA. He assured the graduates that President Tinubu has demonstrated his unwavering support for maritime security.

Nigeria out of hot list - NIMASA DG

What seemed to be the biggest news on the day was the disclosure by the Director-General of NIMASA, Dayo Mobereola, that Nigeria is no longer in the piracy hot list of the international community.

He gave the history and objectives of the Deep Blue Project and the removal of Nigeria from the hot list was very remarkable because of the huge impact in the economy especially the push for a deepened blue economy.

The DG said the task of winning back the confidence of the international maritime community was uppermost in their mind.

He said the Minister of Defence and that of the Blue Econ-

omy have worked to sustain the new rating of Nigeria.

Speaking further, the DG said Nigeria did not witness any successful attack in its territorial waters in 24 months.

He talked about milestones gained in Maritime security saying the graduands will add to those already in the waters defending the nation. He said the target and aim were to make Nigeria a Maritime nation with special mission assets on hand.

Others:

The chairman, Senate Committee on Maritime Transport, Wasiu Sanni Eshinlokun, remarked that the graduation ceremony marked the transformative milestone in the collective endeavours of Nigerians to secure the nation's maritime domain. He also said that the addition of these highly trained personnel to the Deep Blue Project was a testament of NIMASA's unwavering commitment to creating a crime-free maritime environment for Nigeria and global maritime community.

On his own, the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral E.I. Ogalla, represented by the Flag Officer Commanding, Eastern Command, a Rear Admiral, S.A. Akinwande, gave the components of the project to include: the establishment of the special force - Maritime Security Unit (MSU) with 337 highly trained and well equipped operatives. He listed the special assets that were on display.

Other dignitaries present at the occasion were: the Chief of Army Staff, represented by the General Officer Commanding, 6 Division Nigerian Army Port Harcourt, Major General Jamal Abdussalam, the Chief of Naval Staff represented by the Flag Officer Command, Eastern Naval Command, Rear Admiral S.A. Akinwande, the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun represented by the Commissioner of Police, Rivers State Police Command, Olatunji Disu and others.



Graduands ready to move to the waters



Helicopter demonstrating combat air operations



# Environment

## Thrilling new film 'Offshoot' to premiere in Cinemas June 14

BRIGHT IMOIH

The wait is finally over! "Offshoot," a thrilling new film that promises to keep audiences on the edge of their seats, is set to premiere in cinemas nationwide on June 14th.

Produced by Oluwatoyin Adewumi and Benjamin Abejide Adeniran and directed by a Ugandan filmmaker, Azeny T. Steve, the film delivers an emotional and action-packed narrative that explores the depths of familial bonds and personal sacrifice.

Offshoot opens with Modesire Mbakwe, affectionately known as Dee, celebrating her 40th birthday following her recent appointment as the Acting Head of Investigation and Operations at the National Drug Agency (NDA).

Dee's appointment follows the untimely death of her predecessor, and she is determined to make a significant impact by combating the drug menace that has gripped the nation. Her husband, Dike Mbakwe, and their intelligent and beautiful teenage daughter, Amara, share in her joy.

Dee's tenure begins with a series of triumphant raids that disrupt the operations of a powerful drug cartel. However,



er, her success comes at a cost. The cartel quickly targets Dee, sending her death threats that escalate in severity.

Despite Dike's pleas for caution and his growing concern for their family's safety, Dee's commitment to her mission is unwavering. There is no stopping her.

As the threats intensify and Amara becomes a target, the strain on Dee and Dike's marriage reaches a breaking point. This plunges the family into a harrowing journey that endangers Dee's career, their marriage, and possibly even her sanity.

Offshoot features compelling performances from

Kehinde Bankole as Modesire Mbakwe, Kelechi Udegbe as Dike Mbakwe, Ibrahim Suleiman, Greg 'Teddy Bear' Ojefua, Bimbo Manuel, David Jones David, Tomiwa Sage, Vera Ephraim, Nonso Odogwu, Fausat Balogun 'Madam Saje', Salisu Danjuma Gezawa, Princess Kossi and other talented actors. Their portrayals bring depth and authenticity to this gripping story.

It's a narrative that combines intense action with profound emotional moments, making it a must-watch. Don't miss the chance to experience "Offshoot" on the big screen in a cinema near you from 14th June.

You can also join the conversation on social media using the hashtag #offshoot-movie and follow the official account @verteview on all social media platforms for behind-the-scenes content, interviews, and more.

Verte View is dedicated to producing high-quality films that captivate and inspire audiences around the globe.

With a commitment to create awareness for pertinent themes in society and to promote values through powerful storytelling, Verte View brings unforgettable narratives to life on the big screen.

## MTN rewards AMVCA Best Short Film winner

THE just concluded Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards was filled with lots of excitement and surprises. The foremost awards recognised and honoured some of Africa's finest filmmakers and storytellers with various activities such as the Special Night with Icons, Young Filmmakers Day, Cultural Day Celebration and the Awards Night.

As a consistent supporter of entertainment, arts, and culture, MTN Nigeria sponsored the award category for Best Short Film /Online Video of the AMVCA for the third consecutive year. This aligns with the brand's commitment to digital and cultural innovation, and African excellence.

The award-winning short film titled "Broken Mass" was written, directed, and produced by Kaghor Idhebor. The film was lauded for its compelling narrative and exceptional performances, capturing the attention of both the audience and the jury with its powerful storytelling and impressive visual execution. The film portrays the psychological impact of child molestation from a father's perspective, drawing inspiration from Nigerian painter and sculptor Ben Enwonwu for the main character played by Richard. This award is a significant achievement for Idhebor and his team as it signals their creative excellence in the film industry.

Kgho Idhebor expressed his gratitude for the win, stating, "Winning this award is a tremendous

dous honour. 'Broken Mask' is a project close to my heart, and I am thrilled that it has resonated with so many people. I thank my team, AMVCA organizers, and MTN for their support and for providing a platform that celebrates and uplifts African storytellers."

MTN Nigeria awarded Kaghor N1 million, MTN broadband router, and lots of other goodies.

Commenting on MTN's commitment to Nigerian entertainment, Emamoke Ogoro, general manager, Brand & Communication, MTN Nigeria, said "We are incredibly proud to continue to sponsor a category that shines light on the bright and vibrant talent in our film industry. 'Broken Mask' is a testament to the creativity and ingenuity that defines African cinema, and we congratulate Kgho Idhebor on this well-deserved win."

MTN Nigeria's sponsorship of the Best Short Film category for the third consecutive time spotlights its commitment to amplifying the voices of emerging filmmakers and providing a platform for their storytelling abilities. This partnership with the AMVCA demonstrates a shared commitment to celebrating creativity and advancing the Nigerian and African entertainment industry. MTN Nigeria remains dedicated to promoting and supporting the Nigerian entertainment industry and collaborating with strategic partners to create value across the entertainment industry value chain.

## Enugu agency, UNICEF urge youths to plant trees

REGIS ANUKWUOJI, ENUGU

Enugu State Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency (EN-RUWASSA), Enugu State Environment in conjunction with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Enugu Field Office, have marked the 2024 World Environment Day, with planting of trees.

Speaking after planting over 100 trees by the students of GTC, Enugu, the Senior Special Adviser (SSA) to Governor Peter Mbah on Water/Sanitation/Hygiene, Chika Mbah said: "We cannot compromise our environment," and stressed the importance of proper disposal of wastes, especially nylon and plastics to preserve the environment.

She also said that the 2024 Environmental Day with the theme, 'Land Restoration, Desertification and Drought Resilience,' and tree planting campaign at the premises of Government Technical College (GTC), Enugu was to demonstrate to the youth the importance of preservation of our environment now and in the future.

Chinonye Nnamchi, acting managing director, Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency



(RUWATSSA), said that the theme of this year's celebration was a key pillar of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030).

"A rallying point call for the protection and revival of ecosystem all around the world, which is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," she said.

She further said that UNICEF was advocating for a greener environment the #Greenrising project.

Nnamchi disclosed that by 2027, more than one million youths/community volunteers

from across Nigeria would be actively engaged on climate action, by planting at least one million trees around water sources, school premises, public spaces etc.

"By 2027, at least, 100 LGAs become free from plastic waste, as a result of advocacy, mobilisation and action by youth climate activists; and at least 500 plastic waste recycled, generating employment for at least, 20,000 youths/girls/women.

"Also, by 2027, 16 state governments recognize the role of youth and children in state climate policies and establish

formal mechanism to engage them in consultation/policy princess," she said.

Ude Ebele of the Nigerian Environmental Society said the event was all about changing the environment to protect the present and future generations.

"We intensify efforts to educate the younger generations on the preservation of the environment and to be conscious of the environment," she said.

The world environment day is celebrated every June 5, by the United Nations to encourage awareness and action for the protection of the environment.

## Savage Xtra to host listening party for second album

Uche Barry Nwachukwu, a Nigerian singer, music maker, and record label executive is gearing up to release his highly anticipated second album, 'Young, Blessed and Dangerous' (YBD). To celebrate the launch, the singer who is better known by Savage Xtra, his stage name, will host a listening party on June 8, 2024.

Speaking on the forthcoming album, Savage Xtra highlighted that YBD represents a significant milestone in his evolving career, promising to redefine the Afrobeats genre. The 14-track album seamlessly blends elements of Afrobeats, R&B and hip-hop, showcasing his unique sound and lyrical prowess. Themes of empowerment, self-discovery, love, and resilience are intricately woven throughout the album, offering a rich and varied listening experience.

Releasing the new album is a dream come true for Savage Xtra. "This album reflects my journey and the experiences that have shaped me. I wanted to create music that resonates with people from all walks of life and inspires them to embrace their power and potential. I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved and cannot wait for everyone to hear it," Savage Xtra said.

Following the release, he plans to embark on a world tour, per-

forming in Europe and the UK after having already toured East and South Africa. The tour will cover multiple cities, allowing fans to experience his dynamic live performances.

The album 'Young, Blessed and Dangerous' will be available on all major streaming platforms including: Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer, and other digital music stores.

Born in the UK and raised in Oyiibo, Rivers State, Savage Xtra hails from Umezala in Owerri, Imo State. He is the founder of the record label Alta Confianza, which translates to "High Confidence" in Spanish. The label boasts a roster of talented artists such as; Good Life, Moseric, Damascus, Phloryda, and Shunhybrid. He is also the founder of 'OY to the World' Carnival, a free music festival showcasing the artistry and cultural heritage of Eastern Nigeria. "The Road Business," his debut album, received critical acclaim, solidifying his place in the music industry and setting the stage for the ambitious and genre-defying second album.

With 'Young, Blessed and Dangerous,' Savage Xtra is set to profoundly impact the music scene, further establishing his unique voice and storytelling abilities. Fans eagerly await the release and the electrifying performances that will follow.



# Environment

## Lagos in pursuit of sustainable environmental policies to mitigate climate change effects

JOHN SALAU

In an era marked by escalating climate threats, the deep-seated colonial legacies intertwined with modern environmental challenges draw urgent attention.

Lagos, Nigeria's economic capital and Africa's most populous city molded by its colonial past stands as a distressing example where historical injustices amplify current climate adversities.

Currently, Lagos confronts a barrage of environmental hazards like rising sea levels, relentless flooding, and intensified urban heat island effects — each magnified by persistent neocolonial influences that echo through its governance and infrastructure.

Flooding, sea level rise, storm surge, high temperature and high rainfall intensity constitute the notable hazards and high vulnerability levels which are shaped by Lagos' high population density, large poor population, low lying topography and coastal location.

Furthermore, urban coastal megacities like Lagos face flooding challenges that may be exacerbated by climate change in the future. However, in combating the challenges of climate change in Lagos, the Babajide Sanwo-Olu administration in the year 2020, unveiled a five-year Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2020-2025 with the ultimate goal geared toward achieving a zero-carbon Lagos, with the expectation of transforming the state into emission-neutral city by 2050.

Similarly, in commemorating the 2024 World Environment Day, the Lagos State government reaffirmed its commitment to implementing sustainable environmental policies aimed at mitigating climate change effects, promoting a circular economy and ensuring environmental protection against drought and desertification.

In achieving this, Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA), in a statement, promised to scale up its advocacy campaigns in schools and colleges to carry youth along in the implementation of the reform policies geared towards combating climate change and greenhouse effect for sustainable environmental growth.

Tunde Ajayi, general manager, LASEPA, disclosed that the state would partner Dangote Industries and the Nigerian Breweries to sponsor



an essay competition among undergraduate students across all tertiary institutions in the state as a way of involving youths in the task of environmental preservation, as part of its school advocacy programmes for the World Environment Day celebration for 2024.

According to him, the essay competition aimed at raising the consciousness of youths across the state on environmental preservation, desertification and other climate change mitigation efforts towards achieving a sustainable environment for a healthy living.

The theme of 2024 World Environment Day is: 'Land restoration, desertification and drought resilience, with the slogan, Our Land, Our future. We are #GenerationRestoration.' The theme underscores the investigation into the effects of climate change on Lagos, highlighting how the relics of colonialism are not just remnants of history but active agents in contemporary ecological crises.

At the Rhetorical Society of America 2024 Conference held in Denver, Colorado, Olarotimi Ogungbemi, a researcher in the field of environmental justice rhetoric and climate politics, from the University of Texas, San Antonio, unveiled a seminal research titled 'Community Climate Tropes & Neocolonial Resistance from Lagos, Nigeria.'

Ogungbemi's presentation at the conference not only

shared pivotal research findings but also ignited a discussion on the methodologies and frameworks employed in studying environmental justice. His integration of academic analysis with committed community engagement sets a new benchmark for research in the fields of technical communication and rhetoric.

According to him, the innovative approach encourages further exploration of how other postcolonial urban centers globally navigate their unique environmental challenges, fostering a reevaluation of traditional research paradigms in light of colonial legacies and their lasting impacts on contemporary urban environments.

His presentation served as a vital probe into how colonial histories intricately shape environmental policies and community reactions in Lagos — Africa's bustling metropolis and economic powerhouse.

"I started my investigation in 2021 and it's ongoing. Lagos has become my field of investigation as a researcher. I'm investigating climate change, and discourses of climate politics in Lagos. My research also explores both historical and contemporary narratives regarding environmental degradation in the city."

According to Ogungbemi, the study charts the intersections of environmental justice, rhetoric, and neocolonialism, offering a comprehensive perspective on the challenges of climate adapta-

tion in a postcolonial setting. "This research broadens our understanding of environmental dynamics in Lagos and equally exemplifies the broader implications of historical legacies on modern urban resilience strategies," he stated.

Advocating for a shift towards community-based research methodologies, Ogungbemi emphasizes the necessity of involving local populations directly in the research process. He stated that this participatory approach ensures that the research is conducted with the community rather than merely about them, fostering a model of mutual benefit and cooperation.

**“This perspective is vital for developing fair and effective environmental policies that respect the sovereignty and specific circumstances of postcolonial communities”**

He stated further that by incorporating local knowledge and narratives, the methodologies enable the development of environmental strategies that are both culturally pertinent and effective. According to him, the emphasis on local engagement is crucial for crafting sustainable solutions that resonate with community needs and perspectives, thereby enhancing the overall impact and relevance of environmental policies.

Ogungbemi disclosed that central to his analysis is a rigorous examination of the rhetorical strategies used in local discourses about climate change. According to him, the study illuminates how specific tropes and metaphors encapsulate the community's experiences and resistance against external environmental mandates.

He stated further that a notable aspect of his analysis is the integration of indigenous water deities in strategies to combat climate impacts, highlighting a fascinating blend of traditional practices with contemporary environmental management. "This approach enriches our understanding of cultural resilience and showcases the potential of heritage to inform and strengthen modern-day environmental policies."

According to Ogungbemi, an essential component of the research is the strategic use of digital media to amplify the voices of local communities against neocolonial environmental practices. He

stated that through platforms like social media, blogs, and online forums, communities in Lagos can broadcast their experiences and forms of resistance to a global audience.

"This digital engagement is crucial for garnering international support and highlighting the unique environmental challenges faced by Lagos, thus placing local struggles within a global context for broader recognition and action," he stated.

Speaking further on the findings, Ogungbemi stated that insights from the research hold profound implications for policymakers and environmental planners. According to him, findings suggest that effective climate adaptation strategies must account for the historical and cultural contexts of the communities they aim to serve.

Strategies developed without this consideration are likely to fail, as they do not align with the community's established values, knowledge systems, and historical experiences. "This call for culturally informed policy-making is essential for the success of environmental initiatives in postcolonial urban settings."

Furthermore, Ogungbemi disclosed that the study critically engages with the global environmental discourse, urging a reevaluation of the power dynamics that often underpin policy decisions.

By bringing attention to the neocolonial foundations of certain environmental initiatives, he advocates for a more equitable approach that truly considers the priorities and needs of postcolonial societies. "This perspective is vital for developing fair and effective environmental policies that respect the sovereignty and specific circumstances of postcolonial communities."

In conclusion, Ogungbemi's research provides a crucial lens through which to view the persistent influence of colonialism on current environmental issues. His work acts as a clarion call to scholars, policymakers, and community leaders worldwide to forge new paths in environmental justice that are grounded in respect, recognition, and rights for all.

Ogungbemi stated further that by deepening the collective understanding of the complex interactions in climate justice, the world can better prepare to meet the global challenge of climate change with solutions that are effective, just, and equitable.



# The Worshipper

## Nigeria can't build anything meaningful on uncertainty – Pastor Akinyemi

Bolaji Akinyemi, the senior pastor of Voice of the Word Ministries, spoke about the one anniversary of president Tinubu and the state of the nation, points out what the Church must do to intervene in the political sphere. Excerpts by **JOHN SALAU**

**C**AN was against the muslim-muslim ticket of the APC in 2023; what will you say the Church got wrong?

Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is the structure. CAN have five blocs. PFN is one of the blocs in CAN. Last year 2023 PFN established what it called the Directorate for Politics & Governance (DPG). After the 2023 election, what has the DPG been doing since then to promote the political and general interests of Christians in Nigeria under the government of President Tinubu in the first year of his administration? The DPG is supposed to be giving us monthly reviews of the activities of the government. The interests of the Church cannot be served by people that are running errands for the government. There are so many things wrong with the Church in Nigeria vis-à-vis the structure we call CAN. Before the last election, there was a directorate at the national level which was managed by Bishop STV Adegbite. He was also the unofficial campaign spokesperson for Asiwaju during the election campaigns. We, the Church, really don't understand politics and those that do are taking advantage of the structure to foster their personal interests, and they are getting away with it. The offices are there but with poor supervision and the naivety of



Akinyemi

those who sit on top of CAN's structure. They can't speak to those who are erring and beat them to shape. That's why we are where we are.

**Is the DPG still relevant considering all that happened in the polity in the last one year?**

The truth is the body language of the people who were involved. That portfolio was created to serve the presidential interests and ambition of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and as soon as he became the president, there was no need for the platform again. We have seen

the turn of man (Emilokan). It is time to see the turn of God if we want to achieve real hope and positive changes in Nigeria. God is not religious. He's the one who ordains leadership. So, if a leadership is failing we have to take it back to God.

**Is it possible for PFN to leverage DPG to benefit the Church in Nigeria instead of individuals?**

You can't build any meaningful thing on uncertainty and falsity. The foundation of the DPG is faulty. We have to pull it down and rebuild it from the scratch if we really

want it to be useful for the collective interests of the body of Christ in Nigeria.

What is your view on president Tinubu's appointment so far; has he done enough for the Church in the last one year?

It is unfortunate that these two leading Christian bodies in Nigeria; CAN and PFN, do not understand politics. The wisdom of democracy demands that majority will have their way and the minority will have their say. Within the context of Nigeria's structure today, Christians in Nigeria better accept the fact that we are the minority and as the minority our responsibility is to be in the opposition. So, we should be talking because that is what we are left with. We cannot be part of the table where things are divided or shared. How many of the appointees in this government got their appointment on the basis that they are representing the Christian community. It was convenient for them to tell us that the President of the Senate, Godwin Akpabio is a Christian. But Akpabio as a person will serve the interests of the President, the APC caucus and the political class. These are the dynamics in politics that the Church in Nigeria is sadly and unfortunately ignorant of.

**That said; the Tinubu administration celebrated its first anniversary recently, what is your take on this?**

First, I want to appreciate you and other media professionals who give us the privilege of expressing ourselves

and putting us in the hands of Nigerians and beyond; because when we write or talk and no one is publishing us we wouldn't be where we are today. There are several people whose thoughts and opinions might be richer and better than ours, because they don't have the platforms for their expressions nobody hear about them. But our voice is being heard, and it is you our media friends that make this happen. Now, to the question, when Asiwaju Bola Tinubu came in as Nigeria's President a year ago, expectations were high but not for me because I knew that the eight years of former President Muhammadu Buhari's administration was the most terrible Nigerians have ever experienced.

**Was that a pointer the current struggles of the Tinubu's administration?**

Asiwaju Bola Tinubu was one of the people who drafted General Muhammadu Buhari into the race for Nigeria's presidency in 2015 basically because he needed to succeed Buhari as Nigeria's president. The best president Asiwaju could have succeeded was no other person than General Buhari. Asiwaju needed someone whose pedigree would be for him a stepping stone into the presidency. But Asiwaju himself never expected the eight years of General Buhari's presidency would be as terrible as it was. Of course all Nigerians know how terrible the Buhari administration was; it was a colossal disaster.

**What is your view on the**

**various events that happen in the country leading to Tinubu's emergence as president in 2023?**

Most Nigerians know the events that happened towards Asiwaju's ascension as Nigeria's president last year May 29, 2023. One was the drama in Abeokuta where Asiwaju said, "Egbe kini yi wa. Emilokan." You don't make such a statement except there have been some discussions and agreements. People may ignore that statement as may be one of his many political jabs but those of us who know Asiwaju as a strategic communicator knew that there were quite a number of things fishing behind the stage. We saw all the other dramas surrounding the election. I took a position before the election against the APC Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket. Today, I will say we stand justified by the many things happening across the country in the one year of Tinubu administration. The killings in Benue, the killings in Plateau and the killings in Southern Kaduna are the effects of the APC Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket. All these places are predominately Christian areas. The most embarrassing aspect of the spate of killings is the silence of the Church. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is not talking about it. Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) is not talking about the killings in these predominantly Christian areas in the first year of President Tinubu's government.

## Israel Kristilere, CTPAN president assaulted by Egyptian Police

JOHN SALAU

**I**srael Kristilere, the President of the Christian Tourism Practitioner's Association of Nigeria (CTPAN), the umbrella body of all Christian Pilgrimage Operators in Nigeria, was recently assaulted by Egyptian Police following his stopover alongside other travellers at the Cairo International Airport.

Kristilere, who is the CEO of Oasis of Faith Intercontinental Ltd, and senior pastor of Shepherdhill Baptist Church, Obanikoro, disclosed this in a recent social media post, narrating his experience while



travelling alongside 28 other pilgrims to Amman via an

Egyptian Air from Lagos.

He stated that upon getting to Egypt for a four-hour stopover, the team was about boarding a connecting flight when the Egyptian Police called him to follow them to their office. However, he was accused of sexually assaulting a lady at the airport.

"I took all my pilgrims to our connecting gate; H2 around 9pm and having set 26 of them there, myself and another woman who were on the trip who were flying Business class left for the business class lounge. We were in that lounge until one hour when I told her

to let go back to the gate since I saw a notification that the gate of our connecting flight was open when we arrived," he stated.

He explained that he had never set his eyes on her; however, he apologized as he was requested to do. According to him, the police insisted he apologise to the lady, which he did, stating that he did not know the lady, and if it was a missing identity, he was sorry, and that he did not commit the offence.

Thereafter, they offered a solution and told him to sign a document in Arabic. But he insisted on having the docu-

ment translated into English. "The police chief then said, in our country we believe the word of any woman as true and that means with or without evidence; you are guilty."

According to him, the police chief threatened that he would miss his flight and charged to court when he objected to signing the document. "As the heated conversation continued, I wrote I do not on the document. The desk manager of the airport came in and spoke to them, and this led to my release."

However, on getting to the aircraft, he realised that the

other 26 co-travellers had refused to enter the plane unless their leader is available to travel with them, leading to his speedy release by the officers.

Kristilere said he is calling out the Egyptian Police because he was traumatised as a result of their unruly attitude towards him. He noted that this is one of the many syndicates in various airports across Africa, and it will be essential to alert other Nigerians, the government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) and travellers to be aware of another antic in the hands of the Egyptian Police.



# Governance

## One week after anniversary, Fubara rolls out N74.9bn to rebuild demolished Assembly auditorium, road, hospitals

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The award of mega projects may have resumed in Rivers State one week after the 20-day celebrations of Gov Sim Fubara's one year in office. The masses seemed to celebrate the avalanche of projects in the run-in of the first year.

Apparently encouraged, the embattled governor who may have found that awarding projects was a better way to win the battle facing him, has resumed the award of mega projects. The first beneficiary is the demolished Rivers State House of Assembly auditorium which would gulp over N19bn.

The state executive council also approved contracts for the reconstruction of the Kalaibama/Epellema Road, and completion of four zonal hospitals across the state.

Also approved is the renovation of Bonny General Hospital; renovation and upgrade of Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Rumuigbo; as well as construction of new General Hospital at Rumuigbo in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of the State, according to a statement released by Nelson Chukwudi, chief press secretary (CPS) to Gov Fubara.

The statement put the costs thus: Assembly Auditorium N19.56bn; Kalaibama-Epellema Road and bridge in Opo-bo-Nkoro Local Government Area N29.036bn; hospitals N26.35bn.



Rivers State Commissioner for Health, Adaeze Chidinma Oreh (l); Commissioner for Information and Communications, Joseph Johnson (2nd l); Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Special Projects, Roland Obed-Whyte (2nd right); and Acting Director General, Bureau of Public Procurement, Ine Briggs (r); during a press briefing on the outcome of the State Executive Council meeting at the Executive Council Chambers of Government House in Port Harcourt on Friday.

The zonal hospitals are located in Ahoada Town in Ahoada Local Government; Degema Town in Degema Local Government; Omoku Town in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government; and Bori Town in Khana Local Government Area.

The State Government said that it decided to complete the construction of the zonal hospitals in four Local Government Areas of the State in order to strengthen the secondary level healthcare service delivery to the people of the State.

Approval was also given for the cancellation of all previous contracts awarded for the construction of those zonal hospitals.

Briefing newsmen after

the meeting, Commissioner for Health, Adaeze Oreh, said the approval was sequel to the memos presented by the Ministry of Health to the State Executive Council.

Specifically, Oreh said the ministry requested for the termination of all existing contracts for those zonal hospitals in the State, and the re-awarding of fresh contracts that would enable completion of the projects, including the renovation of the Bonny General Hospital.

Oreh stated that there was also the request for the renovation and upgrade of the Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital and the construction of a new General Hospital at Rumuigbo in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area

of the State.

She said, "We are thankful to the Rivers State Executive Council that the various decisions sought and prayers that were made by the Rivers State Ministry of Health for the approvals were approved."

"This also included the construction of a new General Hospital at Rumuigbo, Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, which were not among those initially awarded for renovation."

She emphasised that competent contractors would also be mobilized to site.

On his part, the Permanent Secretary of the Rivers State Ministry of Special Projects, Roland Obed-Whyte, said his ministry presented two mem-

os that requested for the award of separate contracts. He mentioned the contractors and the costs of the projects.

"This Rivers State House of Assembly Building Complex is made up of about 34 en-suite offices, two storey buildings with elevator, gallery, meeting rooms and conference hall."

"It also includes the renovation and refurbishing of other existing structures within the House of Assembly Complex. It also includes the provision of ambulance and other external works."

Obed-Whyte explained that by the time the work on the Rivers State House of Assembly building is completed, it will turn out to be one of the very best Assembly complexes in the country.

Also, Obed-Whyte said the second memo that was presented to the State Executive Council requested for the approval of the contract for the award of the construction of the 5.75 Km long Kalaibama-Epellema Road, with a 450 meters length of bridge and carriageway of 10.3 meters with solar lights.

"Again, in these two contracts, 30 percent mobilization is to be paid as an advance payment. We believe strongly that when that road is completed, it will connect over four or five communities within that axis, and the issue of boat mishap and its attendant problems that riverine transportation faces will be a thing of the past."

Obed-Whyte said the governor is determined with his

mantra of "Rivers First" to open up the coastal areas with what he is doing on the Trans-Kalabari Road project, adding that with this project in the Opo-bo axis, the people will be the greatest beneficiaries.

In her presentation, the acting Director General of Rivers State Bureau for Public Procurement (RSBOPP), Ine Briggs, said due diligence has been done by the agency in scrutinising the projects and the cost efficiency, adding that after due diligence was conducted, the agency issued certificates of no objection to each of the projects.

She said, "The consideration of all these projects approved today by the Rivers State Executive Council, the Bureau is glad to inform the general public that it has duly carried out its regulatory function in ensuring that value for money has been met, economy has been met, fitness for purpose has been met in defending the stakeholders' position in expenditure of fund from the State."

"So, the Bureau has issued a certificate of no objection for the two projects from the Ministry of Special Projects and the projects for the Ministry of Health."

"The Bureau wants to assure the public that it will carry out its oversight functions at ensuring that quality specifications as enshrined in the approvals, would be met, and the people will feel their government, and that is our assurance as a regulatory body."

## McEnies CEO becomes IMC fellow, bags certification in AI at Oxford Business School

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Omolaeni Olaosebikan, Group Chief Executive Officer, McEnies Global Communications, a notable practitioner in marketing communications and event planning, has identified Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a transformative technology with the potential to revolutionise industries and drive economic growth not only in Nigeria but across the globe.

She made this assertion at a virtual meeting with newsmen. She used the opportunity to talk about her latest skill and knowledge acquisition feats at Said Business School, the University of Oxford, and the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC).

Omolaeni secured certifications in the Artificial Intelligence programme at Said Business School, University of Oxford on May

28, 2024, and also became a Certified Management Consultant, CMC® on May 27, 2024, at the Institute of Management Consultants. The McEnies CEO also attained IMC Fellow Membership.

While fielding questions from journalists, she shared, "Recently, after a rigorous two-month academic experience, I received a certification from the Said Business School, University of Oxford, on the Artificial Intelligence programme. The experience was incredibly engaging as it allowed me to enhance my skills in integrating AI into business processes, while also gaining insights into the ethical implications and impacts on businesses. Understanding the expectations as the world transitions towards AI in contemporary business practices has been enlightening. This certification holds great significance for



my career development and has broadened my perspective on the future of AI in business."

"Through my scholarly experience, I have gained valuable technical awareness and leadership skills essential for navigating and expanding organisations in the era of Artificial Intelligence. This enriching journey has not only equipped me to lead effectively in a rapidly evolving technological landscape but has also empowered me

to balance and excel in meeting my current work obligations. The blend of academic knowledge and practical application has honed my abilities to drive innovation and success while managing existing responsibilities with dedication and proficiency."

"I also got certification at the Institute of Management Consultants, CMC-Nigeria; this is a founding member of an international federation, The International Council of Management Consulting Institutes, ICMCI-Global; interestingly, I am now a fellow. For me, it's a big win and also a plus in career progression. This certification establishes me as a consultant capable of managing consulting business transactions within blue-chip companies with a strong emphasis on ethical standards. Equipped with this certification, along with my meticulousness, clarity, and strategic thinking, I am

well-prepared to engage with multinational corporations and provide expert consultation across various domains, ensuring precision and timely delivery of services as agreed upon."

"Permit me to also say that for Nigeria to leap-frog into the next AI revolution that is changing nearly all aspects of human life, there is an urgent need for the launch of a successful implementation of a national AI strategy in the country that hinges on collaborative efforts among stakeholders from various sectors- government and the private sector."

"By fostering partnerships between the government, businesses, researchers, and international allies, Nigeria can leverage the transformative potential of AI to drive economic growth, foster innovation, and address societal challenges. Each stakeholder has a vital role to play

in contributing to Nigeria's AI journey, whether through policy advocacy, technology adoption, research collaboration, or global partnerships. By working together towards a common vision, Nigeria can position itself as a frontrunner in AI innovation, unlocking new opportunities and shaping a prosperous future for its citizens in the age of Artificial Intelligence," she said.

Olaosebikan also used the occasion to appeal to various industry business owners and leaders to key into the AI digital transformation of Nigeria's business ecosystem through technology adoption. According to her "businesses are principal drivers of AI innovation and adoption, leveraging AI technologies to enhance operations, drive growth, and deliver value to customers in the contemporary transformative business climate."



## NewsXtra

## FRSC supports safe cycling, reels out health benefits

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

Oyediji Samuel, sector commander, Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Kogi State, has called on the public to engage in safe cycling and for exercise in order to keep fit and fight minor ailments.

Speaking during the celebration of the World Bicycle Day in the state on the theme, 'Promoting health, equity and sustainability through cycling, Oyediji, who led a team of officers and men of the corps and members of the Cycling Association to a ride on some streets of Lokoja, noted that



the experience is healthy and exciting.

Decried that cyclists are

one of the unprotected road users that must be adequately cared for.

"For centuries, bicycles have been a simple, affordable, reliable, clean, environmental-

ly fit and sustainable means of transportation, fostering environmental stewardship and health.

"What some people don't know is that through cycling many health challenges could be avoided.

"Today, the staff members of FRSC Kogi Sector Command and the cyclist association in the state are riding round the town.

"It is to showcase the usefulness of riding bicycle and to commemorate the World Bicycle Day in the state," he said.

Speaking also on safety, the sector commander said that as much as cycling should be encouraged, safety must be paramount to all riders.

He recommended safety

measures such as wearing helmets, strict compliance with road traffic rules, regulations and observing lane discipline while cycling.

"There is a need for the government at all levels to construct roads designed with bicycle lanes to enhance the safety of cyclists given the recklessness of some motorists on the road," he said.

However, he warned that every cyclist must be careful while on the road to avoid any attitude that could lead to road traffic crash.

Oyediji, equally warned all participants and drivers travelling through the state to obey traffic rules and regulations and to be patient and safety conscious on the highway.

## Group offers scholarship to 13 students in Abia

...Urges families, govt to pay attention to boy-child for balanced society

GODFREY OFURUM

He's a Hero Network, a non-governmental organisation that focuses on the wellbeing of the boy child, has awarded scholarship to 13 junior and senior secondary school children in Abia State, to mark the 2024 International Day of the Boy Child, which is celebrated annually on May 16.

The scholarship, which is for a term covers the students tuition.

Peace Ukaegbu, founder, He's a Hero Network and convener, International Boys Conference 2024, in an interview with BusinessDay urged families and government to pay adequate attention to the boy child, to create a balanced society.

She observed that the boy child has been neglected for so long, while attention is mostly

focused on the girl child, noting that the boy-child deserves to be groomed, nurtured to become a responsible citizen.

She observed that the adult male folks do not care about the boy-child, because they think that the boy-child does not need help.

"We are here to tell the world that the boy-child needs help. We need to groom, nurture him, because he is human first before his gender.

"He has emotions, we need to teach him right, to guide him right to become a well-balanced male child, who will grow up to be responsible.

You can't keep empowering the girl-child and 'leaving the boy-child. After teaching the girl child the proper things to do, who do you think she'll get married to, an untrained boy?"

"There is a lot of marriage failures nowadays, because the girls are well trained and so

they know what they want for themselves, and so when they don't see such qualities in their male suitors, they quit the marriage. So, we need to create this balance for the good of society," she advised.

Joyce Akubueze, who gave a talk entitled 'Purpose Discovery' in the First Plenary of the 2024 International Boys Conference, held recently in Aba, the commercial hub of Abia State, advised the boys not to indulge in activities that impact negatively on others.

Raymond Ukwa, an aide to Abia State Governor on Information Communication Technology (ICT), who spoke on leadership skills, advised the boys to be serious with their studies, noting that being knowledgeable would attract things that they need to live a good life.

According to him, life is about progress and for you to

be an effective leader, you need to have knowledge. Knowledge is not just about knowing how to speak English, or knowing mathematics, you have to know what's happening around you."

He advised them not to indulge in drugs and cultism, stressing that such acts will lead them to jail or untimely death.

"Indulging in fetish things to make money does not guarantee wealth. Don't do drugs, be decent, communicate effectively, don't engage in fights, fights do not solve issues. You must know God, do what is right at all times, don't lose focus and don't allow friends to mislead you," he advised.

Akachi Nwoke, the presiding pastor of The Afternoon Church, who gave a talk on entrepreneurship, advised the boys to inculcate the culture of saving.

## Abia's transport policy to create jobs, improve aesthetics of Aba, Umuahia

GODFREY OFURUM

Abia State Government's plan to build bus terminals and bus stations in Aba, the state's commercial centre, and Umuahia, the state capital, would create jobs, ease traffic and improve the aesthetics of the two urban centres, Abiodun Otunola, managing director, Planet Projects Limited, the contractor handling the project, has observed.

He explained that Aba would have two terminals-a bus terminal and Transport Oriented Development (TOD), which would integrate trailer parks.

Otunola said that Aba currently has 70 motor parks, which accounts for the chaos experienced daily in the commercial city.

Apart from dealing with the issue of motor parks, he said over 70 percent of traffic in Aba are always at junctions and that about 9 critical junctions in the city, would be remodeled to ease traffic.

He promised that Aba, in the next 12 months would have a new look.

"In the next twelve months, the Aba you know, is not the same Aba you'll see. By the time this project is completed, we assure you that people will begin to use modern facilities.

"There will be a bus terminal, 40 bus stations, facility for ticketing, which will be strictly electronic, among others," he said.

We will be providing people facilities to live a modern life.

Governor Alex Otti, while flagging off the construction of the bus terminal in Aba, which is in the first phase of his administration's Urban Renewal Transport Project, said that the project when completed would change the face of public transportation in Abia State, create room for more efficient vehicles, create jobs for youths and

make the cities more livable for the modern man and woman.

He said that the combined infrastructure and remodeling works shall proceed simultaneously in the two urban centres of the state.

The critical components of the project according to Otti, includes the remodeling and construction of a bus terminals for bigger commuter busses at strategic locations into the two cities, bus shelters and walkways along the intracity routes and major improvement works in intersecting roads.

The Abia State Governor, explained that the Abia Urban Renewal Transport Project is conceived and structured with holistic improvements in inter and intra city echo system in urban cities in the State, noting that it would reduce traffic congestion and improve the aesthetics of the cities.

He said that the flag off of the project underscores his administration's commitment to setting higher standards in social service delivery, as they seek to deliver to the people, an end-to-end transport system that structurally mirrors what is found in more organised cities of the world.

"The project is essentially about moving people in safety and comfort, from one part of the city to the other, cutting out the inefficiency of the present system and open up the general transportation echo system to new private investors with accommodation to various vehicles of different sizes, this system is poised to systematically change how we shuttle from one part of the city to another.

"Beyond changing the way individuals and families move around for business and leisure, the Abia Urban Renewal and Public Transport project holds even greater promise with provision for the development of Truck Transit Terminals in the outskirts," he said.

## Kogi to spend N150b in revamping Lokoja water treatment plant

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

Yahaya Farouk, commissioner for Water Resources, Kogi State, has said that it will cost the state government between N120 billion to N150 billion, to relocate and revamp the Greater Lokoja Water Treatment, excluding reticulation.

Farouk, who disclosed this while addressing the media in his office over the prolonged

water scarcity within Lokoja metropolis, pointed out that another option would be to relocate the two major flood prone sections of the facility at the cost of between N70 billion and N90 billion. He said that the state government, in its determination to restore water to the residents of Lokoja, is presently considering some options in alleviating people's suffering.

"Another option is the raising of the major equipment of the facility above the flood level

of 2022, this dream project also runs into billions of naira."

However, he noted with regret that the October 2022 flooding in Lokoja submerged most of the vital equipment of the facility, including four electro mechanical equipment with huge cost, adding that the development brought the treatment and supply of potable water to a halt.

Farouk equally disclosed that the state government is making efforts to contact the

Federal Ministry of Water to look into the possibility of Public Private Partnership arrangement and possibly, the state government financing the reactivation of the facility at the water works, pointing out that his ministry has embarked on the rehabilitation of the old Lokoja Water Works, to supply water to some areas among other interim measures pending when the Greater Lokoja Water Treatment would be functional.

## NYSC tasks Kogi corps members on good behaviour

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Kogi State, has charged corps members serving in the Kogi State Polytechnic to prove themselves worthy ambassadors of the institution.

Femi Osunghobun, Kogi

State coordinator of the NYSC, gave the charge during a courtesy visit to the institution, over the weekend, while commending Salish Aogbo Usman, rector of the polytechnic, for giving priority to the welfare of corps members in his care.

Osunghobun further requested an increase in the monthly stipends for the corps

members and access to the medical facilities of the institution.

"You are our major partner and I am impressed with the way corps members are being engaged in the various departments and units of the polytechnic," Osunghobun said.

Responding, Salisu Ogbo Usman, the rector, thanked the

state coordinator for his commendation, emphasising the institution's pride in partnering with NYSC to develop corps members' skills and abilities.

He further noted that his administration has retained a significant number of corps members who have distinguished themselves and would continue to do so.



## NewsXtra

# UK says its new trade scheme still in force in Nigeria

INIOMBONG IWOK

The British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Richard Montgomery has said that the United Kingdom's ambitious Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS) launched last year and put in place simpler and more generous trading terms for Nigeria was still in force.

Launched last June, the DCTS offers Nigeria one of the most generous sets of trading preferences in the world. The scheme cut tariffs for Nigeria, so that over 3000 new products are duty free.

This was disclosed in a statement to BusinessDay by Ndidiamaka Eze, Senior Affairs Officer at the British High Commission in Lagos over the weekend.

The British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Montgomery, reiterated the UK's commitment to deepen bilateral trade ties between the UK and Nigeria.

The statement noted that with DCTS, wide variety of



Richard Montgomery

products that aren't widely produced in the UK, including food items such as cocoa, plantain, olive oil, tomatoes & other vegetables, yam, shrimp & prawns, and cashew nuts, could now benefit from lower or zero tariffs.

The statement quoted

Montgomery as saying that, as an independent trading nation, the UK is one of the foremost champions of free, fair, and inclusive trade.

Montgomery further stated that the DCTS offers harnesses the power of trade to support Nigeria and other

emerging economies' ambition to grow and will boost Nigeria's non-oil exports.

The High Commissioner added that there was an on-line facility called the Growth Gateway with a team ready to provide technical assistance and help partner agencies and businesses to boost two-way trade between Nigeria and the UK.

"As the UK government, we're keen to maximise uptake of the DCTS. In this respect, I'm happy that the recently signed Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP) will help address underlying export challenges in more detail and thus improve exports and the economic and social wellbeing of both our nations," Montgomery said.

"For anyone who wants to know more about the UK's new trading scheme, please search on the Internet for the 'Department for Business and Trade and the Growth Gateway' and a website with more information will pop up.

"If you then add Nigeria to the search, you'll get a country specific page and guidance links," he added.

## Microsoft boosts students' digital skills as 6 represent Nigeria in US championship

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

Six students from schools across Nigeria have been selected to represent the country in the United States of America for the 2024 Microsoft Office Specialist World Championship (MOSWC).

The six students include Olamiposi Ayoola Ajisafe, Gabari Rume, Daniel Uzugbo, Bolurinwa Fabuyi, Arigbabu Oluwadamisola and Excel Chukwuemeka.

The competition, which is designed to test students' capabilities in the use of Microsoft including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, is scheduled to be held in Disneyland Anaheim, California, USA.

The students were selected to represent Nigeria after emerging as winners of the 2024 MOS Nigeria Competition conducted by ReadManna in Nigeria between October 1 2023 and March 31 2024.

Speaking on the competition, Edna Augusto, founder of ReadManna Empowerment Initiative, said Nigeria has emerged in second and third in the World Championship in the past 15 years and had finished in the top 10 places nearly every year.

Agusto said the Nigeria version of the championship is sponsored annually by Zenith Bank PLC and challenges students to demonstrate their proficiency in the use of Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel.

According to Agusto, these Microsoft Office Specialist programmes are the most commonly used productivity tools by businesses worldwide and the official MOS certifica-

tion programme assesses and demonstrates proficiency in these programmes.

She further said the winners of the 2024 Microsoft Office Specialist in Nigeria and their school's ICT teachers will be representing Nigeria at the World Championship in the USA.

Giving the details of the students, Augusto said Olamiposi Ayoola Ajisafe is an Excel 2019 winner from Faith Academy, Gowon Estate in Lagos State who scored 1,000/1,000 at the competition;

Gabari Rume, a Word 2019 winner is from Grace High School, Gbagada, Lagos State scored 1,000/1,000; Daniel Uzugbo, a PowerPoint 2019 winner is from Faith Academy, Canaanland, Ota, Ogun State scored 1,000/1,000.

Others are Bolurinwa Fabuyi, an Excel Office365 winner from City of Knowledge Academy, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State scored 980/1,000; Arigbabu Oluwadamisola, a Word Office 365 winner, Faith Academy, Canaanland, Ogun State scored 1,000/1,000; Excel Chukwuemeka, a PowerPoint office 365 winner, from Faith Academy, Canaanland, Ogun State scored 1,000/1,000.

She further said that the students will be accompanied by two ICT teachers namely, Stephen Aimufua, the ICT teacher of the student with the highest score in the 2023 MOS Nigeria Competition from Faith Academy, Ogun State and Omotayo Adeniyi, the ICT Teacher of Louisville Girls High School, Ijebu-Itele, Ogun State - the school with the largest number of certified students in the Junior ICT Competition 2024.

# Kwara senator distributes 3,500 bags of fertilizer to farmers

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

Salu Mustapha, senator representing Kwara Central in the National Assembly, has commenced the distribution of 3,500 bags of 50kg fertilizer to smallholder farmers across the four local government areas of Kwara Central Senatorial District.

The programme was the first phase of the exercise which formed part of a broader strategy to ensure sustainable agricultural practices.

Mustapha, who is also the chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Production Services and Rural Development, explained that the programme was designed to empower the farmers within Kwara Central Senatorial District to be able to minimize the challenges faced with food production and improve the quantity and quality of farm produce for the people of the Senatorial District and beyond.

The event held at the playing ground of the Lower Niger River Basin Development Authority, Ilorin, featured the lawmaker distributed fertilizers to members of All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN) in Kwara State, individuals and party members, who are also farmers.

Tagged: 'Empowering

Kwara Central Farmers: Unlocking self-sufficiency in food production, the initiative was aimed at supporting agricultural productivity and improve crop yields for local farmers.

The Senator said that about 1,000 pumping machines were distributed to the farmers.

According to him, the impact of climate change and over cultivation of farm land has negatively affected the quality of the soil for farming. This has resulted in lower yield of crops produce.

"It is important to emphasise that I personally purchased the 3500 bags of fertilizer distributed today to empower our farmers and improve their yield," he said.

Mustapha noted that the

distribution of such a significant quantity of fertilizer demonstrates a substantial investment in the agricultural sector, reflecting a commitment to enhancing food security and supporting the livelihood of farmers to boost food production in the state.

The Senator, who is also the Vice Chairman Senate Committee on Federal Capital Territory Area Council, gave his stewardship in office in the last one year as a legislator, saying that the reconstruction of one-kilometer asphaltic road opposite Al-Hikmah University leading to Oke-Foma link road in Ilorin West Local Government Area was facilitated to the constituency.

He added that solar-pow-

ered motorized boreholes and street lights were also installed across the four local government areas of the senatorial district, to complement the state government's effort in ensuring that the people of the state have access to safe water.

"For record purpose, the solar-powered motorized boreholes were provided at Ile On-Ifitila, Kankatu, Okelele Road, Ilorin East LGA, Jato Community Ifesowapo, behind Taoheed Central Mosque in Ilorin South LGA, Itamerin Junction, Opposite Alhaja Oil in Ilorin West LGA, Aloba Close, Oke Ikoyi, Oke Oyi in Ilorin East LGA, Agbeyangi town in Ilorin East LGA, while Solar powered street lights were installed at Computer Village Challenge Area, Ilorin; and Muslim Cemetery, Oko-Olowo, among other areas and Over thirty (30) communities across the four (4) Local Government Areas of Kwara Central Senatorial District.

"We also facilitated construction and furnishing of a block of two classrooms with office and store as well as solar-powered street lights at Government Day Junior Secondary School, Karuma, Ilorin East LGA, Fate/Basin Junior Secondary School, Ilorin South LGA, Local Government Junior Secondary School Odore, Ilorin West LGA, the legislator further said.





# Summit seeks to change narrative on Nigeria's leadership crisis

INI OBONG IWOK

A leadership summit aimed at addressing the pressing issue of ineffective and unethical leadership in Nigeria and across Africa has called for attitudinal change among aspiring leaders.

The summit challenged Nigerians, especially the young population, to aspire to lead, be different and change leadership crisis bedeviling the country.

The leadership summit was organised by the Bells University Students Union.

The event, dubbed "The South-West Leadership Summit," was conceived out of a profound concern for the detrimental impact that poor leadership has had on the region's socio-economic development and the well-being of its citizens.

Recognising the Univer-



Adeshina Adepoju, bursar; Prof. Pearl Opoko, deputy vice chancellor; Prof. Jeremiah Ojedian, vice chancellor; Adefowoke Ayo-Ponle, keynote speaker at the summit, and Lamidi Tafa, registrar, at the event.

sity's pivotal role as an educational institution dedicated to nurturing future leaders, the Student Union, under the leadership of Tobi Animashaun, took the initiative to host the groundbreaking summit.

The aim was to foster a culture of ethical and effec-

tive leadership among students and to inspire them to take on leadership roles that could drive positive change.

The summit brought together a diverse array of speakers from both the corporate and government sectors, all of whom shared their insights and experi-

ences on the theme, "The Role of Leadership in the 21st Century."

This theme was chosen to highlight the evolving demands and responsibilities of leaders in today's fast-paced and interconnected world.

The event commenced with opening remarks from the Vice Chancellor of Bells University of Technology, Jeremiah Ojedian, a professor, who emphasised the critical need for visionary leadership in addressing contemporary challenges.

The keynote address

was delivered by Ayo-Ponle Adefowoke, a distinguished lawyer and leader known for her contributions to both the corporate world and civic engagement.

Her speech underscored the importance of integrity, accountability, and innovation in leadership. She challenged the attendees to not only aspire to leadership positions but also to embody the qualities of true leaders who can inspire and effect meaningful change.

Throughout the summit, various sessions and panel discussions covered a wide range of topics pertinent to leadership. These included ethical leadership, the role of partnership in modern leadership, the importance of diversity and inclusion, and strategies for effective governance.

Notable speakers such as Genle Habeeb, Co-founder and CEO of Stecs, an ethical and alternative fintech startup, Muhammed Mustapha, a published author of Switching Lanes and publisher of Techmoonshot a tech media publishing platform, and Chinonso Clark, the founder of Lead For Good Africa, provided valuable perspectives and practical advice.

To show appreciation to

the speakers and panelists, a recognition and award ceremony followed. The Vice-Chancellor presented the awards to the panelists, honoring their valuable contributions to the summit.

In his closing remarks, Tobi Animashaun expressed his gratitude to all the speakers and participants for their contributions to the success of the summit.

He reiterated the Student Union's commitment to continuing this important dialogue and to promoting leadership development initiatives within the university and beyond.

The South-West Leadership Summit was more than just an event; it was a call to action for the next generation of African leaders.

By fostering a culture of ethical and effective leadership, The Bells University of Technology aims to make a lasting impact on the future of the continent.

The summit's success has set a precedent for future initiatives and highlighted the university's role as a beacon of leadership development in Nigeria and Africa.

## Nigerian Airforce to establish base in Abia

...To boost security in South East

UDOKA AGWU, UMUAHIA

In a bid to beef up security in Abia in particular and the entire South-East in general, the Nigerian Air force is to establish Airforce Base in the state.

Hasan Abubakar, Air Vice Marshall, Chief of Air Staff, disclosed this at Government House, Umuahia, when he led a delegation to pay a courtesy visit to Governor Alex Otti of Abia State.

Abubakar disclosed that the essence of his visit was to engage in a meaningful dialogue with Otti and explore opportunities for collaboration between Nigerian Airforce and Abia State.

Abubakar requested the state government for a parcel of land to establish Airforce Base in the State to enhance security in not only Abia state but the entire South-East.

The Chief of Air Staff appreciated Otti for his dedication to public service and commitment to development the state as well as his governance style which is people-oriented and centered on judicious management of public resources in order to improve the living standards of Abians.

He used the forum to commiserate with the state government over the unfortunate incident which led to the loss

of five soldiers at Obikabia, while assuring that Nigerian Airforce would partner with other security agencies to bolster security in the state.

Governor Otti appreciated the Chief of Air Staff, Abubakar for granting approval for the establishment of an Air Force Base in Abia.

Otti promised that the state government would provide land for them to site their operations.

He said that in the interim, a temporary site in Umuahia would be provided while operational vehicles, official residence and other logistics required for the take off would equally be provided by the state government.

The Abia Chief Executive expressed optimism that establishment of an Airforce base would be realised in the state to further enhance security of lives and property of citizens.

"I will instruct the commissioner for Lands and Housing to engage with anyone that you will nominate to work with us so that we can realise this in the shortest time possible.

"While we do that, we are also in a position to give you a temporary site so you do not wait for the construction of the permanent site before we realise this good gesture that you have made here. Airforce

would partner with other security agencies in the state to bolster security.

"We will give you a temporary site in Umuahia and we will also provide residences for your men and also provide vehicles for them to move around and any other thing that they require and so I believe that we can achieve this in the next one to two months," Otti assured.

He attributed the relative peace in the state to efforts of security agencies, emphasized that security was among the top priority of his administration adding that government would support them to perform optimally.

While noting that the visit came at the right time especially with the Federal government's approval for the setting up of an Airstrip in the state, the Governor said the administration was committed to partnering the FG to expand the airstrip to an airport.

The Governor disclosed that his administration was not resting on its oars to apprehend the killers of the five soldiers at Obikabia, and announced that the bounty had been upgraded to 30 million naira.

He urged citizens and residents who have useful information to volunteer so as to apprehend the criminals.

## Faith group unveils platform to promote positive values

FAVOUR OKPALE

Sphere of Light Church, a leading faith community Church dedicated to spiritual growth and community service, has announced the launch of its new TV station, Ambience TV, to reach a broader audience, promote faith, hope, and positive values.

Femi Lazarus, senior pastor and founder, Sphere of Light Church, speaking at the official launch of Ambience TV said that the new TV station would broadcast a diverse range of programming, including live worship services, inspirational sermons, community stories, faith-based documentaries, children's programs, and educational content.

"We are thrilled to launch Ambience TV and extend our reach beyond the walls of our church. This vision of Ambience TV seeks to not only encourage believers and inspire others on their faith journey but also encourages more faith-based content creators

and creatives to continually use their gifts for profound and meaningful causes," Lazarus said.

According to him, the mission of the ministry is not just to preach faith and love, but also create an avenue for the gospel to touch lives all around the world. He also said that the TV station allows the church to connect with individuals and families in their homes in over 120 countries, providing spiritual nourishment and encouragement.

Speaking further, he said that the platform is a direction from God that aims to cater to a wide audience, offering programmes that are both engaging and spiritually enriching.

The station's line up includes, "Live Worship Services: Bringing the church experience directly into viewers' homes; Inspirational Sermons: Life transforming messages from Apostle Femi Lazarus and guest speakers; Community Stories: Highlighting the

work and testimonies of

individuals within the church community; Faith-Based Documentaries, Exploring significant spiritual and historical themes, Children's Programmes; Engaging content designed to teach and inspire young minds, and Educational Content: Programmes aimed at promoting personal growth and understanding of faith."

He added that the TV station was presently available on all-free-to-air decoder, as "Ambience TV", ensures that viewers can tune in from anywhere at any time.

"The launch of Ambience TV is a testament to our commitment to infiltrating systems, innovating, and adapting to the needs of our viewers."

Olajumoke Afolarin, Media Director, Ambience TV also said that the platform would not only strengthen existing bonds with audiences "but also expand our global reach, providing inspiration and support to a wider audience and reaching nations with the light of God's word."



# Sports



## Mo Salah voted Liverpool men's player of the season

... As Mac Allister wins goal of the season award

Stories by SEYI JOHN SALAU

**M**ohamed Salah has been voted the winner of Liverpool's Standard Chartered Men's Player of the Season award, just as Alexis Mac Allister emerges as the winner of the men's goal of the season award for the 2023/24.

Salah's fourth Liverpool Player of the Season honour came after he clinched the award at the end of the 2017-18, 2020-21 and 2021-22 campaigns.

The Egyptian emerged top for 2023-24 to claim the

award for the fourth time in his seven years at Anfield in a poll on Liverpoolfc.com ahead of Virgil van Dijk and Alexis Mac Allister, who finished second and third respectively.

Salah was also the Reds' top scorer in the campaign with 25 goals in all competitions and his tally of 13 assists was the joint-most within the squad alongside Darwin Nunez.

In total, the Egyptian had 38 goal involvements from his 44 appearances to help his side lift the Carabao Cup and secure Champions League qualification via a third-place finish in the Premier League.

Salah started the season in typically brilliant form and won all three Standard Chartered Player of the Month prizes on offer between September and November, as well as receiving the Premier League's award in October.

After climbing above Steven Gerrard to take fifth place on the club's all-time top scorers list, he was on the scoresheet at Crystal Palace in December to reach the milestone of 200 goals – joining esteemed company in Ian Rush, Roger Hunt, Gordon Hodgson and Billy Liddell as double centurions for Liverpool.

However, Salah picked up an injury while at the Africa

Cup of Nations with Egypt that disrupted his campaign but he returned to accomplish a feat no other Red had previously done.

Netting in a Europa League victory over Sparta Prague at Anfield, the forward arrived at the 20-goal mark for the seventh consecutive season. That game also saw him produce a hat-trick of assists.

And by scoring and assisting in last month's 4-2 win against Tottenham Hotspur, Salah became the first player in Premier League history to reach double figures in both goals and assists for three seasons in a row.

## Mozambique dream of qualifying for 2026 World Cup - Conde

**C**hiquinho Conde, head coach of the Mozambique national team, has disclosed that himself and the players' dream of representing their national team at the 2026 FIFA World Cup following his side's recent improvement at the 2023 TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

The former Mambas' captain speaks to CAFOnline about his sides' and their chances of qualifying for the FIFA World Cup and disclosed his intention to test his coaching acumen against the best in the world.

"Playing in the World Cup is a dream for the players, and as a coach, I would love to be there. Today, the number of teams qualify-

ing for the World Cup has increased, and we have a dream," Conde said, stating his team will fight to achieve their goals with humility and respect for opponents, regardless of their calibre.

Speaking to the increased number of African teams at the FIFA World Cup, Conde said that it opens up the opportunity for more teams across Africa to fulfill their dreams of playing at the global stage.

"Obviously, this is a significant step given the quality of most African players who play for major European and international teams. It is a great opportunity, but also a great responsibility because it is the biggest global event."



## Tyson-Paul bout rescheduled for 15 November in USA

**T**he fight between former world heavyweight champion Mike Tyson and YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul has been rescheduled to take place on 15 November in Texas after the original date was postponed.

The Tyson-Paul contest, which will be broadcast on Netflix, has been sanctioned as a professional fight, but will have certain conditions, including that the contest can only be eight, two-minute rounds and 14oz gloves must be worn, rather than 10oz.

"Although we had to postpone the fight, I will resume training shortly. I am thankful to the medical staff that treated me," said Tyson who has not fought professionally since 2005, but did compete in an exhibition bout in 2020.

In 1987 he became the

first heavyweight boxer to simultaneously hold the WBA, WBC and IBF heavyweight titles but his reign as unified champion came to a shock end in 1990 as he was beaten by Buster Douglas in one of the biggest upsets in boxing history.

"While we have a new date, the result will be the same no matter when we fight. Jake Paul is getting knocked out," Tyson said.

Paul, 27, has won nine of his 10 fights, mostly against former UFC fighters, with his solitary defeat coming against British boxer Tommy Fury in February 2023. "New date, same place, same fate," he wrote in a post on social media.

Also, Ireland's Katie Taylor, the undisputed women's light-welterweight world champion, will fight in the co-main event with a rematch against Puerto Rico's

Amanda Serrano at NFL side Dallas Cowboys' AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

The two bouts had been scheduled to take place on 20 July but Tyson, who will be 58 later this month, had

to pull out because of medical advice after a recent ulcer flare up.

Taylor defeated Serrano via split decision in an all-time lightweight classic in April 2022 at New York's

Madison Square Garden.

Two judges gave Taylor the victory, by 96-93 and 97-93 margins; while a third judge said Serrano had won 96-94.

The loss was only Serra-

no's second professional defeat and she has since won all four of her world featherweight title contests, but will step up in weight to face Taylor.

"This is the rematch the world has wanted to see. The first fight in New York was obviously an epic occasion and it more than lived up to the billing, and I'm sure the rematch will be no different," Taylor said when the fight was originally announced.

Since beating Serrano, Taylor defeated Argentina's Karen Elizabeth Carabajal but then suffered the first and only loss of her professional career when England's Chantelle Cameron gained a majority points decision win in Dublin in May 2023.

The pair met in a rematch, again in Dublin, in November with Taylor winning via majority points decision.





## Sports

# Roma owner Friedkin emerges favourite in Everton takeover

Stories by JOHN SALAU

American businessman Dan Friedkin, has emerged as one of the favourites parties interested in a takeover of Premier League club Everton.

Friedkin, who is also the owner of Serie A side Roma, with a reported net worth of £4.8bn, is aiming for an exclusivity agreement to purchase current owner Farhad Moshiri's 94 percent stake in the club.

A takeover deal with 777 Partners had been agreed in September 2023 before falling through last month.

Moshiri had agreed to sell the Blues to Miami-based investment firm



777 Partners in September but after a prolonged process, the sales and purchase agreement ended on 31 May.

According to BBC Sport, MSP Sports Capital and local businessmen Andy

Bell and George Downing, who have lent the Toffees £158m, are also aiming for a takeover.

Michael Dell, chief executive of Dell Technologies, and Kenneth King of investment firm A Cap are

also in the mix.

Crystal Palace co-owner John Textor expressed an interest in buying Everton last month and is looking to sell his 45 percent stake in the Eagles.



## Cameroon trash Cape Verde 4-1, tops Group D

The Indomitable Lions of Cameroon went top of Group D after thrashing Cape Verde 4-1 at the Stade Omnisport Roudé Adji Stadium in the match-day 3 qualifying round of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The Indomitable Lions now have seven points from possible nine, level with Libya but boast a superior goal difference to top the group.

Michael Ngadeu open scoring for Cameroon in the 13th minute, with assist from Moumi Ngamaleu, setting the tone for Cameroon's offensive onslaught.

Captain Vincent Aboubakar doubled the lead in the 25th minute, finishing clinically from the center of the box after another precise assist from Ngamaleu.

Cape Verde briefly threatened a comeback when Jamiro Monteiro netted from close range in the 37th minute, but the Indomitable Lions swiftly restored their two-goal cushion.

Aboubakar confidently converted a penalty in the

44th minute after Cape Verde's defence was caught napping, ensuring Cameroon took a 3-1 lead into the halftime break.

The second half saw no let-up from the rampant hosts, as Nouhou Tolo headed in from the center of the box in the 54th minute, assisted by Ngadeu, making it 4-1 and effectively sealing the victory for the Indomitable Lions.

Cape Verde made several substitutions in a bid to claw their way back into the match, but Cameroon's defense remained resolute, thwarting any potential comeback.

The final stages witnessed a flurry of substitutions and bookings, with Carlos Baleba and Jackson Tchatchoua of Cameroon receiving yellow cards.

The victory propelled Cameroon to joint top of Group D alongside Libya, setting the stage for a crucial clash against Angola in Luanda on Tuesday.

Cape Verde, on the other hand host Libya in their next match and will need to regroup quickly to keep their qualification hopes alive.

## Glovo deepens physical fitness, wellness with maiden 'Courier Day'

Glovo, a multi-category app recently organised its maiden 'Courier Day' with a friendly football match to promote wellness and help its couriers stay fit.

Four teams, representing different regions of Lagos, competed in a 45-minute match, held at the Onikan Stadium with the winning team earning a trophy and prizes.

"With the launch of Glovo+, we are not only enhancing the professional lives of couriers, but also offering tangible rewards that improve their day-to-day living and acknowledge their dedication and excellence," Lamide Ak-inola, general manager, Glovo Nigeria, said.

He disclosed that the brand is committed to creating value for all its



stakeholders in Nigeria. "Our goal is to build a thriving ecosystem where couriers, partners, and customers all benefit from our innovative and tech-driven services."

According to him, the two-day event was aimed at empowering couriers with essential financial literacy skills in partnership with Money Africa and Opay. He said that the initiative aligns with an ongoing commitment to support the development of couriers,

helping them grow both professionally and personally.

A key highlight of the event was the launch of Glovo +, a loyalty program which gives couriers the chance to unlock advantages such as fuel vouchers, grocery discounts, and insurance benefits.

"Courier Day is beyond a training session; it's a celebration of the outstanding couriers. As a tech-driven company dedicated to leveraging innovation, we

are excited to see how the couriers use this type of initiative," said Chidera Akwuba, head of government and public relations, Glovo Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Courier Day initiative and Glovo+ is part of Glovo's Couriers Pledge, a commitment launched in Nigeria in October 2023 to increase the social rights and benefits available to couriers.

"By contributing to this initiative, we are helping couriers not only manage their finances but also understand how to navigate the broader financial landscape which is crucial for their personal and professional advancement," Ijeoma Beatrice Nwachukwu, business development manager, app and cards at Opay, stated.

## Iga Swiatek wins third straight French Open title

World No 1 Iga Swiatek on Saturday won her fourth French Open title in five years with victory against Jasmine Paolini in the women's final.

The top seed from Poland brushed aside Italian surprise finalist Paolini 6-2 6-1 in an hour and eight minutes.

Swiatek is the first woman to win three consecutive Roland Garros titles since Justine Henin in 2007 and only the third to achieve the feat in Open history, along with Monica Seles.

"It's amazing to be here. I love this place. I wait every year to come back here."

"I was almost out of the tournament in the second round - it's been a really emotional tournament," said Swiatek.

Swiatek is undefeated in Paris since 2021, 21 matches ago, and has won 34 of her 36 matches here, a record matched only by Seles and Chris Evert.

Evert and Martina Navra-



tilova, with nine Roland Garros titles between them, presented the runners-up plate to Paolini and the winners' trophy to Swiatek.

Since surviving a match point in the second round against Naomi Osaka, in arguably the match of the tournament, Swiatek's route to the final has been more like a procession.

She won 20 games in a row over three matches against Marie Bouzkova (6-4 6-2), Anastasia Potapova (6-0 6-0) and Marketa Vondrousova (6-0 6-2), before rolling over Coco Gauff 6-2 6-4 in the semi-final.



# Sports

## Africa's 2026 World Cup Qualifiers Roundup

# Poor Super Eagles held by Bafana Bafana in Uyo

Stories by Anthony Nlebem

The Super Eagles of Nigeria endured a disappointing night as they were held to a 1-1 draw by South Africa's Bafana Bafana in their 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifier at the Godswill Akpabio International Stadium in Uyo on Friday.

Themba Zwane opened the scoring for the visitors with a superb strike in the 29th minute, giving South Africa a first-half lead against the three-time African champions.

Nigeria's Fisayo Dele-Bashiru equalized in the second half, scoring his second goal for the national team to cancel out Zwane's opener. Despite several



opportunities, the Super Eagles were unable to secure a victory, leaving fans and players frustrated.

Bafana Bafana executed a

solid team effort, stretching Nigeria's defense from midfield and maintaining pressure throughout the match.

This result puts South Africa in fourth place in Group C with four points from three matches, while Nigeria sits in fifth place

with three points from the same number of games.

Group C is currently led by surprise leaders Lesotho, followed by Rwanda and Benin, with Nigeria and Zimbabwe at the bottom.

This match marked Finidi George's first major competitive outing since becoming the head coach of the Super Eagles in May.

He fielded a lineup featuring Stanley Nwabali; Semi Ajayi, Calvin Bassey, Benjamin Taminu, Bright Osayi-Samuel; Alex Iwobi, Wilfred Ndidi, Fisayo Dele-Bashiru; Ademola Lookman, Paul Onuachu, and Kelechi Iheanacho.

Nigeria, playing at home, was expected to secure all three points.

However, South Africa dominated the early minutes of the first half,

nearly scoring on multiple occasions, thanks to Stanley Nwabali's composure and confidence in goal for Nigeria.

The Super Eagles struggled with precision and cohesion, failing to impress despite their home advantage. South Africa's persistent pressure paid off with Zwane's goal.

Hugo Broos' team now looks forward to climbing the group standings as they host Zimbabwe at the Free State Stadium in Bloemfontein on Tuesday.

Bafana Bafana arrived in Nigeria with positive memories of Uyo, having previously secured a 2-0 victory over the Super Eagles during a 2019 AFCON qualifier under Stuart Baxter and a 2-2 draw under Shakes Mashaba.

## Lesotho Stun Zimbabwe to Top Group C

Lesotho pulled off a surprising 2-0 victory over Zimbabwe on Friday afternoon, propelling them to the top of Group C in Africa's 2026 World Cup qualifiers.

Ranked 149th globally, Lesotho defied expectations with their performance in Soweto, overshadowing more prominent football nations like South Africa and Nigeria. This victory, their first in the group stage, followed draws against Nigeria and Benin last November.

In the match against Zimbabwe, Rethabile Rasethuntsa and Jane Thaba-Ntso scored within a ten-minute span during the first half, securing the win for Lesotho.

Later in the day, Nigeria and South Africa played to a 1-1 draw in Uyo, which allowed Lesotho to maintain their position at the top of the group. South Africa's Themba Zwane opened the scoring in the 29th minute with a brilliant solo effort. Nigeria responded immediately after the halftime break, with Fisayo Dele-Bashiru equalizing just one minute

into the second half.

The current standings in Group C have Lesotho leading with five points, followed by Rwanda, Benin, and South Africa each with four points. Nigeria has three points, and Zimbabwe sits at the bottom with two points.

Elsewhere in the qualifiers, Morocco, shock semi-finalists in the 2022 World Cup, continued their strong form with a 2-1 victory over Zambia in Agadir, thanks to goals from Hakim Ziyech and Eliesse Ben Seghir. Edward Chilufya scored a late goal for Zambia. Morocco remains at the top of Group E with a perfect record after three matches.

In another match, African champions Ivory Coast edged Gabon 1-0 in Korhogo, with Seko Fofana scoring the only goal. This win keeps the Ivory Coast at the top of their group with nine points, three ahead of Gabon.

The Comoros' perfect record in Group I came to an end with a 2-1 loss to Madagascar in Johannesburg, ending their winning streak in the qualifiers.

## Madagascar lead Group I

Madagascar defeated Comoros 2-1 to move top of the standings in Group I with six points from three matches. The result positioned them ahead of Comoros and Ghana on goal difference.

France-based Rayan Raveloson starred for Madagascar, scoring in the first minute and again midway through the second half before El Fardou Nabouhane reduced the arrears in added time.

With Mali and the Central African Republic just two points behind, Group I promises to be one of the most closely contested mini-leagues.

Angola ended their scoring drought in matchdays one and two by securing a 1-0 win over Eswatini, with Mabululu scoring the only goal just two minutes into the match. This win lifted Angola to five points, two behind table-toppers Libya, who edged Mauritius 2-1.

In Group G, wins for Uganda and Mozambique created congestion at the top with four countries tied on six points. Algeria, who have competed in four World Cups, leads the group on goal difference, followed by Guinea, Uganda, and Mozambique.

Muhammad Shaban's 74th-minute goal secured



Uganda's 1-0 win over Botswana in Kampala, which is now fit to host international matches again. Mozambique quickly built a two-goal lead against Somalia, with goals from Alfons Amade and Stanley Ratifo, before Somalia's Ismail Maxamed pulled one back to set up a tense

finish.

### Group G heats up

Mozambique secured a 2-1 win against Somalia in Maputo. Alfons Amade opened the scoring for Mozambique in the 14th minute, with Stanley Ratifo doubling their lead in the 29th minute. Somalia managed to pull one

back through Ismail Shirwa in the 66th minute, but it was not enough to equalize as Mozambique held on for the victory.

This win moves Mozambique level on six points with group leaders Algeria and Guinea, who have also played three matches. Somalia remains at the bottom of the table with no points.

### Kenya and Burundi Draw in Group F

In Group F, Kenya and Burundi played to a 1-1 draw in a closely contested match held in Lilongwe, Malawi. Duke Abuya gave Kenya the lead in the 72nd minute, but Abdallah Sudi equalized for Burundi 13 minutes later.

The draw places Kenya in third with four points, narrowly ahead of Burundi on goal difference.





## Sports

# European Olympic Committees criticise World Athletics' prize money for olympic champions



Stories by ANTHONY NLEBEM

The European Olympic Committees (EOC) president Spyros Capralos has criticized World Athletics' decision to offer prize money to gold medallists at the upcoming Paris Olympics, calling it discriminatory and against Olympic values, according to Reuters.

World Athletics (WA), led by former Olympic champion and current International Olympic Committee (IOC) member Sebastian Coe, has announced it will award \$50,000 in prize money to each of its 48 Olympic champions in Paris.

However, World Athletics will not provide cash prizes for silver or bronze medalists at these Games, though it plans to do so at the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

The International Boxing Association (IBA) has also declared its intention to offer monetary rewards to all medalists at the Paris Games, with \$100,000 for gold, \$50,000 for silver, and \$25,000 for bronze medalists.

These decisions have sparked discontent among other international federations and the IOC, which views the move as a direct interference in their event

without prior consultation. Capralos, who is also an IOC member, stated, "We believe in the Olympic Games, athletes compete for the values of the Games, not for money and bonuses."

Capralos expressed concern that offering money exclusively to gold medalists is discriminatory and undermines the principles of solidarity that the Olympics represent.

He noted that many countries already provide bonuses for medal-winning athletes through their National Olympic Committees and governments.

Capralos revealed that there had been no discus-

sions with WA or the IBA regarding their announcements. He hinted at potential discussions on the matter at the European athletics championships in Rome but confirmed no contact with the IBA, which was stripped of IOC recognition last year due to governance and financial issues.

The IOC has encouraged the formation of a new global boxing body, warning that athletes from federations adhering to the IBA instead of its IOC-approved successor would be barred from participating in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.



## Vardy signs new Leicester deal

Leicester City forward Jamie Vardy has signed a new one-year contract with the Premier League club, extending his stay until 2025.

Vardy, who joined Leicester in 2012, has scored 190 goals in 464 appearances. The 37-year-old striker famously helped Leicester win the Premier League title in the 2015-16 season.

In addition to Vardy's extension, Leicester City announced that center-back Jannik Vestergaard has signed a new deal until the summer of 2027. However, Marc Albrighton, Kelechi Iheanacho, and Dennis Praet will be leaving the club as free agents.

Reflecting on his new contract, Vardy said, "I've always said that age is just a number. My legs feel fine, so I'll continue until they tell me otherwise."

"There will be a day when that comes, but it's not now. We look forward to another season in the Premier League and seeing what we can do. One hundred per cent, it's the best league in the world. That's where you want to be playing your football."

Vardy, who earned 26

caps for England, last played for the national team in 2018. Throughout his career at Leicester, he has also won the FA Cup, Community Shield, and two Championship titles, including last season's win that secured promotion to the Premier League.

Vestergaard, a Denmark international who joined from Southampton in August 2021, played 42 Championship matches last season.

"With football and my situation having developed in a positive way, I'm just very happy to be here. It fills me with pride that I went through the lows and continued to work. I've come out on the other side and shown more of what I can contribute."

Albrighton, who made 313 appearances over ten years and won multiple titles with Leicester, is set to leave the club. Iheanacho, the Nigerian forward who scored 61 goals in seven years, and Belgian midfielder Praet, with 107 appearances, are also departing.

The club remains in discussions with Nigerian midfielder Wilfred Ndidi, 27, regarding his future, as his contract is nearing its expiration.

## Bafana coach Hugo Broos happy with draw against Super Eagles

Bafana Bafana coach Hugo Broos has expressed satisfaction with his team's 1-1 draw against the Super Eagles of Nigeria in their 2026 World Cup qualifier at the Godswill Akpabio International Stadium in Uyo on Friday night.

The result places South Africa fourth in Group C, with four points from three matches, trailing leaders Lesotho, Rwanda, and Benin, and ahead of Nigeria and Zimbabwe.



"First of all, I think the result of a draw is fair; we had our chances, and Nigeria had theirs," Broos

said in a post-match as his team prepared for their next fixture against Zimbabwe at Free State Stadium in

Bloemfontein on Tuesday.

"I have to congratulate my players. As you know, we had a terrible travel experience to Nigeria on Wednesday, arriving at 2 AM on Thursday after a 20-hour journey."

Broos praised his players' mentality and effort, noting the difficulty of the match against a strong Nigerian side. South Africa led 1-0 at halftime thanks to a goal from midfielder Themba Zwane, but Nigeria equalized immediately after the restart.

"In the first half, we played fantastic football, created chances, and could have scored more. It was unfortunate that we conceded a goal just two minutes into the second half, which made the game challenging," Broos added.

"We fought from the 46th to the 95th minute, and I believe the result is fair."

With three rounds of matches played, Lesotho leads Group C. Broos remarked on the improved performance of smaller football nations, highlighting the unpredictability and competitiveness of the qualifiers.

"When you look at the draw, you expect Nigeria to be the group leader. Our aim was to secure

at least a point or avoid defeat, which was crucial for us," Broos said. "The pressure was on Nigeria because they have had three successive draws, and winning home games is vital in qualifiers. We are happy with the point."

Broos emphasized the challenging nature of their group, where any team can secure a victory against another, reflecting a trend seen at the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) where smaller countries have shown significant progress.

"Our group may not feature top countries, but it is very tricky. "The results after three games are surprising, demonstrating that smaller countries are advancing," he added.



# Minimum wage brouhaha: Any lessons learnt?

When ResearchGate made the startling revelation back in October 2018 that it would take an average Nigerian worker, paid a minimum wage of eighteen thousand naira (N18, 000), about 792 years to earn the annual salary of a Nigerian senator, it was simply incredible and unjustifiable, worse still in a poverty-ridden country called Nigeria. That piece was written by one Emmanuel Stober and published on the organisation's online portal.

It would be recalled that yours truly had in that same year warned about: "The Implications of Legislators' Jumbo Pay" in an opinion article of the same title, as severally published by different newspapers, magazines and online blogs. Back then one had referred to the concern raised by 'The Economist' magazine of London, which was in tandem with that of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), revealing that the humongous take-home pay package of our good-hearted senators, was ranked as the highest in the whole wide world!

As at that year, the senators' basic salary put at \$189,000 per annum (excluding allowances) was equated as 116 times the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person, at \$1,600. It was also estimated as 52 times what their counterparts were being paid in Kenya, which was ranked second, considered from the global perspective. Though the erstwhile Chairman, Senate Committee on Media and Information, Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe had rubbished that report as incorrect, the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC)-the agency that fixes the lawmakers' salaries and emoluments could not deny it. Rather, it kept sealed lips!

Though it reviewed the same pay package in 2007 and attempted to increase it by an astronom-

**"For them to know where it pains us, let the Senate, whatever, put their salary on this minimum wage and let's see what will happen."**

**-Bamgbose Betty (a former treasurer of the NLC and current Chairman of the Health Workers Union of Nigeria)**

ical 114 percent in 2023 soon after the current President Ahmed Tinubu-led administration came into power, it quickly retracted the claim. That was due to the public outrage that trailed the piece of news. In fact, Mr. President denied the knowledge of any such decision, as no document to that effect was on his table.

But after Tinubu's first year in office, Prof. Jibrin Ibrahim, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Democracy and Development, stated point blank that: "Truth be told, we don't have a government. What we have are people enjoying themselves at the top."

Before you raise an eyebrow at his position, let us attempt to find credible answers to the following pertinent questions.

First and foremost, do our political helmsmen ever put themselves in the tattered shoes of the common man, and ask themselves how they feed, take care of their failing health, pay for the education of their children, pay rent and survive on daily basis? I have my doubts. If so, how do we explain the painful fact that even as over 133

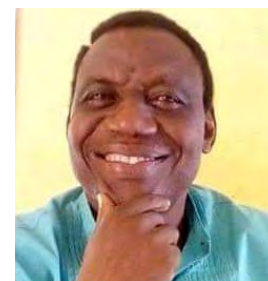
million citizens stew on in multidimensional, preventable poverty our political elite continue to live large, exhibiting gross insensitivity?

On the querulous issue of persisting corruption in high places, how do we justify the sad and saddening situation of Nigeria being described as "fantastically corrupt" by the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron back in 2016, with \$582 billion allegedly stolen by some politicians from 1960 to 2019. And by 2019 Transparency International (TI) ranked the country as 144th out of 180 countries, in terms of transparency in government's financial transactions.

How can anyone therefore, stand on the moral ground to explain that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) had to deny the release of a list of some ex-governors over the allegation of pillaging of N2.187 trillion over the past five years? It is not rocket science to calculate how many good access roads, how many well-equipped hospitals and how many millions of Nigerians could be pulled out of the pits of illiteracy and ignoble poverty, with that huge amount?

If there is one lasting lesson to be learnt from the recent nation-wide protest by the combined arms of labour unions- both the NLC and TUC- that virtually crippled the economy and threw the entire country into total darkness, it is the bitter fact that the led majority matters most at the end of the day. Indeed, it is the people's wishes, needs, dreams and desires that eventually count. Unfortunately, the set of successive, greed-driven and self-serving leaders we have had over the decades simply refused to accept it.

That perhaps, explains why renowned human rights activist and legal luminary, Femi Falana (SAN) has come up with the suggestion that it would be most welcome if the Minimum Wage Act is acted upon with the desired promptitude by the National Assembly. And it should be



**AYO OYOZE BAJE**

Baje is Nigerian first food technologist in the media and author of 'Drumbeats of Democracy'

signed into law by Mr. President, within 48 hours, as it happened with the change of the National Anthem. That should be in tandem with Section (4) of Act 2019 that endorsed the minimum wage of N30,000, which of course, is no more feasible going by the current inflation rate that has hit 33.69 percent as at April, 2024.

Doing so, according to the President of the Nigerian Labour Congress, NLC Comrade Joe Ajaero, will assist to fix the economy, lead to increased productivity, and put food on the family table to feed more hungry mouths. That is all because, living in Nigeria has been an excruciating experience over the past year of the Tinubu-led administration. So stated the President of the Trade Union Congress, TUC, Festus Osifo.

Honestly, if fellow African countries such as Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Libya could pay minimum wage to the tune of N376,500, N323,878 and N313,440 in that order, why not an oil-rich Nigeria, the "giant of Africa"? What is needed is the political will on the part of the leaders to ascent to a realistic minimum wage quite in sync with the harsh economic realities on ground. They should also drastically reduce their huge pay packages, channel that into the economy and walk the talk on true servant-leadership, as former President Umaru Yar' Adua rightly canvassed for.



**IKEDDY ISIGUZO**

Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues

INSTEAD of being angry with Senator Adamu Aliero, Kebbi Central, for resolving the disputes over rights between citizens and cows, in favour of the animals, Nigerians should be grateful to him for his candour. He has introduced more meanings in the animal rights conversations that have dominated the country's farmers-herders crises from the previous century.

Unlike others who befuddle the same point, Aliero was direct, tackled the otherwise impatient Senator President Dr. Godswill Akpabio in a back and forth to stand his grounds that cows had citizenship rights. He put it more succinctly, cows are citizens and should be accorded the rights that the Constitution awards Nigerians.

Aliero is an astute politician if that means anything. He was Governor of Kebbi State for eight years, was elected a Senator in 2007, a position he left to be President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's Minister of Federal Capital Territory for two years. He has had an uninterrupted tenure in the Senate since 2015.

An anti-open grazing bill that Senator Titus Zam Tartenger, Benue North-West, sponsored was what prompted Aliero's rigour to share our citizenship with cows. Tartenger's constituency bears a big part of Fulani herders' attacks which have resulted in loss of lives, displacement of people, and food shortages due to the insecurity in the farms.

Aliero was over-ruled several times as the mini debate on the citizenship rights of cows went on. Aliero was insistent that cows were citizens of Nigeria. Akpabio was persistent in trying to retrieve the constitutional human rights of Nigerians and fending off chances of allowing us share them with cows.

## For Aliero, it's time to share citizenship with cows

Why was Akpabio shutting down Aliero? Had he been allowed to ventilate the elevation of cows to citizens, we would have learnt more and been placed on a better stand to interrogate cow citizenship of Nigeria.

It was a great loss. While the actions of governments, particularly the one that Muhammadu Buhari led, accorded cows the unconstitutional rights as citizens of Nigeria, and in most cases favoured cows in their decisions over humans, we thought these were arbitrary policies that would have died with such governments.

The likes of Aliero stand for those rights. They are convinced that Nigerians whose lives, lands, and generations are being wasted by Fulani herders should curtail their rights to accommodate cows and the tendencies of their herders.

"Cows are not citizens of Nigeria, Senator Aliero, are you arguing with me? The Section you are referring to is talking about citizens of Nigeria. And cows are not citizens of Nigeria. Cows can come from Niger, Chad or anywhere," Akpabio said as he brought that contention to a close.

Aliero is well-educated. The 1980 graduate of political science knows Nigeria well enough and the damage that open grazing of cows has done around the country.

His service in the Nigeria Immigration Service and in the Customs and Excise Service took him to different parts of Nigeria. He wasted the experience in preference for a parochial, dim debate about our shared citizenship with cows.

If the debate had continued, he could have reminded Akpabio that as human beings, that we were also animals. Akpabio kept repeating, "cows are not citizens", so much that his shock that this contribution at the Senate he leads must have shocked him.

Aliero had a strong point to make about the sufferings of Fulani herders. Their victims would not be interested in that. He messed things up by lumping the freedoms of herdsmen with the rights of cows. He piggy-backed the rights.

A law that treats cows less than human beings, he suggested, without human rights, citizenship, would affect the citizenship and constitutional rights of Fulani herdsmen.

How we moved from ranching as a measure

to curb farmers-herdsmen clashes, provide better security for Nigerians, and make cattle-rearing a profitable business, to the citizenship of cows, is one of the wonders of democracy. The freedom of speech, among similar liberties, can take us to unimaginable parts.

Thanks in part to Akpabio's abbreviation of the ridiculousness of the arguments, we were spared an exposure of the type of positions that stall attempts to treat issues of this nature importantly. Aliero came ready to delay the passage of the bill.

Open grazing endangers the herders, their animals, and the communities where farmers yearly lose their lives, lands, and crops to the cows. The herders are often armed. Akpabio alluded to that in agreeing that freedom of movement was for those who were not dangerously armed, mentioning the AK-47 that herders log as unacceptable.

Nobody should think that Aliero does not know that six is half a dozen. He was out to set a certain agenda in the bill. Leaders of the herders had asked for ranches for years and here was Aliero advocating for no ranches. Whose interests was he protecting? The same questions should be asked Danjuma Goje, Governor of Gombe State for eight, whose tenure ended in 2011. He has been in the Senate since then.

Ranching would be a great step in curbing insecurity, stopping farmers-herders clashes, retrieving some of the citizenship rights that we have awarded cows that emboldened Aliero to ask for more. Food supplies in the country would improve. Herders often complain that their animals are rustled. Ranches will deal with the challenge.

With the law, herders and farmers will enjoy their citizenship rights fully. Certainly, citizenship rights are too human to be conferred on cows. Aliero would need a constitutional review to sustain his agenda.

Nigerians can suffer more indignities. One of them should not be to share citizenship with cows, or any animals for that matter.

Finally...

SHOULD the minimum wage talks not have ended? The stability of the Naira is such now that every minute wasted in signing off an agreement, whatever is agreed has less value.

BASHIR Nasir el-Rufai, son of the former Governor of Kaduna State, relishes his notoriety for insulting his elders and bragging about his willingness to answer for the allegations against his father. The Kaduna State House of Assembly in a report asked the former Governor to provide clarity about the financial dealings of the State during his tenure. Shouldn't Nasir just provide the information on the raised issues? How does an unelected son imagine that he would be the one to address an issue on his father's roles as Governor?

ONLY Nyesom Wike, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, can out do himself when it comes to eye service. "This morning, around 1 a.m., I was going around the Bola Ahmed Tinubu Way. Go and tell Setraco, this early morning, around 1 a.m., I was going round, and they put off the street light in that Bola Ahmed Tinubu (BAT) Way. Tell them that it's unacceptable to us. So, you better tell them, that if that happens again, I'm going to blacklist them, they won't get any job as far as FCT is concerned. You can't go and commission a road and name it after Mr. President, and then after that, you go and put off the light, I'll not accept it," Wike said, according to a video broadcast on TVC. What is Wike's issue? That there was no light on BAT Way? And for that reason, he will sanction a company? Does he know how many parts of Abuja are without electricity, including streets in the Central Area? Does he imagine that once BAT Way is lit that he is working? What has he done in the other five Area Councils (local governments) outside Abuja Municipal Council where he has been busy fixing roads in developed areas?

TOO many stories of killing and kidnapping, and these being tied to rituals and organ-harvesting are in the media. There still seems to be no concerted effort to deal with these crimes.

DID you hear that a bank manager (acting alone?) moved more than N40 billion out of a bank? He has not been found, and the money is still missing. One danger of not dealing with this magnitude of fraud is that other criminals could see him as a mentor. The size and number of heists in banks could just get out of hand.

• Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues