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SUNDAY

A Tribute to Prof. Benjamin Obiefuna Nwabueze

PROF. ONWUCHEKWA JEMIE

Let us celebrate Professor Benjamin Obiefuna Nwabueze, one of the great legal minds of our generation.

It is difficult to speak of Nwabueze except in superlatives. His grounding was in Constitutional Law. He was a renowned scholar, a university teacher and a mentor to many, a prolific

Continues on Page 39

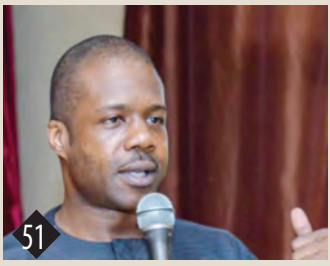
Hunger: Two urgent steps Tinubu must take to avert anarchy - Agbakoba

Page 38

I came into the gubernatorial race on conviction to serve Edo people - Ighodalo



Why FG must end dollarisation of domestic gas – Aiyela



L-R: Salihu Abdulhamid Dembos, director general, Nigerian Television Authority, Shyngle Wigwe; father of the late CEO of Access Holdings Limited; Mohammed Idris, Minister of Information and National Orientation, and Stella Wigwe, mother of the deceased, when the Minister paid a condolence visit to the family over the death of the CEO of Access Holdings Limited, Herbert Wigwe in Lagos, Saturday.

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News

Nigeria plans to unveil circular economy roadmap for sustainable future

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

Nigeria is perfecting plans to launch its circular economy roadmap, a policy document that will see the country promoting healthier people and a sustainable future.

Developed by the Federal Government in partnership with the European Union, ECOWAS and the Consul General of Netherlands in Lagos, the roadmap will guide the country's transition and define the roles of both the government, which is to put policies in place to enable the private sector to drive the implementation.

A circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible.

Speaking at a recent Stakeholders Engagement Review and Workshop on Additional Sectors for Nigeria's Circular Economy Roadmap organised by Circular Economy Innovation Partnership in Lagos, Olubunmi Olusanya, director of Pollution Control and Environmental Health at the Federal Ministry of Environment, said the plan is to launch the roadmap on March 30th before it will become a public document.

He said for Nigeria to successfully transition from a linear economy to a circular economy where things are reused and recycled, the nation needs to develop a Circular Economy Roadmap.



L-R: Koen Rademaeker, director of Trinomics; Muiywa Gbadegesin, managing director of LAWMA; Titilope Oguntuga, head of Sustainable Development & Corporate Brand - Lafarge Africa Plc; Olubunmi Olusanya, director, Pollution Control & Environmental Health at Federal Ministry of Environment; Leonie van der Stijl, deputy consul-general, The Kingdom of Netherlands in Lagos; Opeyemi Orinowo, Policy Advisor at Economic Affairs and Public Diplomacy - Netherlands Consulate and Agharese Lucia Onaghise, ES Food and Beverage Recycling Alliance (FBRA) at a recent Stakeholders Engagement Review and Workshop on Additional Sectors for Nigeria's Circular Economy Roadmap.

According to him, an initial roadmap, which was developed and adopted in 2023 covered only three sectors including waste, food system and energy sector.

He said the stakeholders requested the extension of the roadmap to other sectors such as mining, industrial sector, water and construction sectors, which was the reason for the workshop. He added that adopting a circular economy will lead to sustainable development, create jobs, eliminate

waste and lead to efficient use of resources.

On why the Netherlands is partnering with Nigeria, Leonie van der Stijl, deputy consul general and head economic department, Kingdom of the Netherlands in Lagos, said circular economy concerns multiple countries and in a global economy, countries need to work together.

She said the Netherlands is committed to assisting Nigeria with the knowledge needed for the circular economy roadmap

with a focus on supporting the Dutch private sector and their Nigerian partners.

Stijl said the Netherlands has an objective to become a fully circular economy by 2050 and to achieve that, there is a need for the Dutch to work with other countries to follow that path which comes with opportunities for jobs, less waste, healthier people, and efficiency.

Defining circular economy, Koen Rademaekers, CEO of Trinomics and chair of Acen

Foundation, said it means to reuse, rethink, and recycle.

He said the stakeholder engagement was to bring more sectors on board and to avoid launching a partial roadmap.

Pointing out that Nigeria will finalise the roadmap within a short time, he said, there is a need to put the legislature in place to give security to investors otherwise no investor would want to invest.

"There is a need to clarify mandates, harmonise regulations, ensure more governance,

and have an inter-ministerial committee to make this happen. There is also a need for a public-private partnership to raise the finance because most African countries do not have the budget to invest in a circular economy," he added.

On his part, Muiywa Gbadegesin, managing director of the Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA), said Lagos generates 13,000 tons of waste daily, and much of it can be a resource that should not be thrown away.

Here are 10 most populous nations in Africa at the start of 2024

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

Africa is witnessing unprecedented population growth, with projections indicating that the continent's population will double by 2050, reaching over 2.5 billion people, as estimated by the United Nations (UN).

Factors driving this surge include high fertility rates, declining mortality rates, and a rising number of young people entering reproductive age.

With one of the world's youngest populations, Africa has a large number of people under the age of 25. While this demographic structure offers opportunities for a vibrant workforce, it also poses challenges in terms of education, employment, and the necessity for

10 most populous countries in Africa at the start of 2024

Rank	Country	Population	2023 Population	Global Rank
1	Nigeria	226,990,263	223,804,632	6
2	Ethiopia	128,434,447	126,527,060	10
3	Egypt	113,764,455	112,716,598	14
4	DR Congo	104,257,635	102,262,808	15
5	Tanzania	68,618,327	67,438,106	21
6	South Africa	60,753,308	60,414,495	24
7	Kenya	55,756,491	55,100,586	26
8	Uganda	49,382,848	48,582,334	30
9	Sudan	48,856,040	48,109,006	31
10	Algeria	46,015,642	45,606,480	34

Table: BusinessDay • Source: WorldPopulationReview • Created with Datawrapper

robust social and economic policies to harness the youth demographic.

The growing population presents both opportunities and hurdles for economic development. A sizable and youthful workforce can stimulate innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic expansion.

However, population growth intersects with environmental issues, necessitating a balance between economic development and sustainable practices to prevent resource depletion and ecological damage.

Here are the 10 African countries with the highest population at the beginning of 2024, compiled by WorldPopulationReview, an independent for-profit company specialising in current world population data and demographics.

I see more entrepreneurs embracing alternative sources of energy this year - Delta SPADTE

MERCY ENOCH, Asaba

As Nigerians and the businesses in the country groan over epileptic power supply, many have abandoned their businesses while others are merely struggling to survive.

Electricity as a major source of power supply in the country is seen to be frustrating homes and businesses as they rely more on generating sets. Only a few families and businesses presently afford solar power as alternative.

Even those who have generating sets find it difficult to fuel and maintain them due to hike in petrol price and economic downturn. This has negatively impacted on livelihoods and revenues of businesses.

Unsteady power has made



Shimite Love

businesses that thrived at evenings and nights to now close below their usual times daily and this continues to shrink their income.

The current administration led by Sherrif Oborewori in Delta State seems to have high hopes for the people of the state under his MORE agenda (Meaningful Development, Opportunities for all, Realistic reforms, and Enhanced peace and security).

In an interview with BusinessDay, Shimite Love, Delta State Special Adviser on Trade and Export (SPADTE), has revealed that the state government would step in to help entrepreneurs in the state to embrace other sources of power like Gas to Power or Solar to Power.

"The issue of power is not my portfolio but as far as trading and building industries are concerned, you need power. You can't export products

properly without power.

"My current portfolio covers trade (both local) and export which has to do with international trade.

"We have spoken with the commissioner for Trade and Investments who in turn will speak with his colleague in the power sector, the Commissioner for Power on the need to move forward.

"Our governor is very interested in alternative sources of energy especially Gas to Power which is why you see the Kwale Gas Plant; and almost everywhere there is gas, you can see power.

"I think Delta State is the number one producer of gas in the country. So, there is a lot in getting our investors to go into Solar to Power, Gas to Power in the state and I think that we have little, little signs of it but it is a concerted effort.

"I think Delta State is the number one producer of gas in

the country. So, there is a lot in getting our investors to go into Solar to Power, Gas to Power in the state and I think that we have little, little signs of it but it is a concerted effort.

Before the end of this year, you'll see a lot of people embracing Gas to Power, and Solar to power.

"We have the Koko Industrial Park, the Ogwashi-Agro Industrial Park and Kwale Agro-Industrial Park.

"One of the essences of building the parks is for many industries to be housed inside of these parks so they can share facilities like water, security, power and access to raw materials which will drive their cost down and make it more competitive for us and other states of the country.

"So, a lot of investments have gone in there (parks). We'll invest until we see a lot of entrepreneurs enjoy the dividends," she said.

ALX enrolls 30,000 new AiCE learners across Africa

SEYI JOHN SALAU

ALX Africa, a tech career accelerator has announced the enrollment of 30,000 new learners across Africa into its Artificial Intelligence Career Essentials (AiCE) programme.

Gavin Peter, vice president, community and culture, ALX, stated that the significant milestone underscores ALX's commitment to fostering a new generation of leaders across Africa, equipped with innovative skills in AI technology. According to him,

"It is our usual ritual to start our ALX courses. We want our learners to feel welcome and part of the family. ALX is a community where we all belong and meet each other. We want to upskill young Africans and prepare them to launch so that

they can grow their careers and make an impact," Peter stated, emphasising the essence of the event, termed 'Karibu' which means welcome in Swahili.

The AiCE programme offered by ALX introduces participants to Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools essential to their professional practice. According to Peters, for six weeks, learners will be equipped with knowledge of the rapid advancement of AI and its increasing relevance across various industries.

"Through this course, ALX takes on the responsibility of equipping African talents with the necessary expertise to harness the potential available with Artificial Intelligence," Peter stated, disclosing that over 5,000 of the 30,000 learners' onboarded across Africa are from Nigeria. Others are from Ethiopia, Ghana, Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, Rwanda and Kenya.

According to him, this significant feat is a testament to the dedication and resilience shown by ALX Nigeria. He stated further that it also shows a strong and vibrant community, impactful engagements, and evidential testimonials of personal and professional growth are only a few of the many identifiers of the success.

Ruby Igwe, country general manager, ALX, stated that through the AI Career Essentials programme, the firm aims to cultivate a diverse community of innovators who will drive technological advancement and economic growth across the continent.

"We are immensely proud to welcome 30,000 new learners to our AI programme. This milestone reflects our dedication to providing accessible, world-class education that empowers individuals to shape the future of Africa," she stated.

According to Igwe, ALX is not just a learning platform, rather it is a community where learners come together to grow, inspire, and support one another. "As we extend our heartfelt Karibu to our new learners, we are excited to witness the impact they will make as they harness the power of Artificial Intelligence to drive innovation and change across Africa."

She disclosed further that ALX remains dedicated to expanding access to transformative education and empowering African talents to lead in the fourth industrial revolution. "As the continent continues to embrace technological innovation, ALX stands as a beacon of hope, guiding learners toward a future filled with endless possibilities."

"Karibu to all our new AiCE learners; as they embark on this exciting adventure together, the possibilities are just limitless," Igwe stated.

Ndigbo Lagos mourns passing of Ben Nwabueze

SEYI JOHN SALAU

Ndigbo Lagos, the socio-cultural organisation representing the Igbo community in Lagos State has expressed profound grief and sadness over the demise of Ben Nwabueze, a professor of law, who it referred to as a true champion of Ndigbo and a revered legal luminary.

"We join his family, friends, the Igbo Community across the world, the nation and the world at large in mourning the loss of a remarkable soul and an iconic figure in Nigeria's legal and constitutional development," Ndigbo Lagos said in a recent statement jointly signed by Obi Abel Umahi, president general, and Chuma Igwe, secretary general.

According to the socio-cultural group, Ben Nwabueze's contributions to the progress and welfare of the Igbo people have been immeasurable.

"As a distinguished scholar, he fearlessly fought for the rights and interests of Ndigbo, both within Nigeria and on the global stage."

The socio-cultural group stated further that Nwabueze's pivotal role as the secretary general of Ohanaeze Ndigbo worldwide showcased his unwavering commitment to promoting the welfare and cultural heritage of the Igbo people.

It also stated that Nwabueze worked tirelessly in that position to uplift and promote the interests of the Igbo people. Accordingly, it disclosed that Nwabueze's leadership was a testament to his unwavering commitment to Ndigbo's welfare and cultural heritage, both within Nigeria and on the global stage.

"Today, we pay tribute and bid farewell to this remarkable gentleman, a distinguished scholar, and a true titan of the legal field. His life's work, unwavering commitment to justice, and immense contributions to the legal and constitutional development of Nigeria have left an honoured impact on our nation and the world at large.

"Prof. Nwabueze was not simply a legal luminary; he was a staunch advocate for human rights, the rule of law, and the betterment of society. His influence and expertise were far-reaching, as evidenced by his instrumental role in the drafting of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution and his Chairmanship of the Committee on Human Rights and the Rule of Law during the 1995 constitutional conference," the group stated.

According to Ndigbo Lagos, Nwabueze's brilliance in constitutional law and unwavering dedication to promoting the rights and welfare of Nigerians made him a beacon of hope for many. He stated that the professor understood the power of the law as a tool for transformation and the protection of the marginalized. Accordingly, it stated that his tireless efforts to ensure the voices of the voiceless were heard will forever be remembered.

"We are grateful for Prof. Nwabueze's tireless efforts in uplifting the status of Ndigbo, challenging societal injustices, and advocating for the rights and dignity of all citizens. His numerous publications and scholarly works have not only enriched Nigerian jurisprudence but have also provided a roadmap for future generations of Igbo intellectuals and legal prodigies.

1,000 MSMEs get financial literacy empowerment through SheEnabled project

CHINWE MICHAEL

The SheEnabled project, the seventh phase of the Enterprise, Growth and Opportunities (EGO) Foundation, has empowered over 1,000 women-owned MSMEs in Orile Iganmu, Lagos.

According to a statement by the organisers, through the SheEnabled project, EGO Foundation equipped women with comprehensive financial inclusion and literacy initiatives.

"EGO foundation, com-

mitted to alleviating poverty and reducing unemployment in African communities executed this project in collaboration with Access Bank and Worden HCD, addressing the interwoven challenges of poverty and gender inequality through robust training on financial inclusion and digital literacy," the statement said.

The organisers disclosed that the 7-days event featured artisan cluster engagements, access to funding engagement by the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF) and a one-day in-house train-

ing session on bookkeeping, financial inclusion, digital literacy, and savings for investment.

The event also featured speakers like Ifeoluwa Oyeyipo, representing Access Bank and Olaoluwa Odugbesan, representing LSETF, who shared valuable insights.

"We are thrilled by the overwhelming response and engagement from the community. SheEnabled is not just an event, it's a movement empowering women to thrive in various aspects of their lives," said Ghazali Abdulmuizz, the Programs Associate at EGO

Foundation, represented by the founder, Toluwase Olaniyan.

The project also made a significant impact on the lives of the women through the distribution of palliatives to more than 500 women, addressing immediate needs in the community in the face of the current economic hardship facing the country, the organisers affirmed.

"The initiative recognises the importance of holistic well-being and seeks to address both immediate and long-term health concerns," the statement reads.

News

Varsity don, Nyitse, backs North-Central Development Commission bill

NATHANIEL GBAORON, Jos

Mark Nyitse, a lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations at the Federal University of Kashere in Gombe State, has voiced his support for the Nigerian Senate's consideration of the North Central Development Commission bill.

The Nigerian Senate recently passed, for a second reading, three separate bills for an Act to establish development commissions for the South-East, South-West, and North-Central geopolitical zones.

The bill for an Act to



Mark Nyitse

establish the North-Central Development Commission

representing Niger East, and Abba Morro, who represents Benue South.

The commission, if established, will catalyse the development of the arrays of potential in the North-Central as well as address the gap in infrastructural development of the region.

Reacting to the development in an exclusive interview with BusinessDay in Jos, Nyitse said: "This is a pivotal moment for our region. The Senate's attention to our developmental needs is a step in the right direction towards addressing the longstanding challenges facing the North Central states."

With unwavering dedication to the region's advancement, Nyitse's words echoed a sentiment shared by many who yearned for

equitable development and opportunities in the North Central states.

Drawing upon his expertise in educational foundations and community development, Dr. Nyitse emphasized the significance of holistic approaches to regional progress.

"Education is the cornerstone of sustainable development. By investing in our educational infrastructure and empowering our youth with quality education, we can unlock the potential of the North-Central geopolitical zone and chart a path towards prosperity."

Reflecting on the importance of collective

action, the Benue-born university don stated that "It is imperative that we come together as a community, policymakers, educators, business leaders, and citizens to drive forward the agenda for regional development. Our collective efforts hold the key to unlocking the untapped potential of the North-Central states."

As the North Central Development bill continued its journey through the legislative process, his voice remained a powerful force for change, guiding the way towards a brighter tomorrow for the North-Central geopolitical zone and its people.

Knorr celebrates World Eat For Good Day, unveils Eativists

Knorr, Nigeria's go-to seasoning brand, marked the 'World Eat for Good Day' on February 19, 2024, with a new movement to inspire people to change the world by changing what is on their plates.

During the event held at their Lagos headquarters, Knorr unveiled 14 Eativists. These are people who believe in incorporating veggies into their meals and consciously opt for options that benefit both themselves and the planet, inspiring others to do the same.

The highlight of the

occasion was the launch of a film featuring personalities such as Tobi Bakre, Taymesan, Anu Bakre, Mory Coco, Kaylah Oniwo, Linda Ejiofor-Suleiman, Nancy Umeh, Chef Derin, Chef Cupid, Chef Roux, Diary of a Kitchen Lover, Zeelicious Foods, Chef Fregz, and Dr. Robert, all unveiled as Eativists. Although they are from diverse backgrounds, they all embody the ethos of eating for good.

Arinze Madumere, Knorr's brand manager, emphasized the significance of the Eat for Good movement.

"At Knorr, we believe that what is on your plate

has an impact, not just on your personal health, but the environment as well," the brand manager said.

"We have strategically chosen Eativists to inspire people to eat a wider variety of foods, more vegetables, more plants, and less meat. With these small, significant changes, we can optimize our health and improve environmental sustainability."

Speaking at the media briefing, Chef Taymesan, one of the Eativists, explained why he is in the Knorr eat for healthy lifestyle campaign, noting that the eating lifestyle is in line with his habit of

cooking in a healthy way.

Mory Coco, another Eativists, was excited about the Eativists campaign because it affords her the platform to incorporate healthy method of cooking in almost everything she eats, especially making the local amala meal a lifestyle.

World Eat For Good Day, observed globally on February 19th, serves as an awareness on the importance of sustainable and healthy eating.

With Knorr leading the charge, the celebration highlights the need for all to embrace mindful eating habits to change the world by changing what's on our plates.

UNICEF decries attack, abuse on school children in Bauchi, other states

...Trains over 300 teachers on safety measures

AYUBA MAFFI, Bauchi

THE United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) has conducted a three-day training workshop for Heads of Primary and secondary schools as well as School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) in Misau Local Government Area of Bauchi State.

The Chief of UNICEF Field Office, Bauchi branch, Tushar Rane, who addressed the participants at the training which took place at Mangari Primary School in Misau town, said that the training was aimed at building capacity and strengthening teachers, and community leaders on safe school guidelines.

According to him, "Nigeria has witnessed instances of attacks on education which has led to a significant number of students discontinuing their schooling due to the disruption of educational activities."

Rane further pointed out that education fosters socio-economic prosperity, and other elements for achieving peace, but regretted that children can't even reap the protective and peace-building advantages of education. He further decried that children's access to education is disrupted by factors such as; occupation by state or non-state actors, fear of attacks, and other related reasons, including school-related gender-based violence, encompassing physical, emotional, and sexual forms.

The UNICEF field officer also observed that bullying can lead to severe mental health consequences, diminished self-esteem, heightened rates of school dropout and poor attendance.

He disclosed that a recent assessment showed that, on average, approximately 43 percent of the Minimum Standards for Safe Schools are being fulfilled across approximately 6,000 evaluated schools in Nigeria.

Rane pointed out that the Nigerian government has initiated various policies to ensure the safety of students and teachers both within and beyond school premises.

He said that the initiatives include, the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI), the Domestication of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), the establishment of Minimum Standards for Safe Schools, the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools (NPSSVFS), and the Implementation Guidelines.

According to him, the Minimum safety school standards are broken down into six key result areas to include; Strong school system; Violence against children; Natural hazards; Conflict; Everyday hazards; and Safe school infrastructure.

"We are enhancing the capacity of frontline workers including 1,385 teachers, head-teachers, and school-based management committees at the basic education level, equipping them to respond to emergencies, including school attacks, and developed school emergency preparedness response plans to make sure the schools are safe and habitable for students, teachers and all stakeholders to carry out their activities without risks," he said.

According to him, the ongoing capacity building efforts include training the first cohort of 350 teachers across six local government areas of Ganjuwa, Alkaleri, Toro, Shira, Zaki, and Ningi in Bauchi State.



A cross section of the Knorr Eativists at the event.

BUSINESS DAY

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Wnoo

On behalf of the Government and good people of Enugu State, I heartily welcome you to the Coal City State as he launches the Light Up Nigeria - South East initiative on Monday, February 26, 2024, to speed up the industrialisation of our region.

This commendable Initiative is in sync with our government's determination to grow our state's economy from \$4.4 billion to \$30 billion through private sector investment.

In welcoming Your Excellency, we also wish to register our profound gratitude to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, for his government's support to our development efforts in the state.

Tomorrow is here

**His Excellency,
Senator Kashim Shettima, GCON,**
Vice President, Federal Republic of Nigeria

SIGNED

Dr. Peter Ndubuisi Mbah
Governor, Enugu State



PRINVEST 2024

PROPERTY INVESTMENT CONFERENCE



Theme:

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Cityfile

Oyo gov't, Anglican church agree to demarcate cemetery from school premises

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan.

The leadership of St. Paul's Anglican Church, Odo-ona, Ibadan has agreed with the Oyo State government to demarcate its cemetery from the premises of an adjoined public primary school, while it ensures burial activities do not disturb school pupils.

The decision was the church's response to a recent request from the Executive Chairman, Oyo State Universal Basic Education Board, OYO-SUBEB, Nureni Aderemi Ad-

eniran during the week.

This came to the fore after a meeting held with the vicar of the church and other stakeholders, over the disturbing sight of burial grounds close to St. Paul's Basic school building.

During the two-fold meeting held at the Board headquarters and subsequently at the church, Dr. Adeniran appealed to the leadership of the church to consider the commitment of the state government to ensure children get good education.

The Chairman told the church leadership that the gory site of burial grounds would have psychological effects on the children, if proper care is

not taken.

He added that the present administration is not out to victimise any one, on religious sentiments, but to ensure the pupils in its care get proper education.

"Our duty as a Board is to ensure our children get the best of basic education under a serene and conducive environment," Adeniran appealed. Responding, the vicar of the church, Ven. Yemi Jesulola promised to execute the resolutions of the meeting, adding that it's their joy to see the pupils succeed in future.

He promised the church authority's utmost co-opera-

tion with the Board and the Oyo State government in ensuring pupils are taught under a conducive environment. "We will continue to ensure that the pupils learn under a conducive environment. In fact, we laid down a rule that sounds of trumpets and drums must halt at the entrance of the church, during interments on weekdays, so that pupils will not be affected by the noise," the priest said.

The Vicar noted that they hold the school in high regard, considering the fact that it was owned by the church, before its hand-over to the State government.

Unilorin expels students over exam malpractices

SIKIRAT SHEHU, ILORIN

The University of Ilorin says it has expelled 14 students of the institution over various offences bordering on examination misconducts.

A statement by Kunle Akogun, the university's director of Corporate Affairs, said the students, including five 500-Level student were

expelled for examination malpractices.

The statement noted that the Vice Chancellor's approval of their expulsion was sequel to the recommendations of the Students' Disciplinary Committee at its 219th meeting held on Wednesday and Thursday, January 10 and 11, 2024 respectively.

The expelled students also include 400-Level, 300-Level and 100 Level students.

Corps members urged to be instruments of change in society

NATHANIEL GBAORON, Jos

Governor Caleb Mutfwang of Plateau State has urged National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) members posted to the state to be instruments of change in the socio-economic landscape of the state.

Mutfwang gave the advice in Jos at the swearing in of 2024 Batch A Stream 1 corps members deployed to the state.

The governor, who was represented by the Commissioner for Youths and Sports Development, Bashir Datti urged them to consider the service year as an opportunity to contribute their quota for the development of the state and country.

He assured the corps members of the state govern-

ment's commitment to creating an enabling environment both in terms of welfare and security.

Mutfwang further said that the state government would do its part to enable the corps members to maximise their potential and creativity in keeping with the ideals of the NYSC in order to deliver on its core mandate.

"My dear compatriots, the NYSC scheme, in its five decades of existence, has been an enduring vehicle for the inculcation of national values such as patriotism, self-reliance, commitment to service, constructive engagement, equity, and justice in our youths.

"Your participation in this noble scheme will provide a platform for you to join other patriots in both the public and private sectors of the economy to work as instruments of pos-

itive change in the socio-economic landscape of the state.

"I hereby commend the NYSC management team, staff, and collaborating agencies for their dedication to service and for working assiduously towards a hitch-free orientation course in Plateau," he said.

Esther Ikupolati, State Coordinator of NYSC in Plateau, congratulated the corps members on their various academic attainments, which qualified them to be mobilised for national service.

Ikupolati commended their patriotic disposition as demonstrated in their readiness to participate in the orientation course.

The state coordinator said that the orientation is the first cardinal programme of NYSC, which is aimed at introducing the corps members to the objectives and pro-

grammes of the scheme.

"It is designed to prepare you both mentally and physically for the task ahead through trainings on Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED), paramilitary drills, lectures, and other physical activities, amongst others.

"It is also an avenue that provides the opportunity for you to realise your potential and attain individual feats during the service year and beyond.

"I therefore, enjoin you to take advantage of this golden opportunity to participate fully in all camp activities. One of the objectives of the NYSC is to promote national unity and integration.

"Hence, your deployment away from your states of origin and also your assemblage here from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds' into Platoons.

"This policy will not only offer you the opportunity for a broader understanding of the country but also entrench the culture of working together in an atmosphere filled with friendship, peace, harmony, and a shared vision of a prosperous Nigeria," she said.

Ikupolati reminded the corps members of the oath of allegiance and that it was expected to guide their conduct during the service year.

The state coordinator enjoined them to familiarise themselves with the provisions of the NYSC Act and NYSC Bye-Laws.

The oath of allegiance was administered by Justice Nanle Komak, who represented the Chief Judge of Plateau, Justice David Mann.

Geometric power: commissioning of turbines to be staggered, says Nnaji

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Management of Geometric Power (GPL), Nigeria's only integrated power plant, Friday announced the completion of the first phase of the project, which will produce 141 megawatts of power from three installed turbines that will each produce 47MW of electricity.

Bart Nnaji, chairman, Geometric Power Limited, while briefing the press Friday, on the readiness of the company to commission the project, scheduled for Monday, February 26, 2024, said that commissioning of the turbines would be staggered.

He explained that the first turbine of 47MW capacity will be switched on, Monday, to increase power supply to the Aba ring fence area, which is almost double of the current 25MW supply from the Niger Delta Power Holding Company (NDPHC).

He said that the first turbine will be monitored closely until the performance is considered satisfactory, before the second turbine will be commissioned and then the third.

Nnaji, a professor and former minister of Power in Nigeria, said that GPL, has invested almost \$800mil-

lion in the integrated power project, making it by far, the largest investment in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

He stated that GPAL is licensed to produce 188 megawatts of power, noting that three turbines have so far been installed, each producing 47MW.

He explained that each of the turbines is from General Electric (GE) of the United States of America (USA), the oldest and largest electricity equipment manufacturing company in the world.

The fourth turbine will be installed when the demand for power increases substantially, Nnaji stated.

According to the renowned engineer, Aba and environs may not absorb more than 100MW right now, noting that excess power from the three turbines will be sent to the national grid to assist other parts of the country to receive more electricity.

"The company has built a 12-inch 27-kilometer natural gas pipeline from Owaza in Ukwa West, Local Government Area of Abia State, to Osisioma Industrial Layout in Aba, where the 188MW thermal plant is located.

The pipeline according to Nnaji, is dedicated to the power plant, to ensure uninterrupted gas supply.



Police apprehends 3 members of popular one chance syndicate in Plateau

NATHANIEL GBAORON

In adherence to the new order and directive issued by Commissioner of Police in charge of Plateau State, Steve Yabanet to officers and men of the Command, that criminal emergencies and distress calls must be responded to within ten minutes, the Eagle Eye Patrol Unit (EEMU) of the command has arrested three members of the popular "One-Chance" syndicate.

In a statement by the Command's Public Relations Officer, Alfred Alabo, made available to Journalists on Thursday in Jos said "On 20/02/2024 at about 1807hrs the Eagle Eye Patrol Unit received information that some suspected One-Chance members were operating along Dogon Karfe, Jos and while in an attempt to dispossess one Abubakar Mohammed of his phone and valuables, the syndicate was overpowered by an angry mob.

"On receipt of the tip-off, EEMU swiftly moved to the scene where they rescued and arrested the suspects from the mob. The suspects include, one Yazid Ukasha 'm' 23 years old of Nasarawa Gwong and one Adamu Yahaya Garba 'm', 22 years old of Layin Dan Maraya, Bauchi Road."

According to the PPRO, Preliminary investigation revealed that the suspects are members of a 'One-Chance' syndicate who have been



dispossessing unsuspecting passengers of their valuables within the Jos metropolis.

"Exhibits recovered from the suspects include one tricycle with PT No. PTA-861 and Reg No. WAS-371 WL. Efforts

are being intensified to apprehend other members of the syndicate," he said.

Alabo added that the commissioner of Police, assures all Plateau residents of the commitment of his Command to

getting rid of criminal elements in the state.

He further urges them to go about their lawful businesses without any form of fear, as the Police is up and doing, to ensure their safety.

Enugu govt raises alarm over fake title documents, building approvals, illegal structures

REGIS ANUKWUOJI

The Enugu State government has announced the withdrawal of all forged and fraudulently obtained building approvals and stoppage of structures that did not have government's permits.

The Executive Chairman of the Enugu Capital Territory Development Authority (ECTDA), Uche Anya, who revealed this while addressing journalists at a conference in Enugu recently said that the state would go after owners of the illegal structures if they refuse to submit themselves for verification and proper approval.

He assured genuine investors in the state that the administration of Governor Peter Mbah remained investment-driven, and would continue to create the right environment for their businesses to flourish in the state.

According to him, government had a fundamental role in ensuring that the lives of the citizens were protected, as unapproved buildings were not only a threat to some major bridges in the state, but also posed a danger to human and environmental safety.

The ECTDA boss expressed concerns over what it further described as willful sabotage of the robust system of land administration and development being put in place by the government, saying that a lot of approvals and buildings were products of fraud, as they did not emanate from any government office.

Displaying samples of fraudulent title documents and building approvals, he said: "It is disheartening that in spite of all we have done, we are still facing challenges in our development control. We have some unscrupulous developers, who call themselves investors, sabotaging our master plan, corrupting the very system we are setting up for international transparency standards.

"We have discovered, painfully, that some of the distortions we have to deal with are actually products of fraud. We have instances where people are applying for approval using the Certificate of Occupancy (C-of-O) for an entirely different district."

He lamented that some individuals, who obtained approvals to erect specif-

ic structures had deviated from the approved building plans to erect "strange and distorted structures that were never approved."

The Chairman who expressed worries that such structure could pose danger to human life if not checked, explained that no approval was obtained for an ongoing building at Otigba and Ogui Roundabout.

According to him, the proprietors of a certain night club, Breathe Restaurant and Lounge, Independence Layout, obtained approval by fraudulent representation through a Certificate of Occupancy meant for Plot 31 Ekulu River Layout in GRA, Enugu.

Citing the example of the Ekulu bridge between GRA and Trans-Ekulu, Anya also raised the alarm that some major bridges in the state were threatened by illegal structures at the banks of the river under them.

He, however, reiterated the commitment of the administration to adhere to the state master plan and support existing and potential investors to grow their businesses by de-risking investment, stressing that the government would not fall prey to vicious attacks and blackmail by the unscrupulous elements holding the good people of the state at the jugular.

"We welcome people that want to make Enugu their preferred home; Enugu is home for all. This is what this administration is committed to. When we talk about our \$30 billion investment drive for Enugu, it is not a joke. You could see that the Governor Mbah administration is not joking about it; you could see the massive infrastructural developments going all over the place.

"You could see that the governor pays attention to ease of doing business. For instance, our taxation system has been harmonised. We have zero tolerance for double taxation. You could see that e-government has taken root.

"Our Lands Ministry is undergoing total reform to enable our people and investors to obtain their C-of-O in a matter of 72 hours maximum if all your documents are in order. Here at Enugu Capital Territory, we also make it easy for every development approval to be done within five working days or within one week," Anya added.

100,000 vulnerable families to get foods items in Borno - Zulum

LADI JOSSY

The Borno State Governor, Prof. Babagana Zulum has approved the distribution of food palliative to over 100,000 families in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC) and Eight Local Government Area of the state.

Zulum announced the approval on Thursday during a meeting with ward working committee, including traditional rulers, elders and community leaders.

He reiterated his government's commitment to ensuring the welfare of Borno's citizens, particularly to families struggling

to access basic necessities in the face of rising food prices and economic challenges.

"I have approved the distribution of palliative to 100,000 families in MMC and Jere Local Government Area to ease the hardship faced by our people in the wake of the rising cost of food and other essential goods.

"We will start the distribution in the coming days. We will start with the wards in the heart of the city, Shehuri North and South, Feezan, Hausari, Gamboru and Mafoni. In each ward, at least 4000 vulnerable families will benefit," Zulum ordered.

Zulum assured that the

distribution will be conducted in a transparent and accountable process to ensure that the assistance reaches those who need it the most.

Zulum also ordered the distribution of the food palliative in seven Local Government Areas in the southern include Biu, Hawul, Shani, Kwaya Kusar, Askira-Uba, Chibok and Bayo.

He noted that his administration has been frequently distributing cash and food items in the local government areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency to enhance livelihood and prevent vulnerable residents from being recruited by terror-

ists.

Since November last year, about 187,454 households from Dikwa, Ngala and Bama Local Government Areas received Zulum's food palliative and over N0.6b cash.

Zulum stated that the southern Borno palliative will be launched in Biu in the coming weeks to extend the gesture to communities that have attained relative peace and residents have their sources of livelihood.

Governor Zulum said that despite the efforts in agriculture, there is a need to address the immediate needs of vulnerable families.

News

Persons with disabilities demand amendment to finance, procurement laws in Kogi

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

The National Association of Persons With Disabilities (NAPWDs) has demanded the full implementation of the provisions of Kogi State Disability Law, and inclusion of disability equity issues in the state.

This is coming on the heels of the policies in the state in line with the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability Act domesticated in the state which includes 32-year development plan to bring about effective disability inclusion.

The Disability Community in Kogi State, North Central Nigeria, also presented a Charter of Demands to the government of Kogi State, aimed at sustainable disability inclusive budgeting to strengthen the inclusion and full participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and their organisations in government planning and budgeting in the state.

The Disability Community in the state under the aegis of Kogi State Chapter of National Association of Persons with Physical Disability (NAPWPD) and the national secretariat made the public presentation of the 'Charter of Demands' to the state over the weekend in Lokoja.

This was contained in a communique after a two-day capacity building workshop for persons with disabilities in Kogi State under the auspices of CRPD - Compliant budgeting and advocacy supported by the US-Based Disability Rights Fund. They highlighted the imperative of budget tracking and understanding of the budget circle towards inclusive budgeting in the state.

"We, the people with disabilities, assembled in Lokoja, from 15th to 16th of January, 2024, present this Charter of Demands on the rights of persons with disabilities to inclusive budgeting and development; developed through a consultative process involving representatives of all clusters and associations of persons with disabilities from across the 21 Local Government Areas of the state," the group stated.

On education, the group asked the state government to set up Education Assessment and Resource Services (EARS) to cater for peculiarities of learners with disabilities, while it advocated an immediate budgetary commitment of at least 2.5 percent of GDP towards disability inclusion endeavours in the state.

The document equally stated that the 'principle of non-retrogression' had been applied in articulating the disability demands with a view to

preventing "disproportionate and arbitrary cuts in budgetary allocations to disability specific projects in the state."

Kogi State Chairman of NAPWPD, Hassan Sule Destiny, appealed to Kogi State government to ensure that persons with disabilities benefit maximally from resource allocation and unhindered participation in Kogi State growth and development, saying that Kogi State government should increase its disability responsiveness by adding disability inclusion in the annual performance agreements of accounting officers and CAOs in line with the group demands in view of the extra costs faced by persons with disabilities in

the state.

The Disability Community in the state also called on the government to ensure that the provision of essential services such as education, healthcare, water and sanitation, housing and employment reach people with disabilities in the state.

The national president of NAPWPD, Ridwanu Abdull-

lahi in his remarks called on the PWDs stakeholders in the state to constantly engage government officials for policy dialogue on disability inclusion in the state. The workshop featured focus group discussions, Knowledge on budget advocacy and analysis with the participants drawn from across the disability clusters in the state.



L-r. Mrs Rebecca Ezeukwu, her husband Chairman of the Occasion, High Chief (Engr) Toni Ezeukwu; Chairman, Staff Board of Governors & Dean Faculty of Education University of Lagos (UNILAG), Prof Adebayo Oladipo; Pastor Remi Morgan (1972 set) Headmistress, (UNILAG) staff school, Akinade Eunice Adedoyin; during the inter-house Competition Organized by University of Lagos Staff School held at the School premises in Lagos

JA Nigeria, Delta Air to empower 100 girls on leadership skills

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

Junior Achievement Nigeria has partnered with Junior Achievement Africa and Delta Air Lines to empower young girls in Nigeria with the leadership skills needed to become future leaders.

To actualise this, Junior Achievement through the Delta Air Lines Leadership Empowerment Achievement Development Camp in Nigeria will hold a five-month camp designed to identify, convene and coach exceptional 100 female students from across the country.

The boat camp commenced in November 2023 and will continue until March 2024.

Olaolu Akogun, acting executive director of Junior Achievement Nigeria, said there will be a one-day Innovation Camp in Lagos, followed by the completion of Junior Achievement DEEP and Social Impact Projects that will be held over eight weeks. According to him, it will culminate in a five-day regional lead camp for 30 girls, with the top 10 selected from Nigeria, South Africa, and Ghana, as part of the International Women's Day celebrations in March 2024 which will take place in

Ghana. "The programme's overarching objective is to empower girls in these countries to cultivate the skills necessary to emerge as exemplary women leaders in the future," he said.

Akogun said the one-day innovation camp for the Girls which was held in December 2023, focused on Design Thinking and an innovation challenge within the Aviation Sector. "With the guidance of mentors, the girls tackled the challenge through teamwork and critical thinking skills, thus serving as an inspiration and support for Nigerian girls aiming to pursue careers in STEM fields," he said.



Facilitators and some student participants at the innovation camp organised by Junior Achievement in partnership with Delta Airlines.

Breaking: ECOWAS lifts sanction Niger Republic

...Urges Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to reconsider their withdrawal notice

TONY AILEMEN, Abuja

The Authority of the Heads of States of the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, on Saturday approved the lifting of sanctions imposed on Niger Republic and urged Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to reconsider their plans to withdraw from ECOWAS.

In a communique read by Omar Touray, President of ECOWAS Commission, the subregional body resolved to lift with immediate effect the following measures imposed on the Republic of Niger.

The decision which was imposed in July, 2023, following the Military Coup that ousted Mohammed Bazoum, will affect closure of land and air borders between ECOWAS countries and Niger.

It will further affect the no Fly Zone of all commercial flights to and from Niger.

According to the ECOWAS president, "suspension of all commercial and financial transactions between ECOWAS member states and Niger is to be lifted."

"Freezing of all service transactions including utility

services is to be lifted.

"Freezing of assets of the Republic of Niger in ECOWAS Central banks is to be lifted.

"Freezing of assets of Niger State and the state enterprises and parastatals in commercial banks is to be lifted.

"Suspension of Niger from all financial assistance and transactions with all financial institutions particularly EBID and BIRD is to be lifted.

"Travel ban on the government officials and their family members is also to be lifted.

Touray said the decision is based on humanitarian considerations especially as we are in the month of lent and as we prepare for the holy month of Ramadan.

According to him, "The authority has also resolved to lift the sanctions regarding the recruitment of Malian citizens in statutory and professional positions within ECOWAS.

"The Authority has also resolve to lift financial and economic sanctions on the Republic of Guinea.

"The Authority has also instructed the President of the Commission to invite Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, and Guinea, to attend the technical and consultative meetings of ECOWAS

as well as all security related meetings.

"The authority calls on ECOWAS institutions, member states YMOU and other regional institutions to implement this decision.

Speaking on the withdrawal of the three countries, the authority said it has taken note of the notifications by the three member states within the context of Article 91 of the 1993 ECOWAS revised treaty, but urged the countries to "reconsider the decision in view of the benefits that the ECOWAS member states and their citizens enjoy in the community.

"The authority expresses its concern over the socio economic, political, security and humanitarian impact of the decision, particularly on the citizens of the three countries and on the regional integration process.

"The authority further urges the three member states to resort to dialogue, negotiations and mediation to address their concerns.

"The authority urges the three member states to adhere to the provisions of the 1993 revised treaty relating to withdrawal particularly article 91.

NewsFeature

Experts proffer solution to adolescent malnutrition

...As YEF commissions office in Lagos

INI OBONG IWOK

Motunrayo Olumakaiye, a professor of public health nutrition, has said that there was the need for government at all levels in Nigeria to implement nutrition programmes within schools to ensure that adolescents have access to balanced meals, necessary to promote healthy eating habits from an early age.

Olumakaiye stated this while delivering a keynote address on "Adolescent Nutrition: Urgent Needs, Key

Benefits, and the Way Forward." at the commissioning of Youth Empowerment Foundation (YEF), a not-for-profit organization new office in Surulere, Lagos.

The professor from Obafemi Awolowo University noted that it was important for parents and stakeholders to empower adolescents with nutritional education, so they can make informed choices about their diet, stressing that adolescent is a window of opportunity to solve malnutrition problems.

"Adolescent in develop-

ing countries are challenged nutritionally with depleting nutrient stores, predisposing them to compromised immunity and high morbidity now in later years," Olumakaiye said.

In her opening remarks, the Executive Director of YEF, Iwalola Akin-Jimoh, explained that the launch of the new office was not about her or her sister, who co-founded the organization in 1995, but rather a testament to YEF's passion, commitment, and resilience in empowering and inspiring younger generations



"Our values such as integrity, excellence, and consistency, including the passion of our team make us stand firm. For instance, honesty is of utmost importance to YEF, a move that made all our partners stick with us," Iwalola Akin-Jimoh said.

Chairman of the occasion, Wasiu Afolabi, National President of the Nutrition Society of Nigeria, commended YEF's mission and impact over the years and vision over teenagers in Nigeria.

Afolabi noted that the organization had consistently stayed true to its goals of impacting lives, especially

young people, calling for support from well-meaning Nigerians and the government for the organisation to continue on its good work.

According to Afolabi, "I am excited to be part of history, witnessing the commissioning of the YEF office. Being there at the inception of the NGO, and seeing how it has consistently stayed true to its mission and vision in the last 29 years, and impacting lives, especially young people, my wish is that people with innovative ideas should support what YEF is currently doing."

The programme was also

attended by Jimmy Ogunnowo, the Lagos State Taekwondo Chairman among several other dignitaries within and outside Lagos State.

The new office, located in Akerele, Surulere, was officially opened by renowned Nigerian and Yoruba historian, Bolanle Awe, represented by her daughter, Tinuade Awe.

YEF's core areas include sexual reproductive health, HIV awareness and prevention, sports, entrepreneurship, personal and team leadership, and mentorship, among others.

How African female founders are bridging funding gap

MODESTUS ANAESORONYE

African start-ups with a solo female founder or an all-female founding team raised only 2 percent of all the funding last year, while 85 percent went to solo male founders or all-male founding teams, a report by Africa the Big Deal reveals.

However, a wave of determined African female founders has launched the Africa Female Founders Collective (AFFC) to create more opportunities for female founders or female-led businesses to receive adequate funding in the African ecosystem.

Ibijoke Faborode, Founder and CEO of

ElectHer and a key driving force behind AFFC said the female collective not only views the role of women in the business space as critical, but it also sees women in leadership as vital to a thriving economy and society.

"But limited access to funding, among other factors ensures that women in business do not fully showcase their potential," she said.

According to Faborode, female founders stand a better chance with investors when they are part of a collective. It is in the collective that they find support, mentorship and other women who keep them accountable and inspire them

to achieve more.

There are different reasons given for the gap in funding. Blessing Adesiyani, founder of Caring Africa, who collaborated with Faborode at AFFC's first outing, said although more women are in the market space, they lag when it comes to showing up where investors can find them.

"This is because of the reality that many women are caregivers. Hence, while the men are seen as providers, the women have to stay back and take care of the home and other obligations."

"For women to take their rightful place in the business, the issue of caring needs to be solved. "Wom-

en should have support at home, which gives time to pursue their goals and objectives," Adesiyani said.

According to Ingressive Capital, a seed-stage VC, funding to female-led start-ups had been consistently low due to a lot of reasons,

"One of the ways to navigate this is to have more female investors both as VCs, policymakers, and even angels in the industry who can help to develop more inclusive and less-biased processes for fundraising to ensure that founders are not marginalised based on gender," it stated.

However, women-led businesses that are succeeding possess some attributes. Omotade Alalade, found-

er, Moobi Baby said two of those attributes are structure and the ability to keep numbers, which are critical when pitching to investors or meeting debt finance institutions for funding. Most female founders do not keep their business properly.

Alalade says it is not just important to keep records and know the numbers, record keeping must start from the first day the business started.

"Other attributes of successful female founders include being intentional about showing up in the same rooms as investors to build both trust and likeability, showing competence, and selecting a strong

team," Efe Braimah, managing director, CrossBoundry Advisory, said.

"Your structure is critical and if your numbers line up, investors will like you," said Braimah.

For, Jumoke Olaniyan, Senior Vice President of Business Development at FMDQ Securities Exchange Limited, underscored the diverse funding channels at entrepreneurs' disposal.

She highlighted the financial market as a resource where founders can tap into various funding options tailored to their specific growth requirements.

"Investors are looking for new opportunities and where to put money," Olaniyan said.

News Feature

NDDC's new era of peace, vitality and development in the Niger Delta

ANIEFIOK UDONQUAK

For three days early this month (February 8-10), the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) had a retreat for its board and management in Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State. The theme was 'Renewed Hope: A New Era for Vitality, Peace and Development.'

For the 24-year old interventionist agency, it was a period of stock taking which afforded it the opportunity to take a critical look at its mandate with a view to charting a new course that will usher in a new era of peace and development for the Niger Delta region.

Niger Delta Development Commission was established by an Act of the National Assembly in 2000 during the administration of former president Olusegun Obasanjo and had a renowned administrator and journalist, Onyema Ugochukwu as the pioneer Chairman of the commission.

Significantly, Ugochukwu was one of the former board members that attended the management retreat and was a delight to be seen as he stood up to acknowledge cheers after his recognition.

But since its establishment 24 years ago, there has been a mixed record of anxiety, much expectations, criticisms of its projects including a litany of uncompleted projects and reports of nonpayment of contractors, among other nagging issues.

The Commission with a vision to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta region has however, made significant strides over the years by providing various communities with social amenities, construction of roads and bridges, training of youths, undertaking skill acquisition programme, scholarship for students both within and outside the country as well as other community engagement programmes.

It has also embarked on a programme of designing a master plan for the region which comprises the oil-bearing states in the country. Apart from the South-South states which are regarded as the main oil producing communities, the membership of the Commission also includes Abia, Ondo and Imo states.

However, the Commission's efforts aimed at turning the region into an eco-



nomically, prosperous, socially stable and ecologically regenerative have not been widely acknowledged by stakeholders of the region.

To them, nothing has really changed positively in the region which is largely seen as the cash cow of the country. Others believe that the Commission cannot continue to do things the old way and expect things to change for the better.

It was against this background that the Commission's retreat which brought the board members and management as well as previous top officials together for the three-day event together in Ikot Ekpene, in an environment that was devoid of the hassling and bustling of a city life. The city itself is known for its raffia product and has served as one of the oldest local government councils in the country which offered a good ambience for a high profile meeting.

In his keynote address, Abubakar Momoh, minister of Niger Delta Affairs, was frank and bold in demanding for a change of attitude among the board and management if the Commission hoped to be in sync with the Renewed Hope mantra of the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration, insisting that there must be a performance bond between the chairman of the Commission and the ministry based on the assigned deliverables to the NDDC as a way of measuring success.

According to Momoh, "If we must make any headway in charting the desired roadmap for sustainable develop-

ment of the region, all hands must be on deck, with every courage it deserves to tackle those factors that have constituted a clog in the wheel of development programmes and policies in the region."

Urging the board and management to ensure transparency and realistic adherence to extant financial regulations, public procurement act, public service rules and the importance of constantly monitoring and evaluating the performance of all contracts, he said by doing so, there will be compliance with the scope and other details of projects. The Commission has come under severe scrutiny over the quality of projects with many saying that not much monitoring and supervision had been done which has often resulted in projects lacking in quality and durability.

Momoh said that the ministry and the NDDC would work together to produce a single regional development plan, noting: "The harmonisation of the existing development plans in the Niger Delta Region was one of the ten deliverables the president gave to the ministry for implementation in between 2024 and 2027."

He urged the NDDC Board and Management to constantly monitor and supervise the projects of the Commission to ensure that quality was maintained. "NDDC must insist on the delivery of quality jobs so that the Niger Delta region will get value for money expended on development projects," he stressed.

The minister also touched other key areas that would

require a quick turnaround in such as sustained inclusive growth, security for peace and prosperity, agriculture for food security, energy and natural resources for sustainable development, infrastructure and transportation as growth enablers but did not forget to draw the attention of the board and management to the controversial forensic audit which he said had been concluded and its report submitted to the Federal Government.

"While the white paper on the report of the Forensic Audit is being awaited, some of its recommendations are being implemented," he said, adding that the "new board has the responsibility of faithful implementation of the report of the Forensic Audit in line with the President's Renewed Hope agenda."

The Renewed Hope agenda was the campaign slogan of President Tinubu, he had promised to give hope to Nigerians after the eight years of former President Muhammad Buhari whose tenure came to an end on May 29, 2023 which was seen as being challenging economically as a result of inflation, insecurity and high unemployment, among others.

The minister in his address clearly laid out the roadmap for the Commission as expected by the President and the people of the region. He emphasised the need for consultations with the stakeholders in project location and execution as well as doing projects based on the availability of funds.

If the minister did not mince words in demand-

ing performance from the commission, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Samuel Ogbuku whose duty it is to implement the Commission's programmes and projects needed to show his readiness to walk the talk.

So, in his address which he titled 'New Paradigm for Niger Delta Development, Balancing Transparency with Agility,' Ogbuku presented himself as willing and ready to actualise a "thriving Niger Delta through the Renewed Hope agenda," adding that it "demands unwavering dedication, agility and a financial framework that empowers us to achieve transformation change."

At the core of the financial framework is the issue of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) which Ogbuku wants the Commission to be taken out of because it has "weighty limitations for an interventionist agency like the NDDC."

According to him, "The TSA framework may limit the NDDC's financial autonomy as all funds must pass through a centralised account potentially affecting the speed of financial decision-making in response to regional needs."

He maintained that the rigid budgetary discipline enforced by the TSA may hinder the NDDC's ability to quickly adapt to emerging needs or unforeseen circumstances, limiting its flexibility in resource allocation.

Pledging that the board and management of the commission are ready to work with the Federal Government for efficient and

transparent development of the Niger Delta, he requested for trust and flexibility to operate within a responsible, tailored financial framework, pledging: "We will deliver results faster and more efficiently than ever before."

The Chairman of the NDDC Governing Board, Chiedu Ebie, had earlier in his address said that the gathering was a reflection of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's strong desire to have the Niger Delta Region transformed into a zone of peace and development.

"Since our inauguration just over two months ago, as a highly accountable and proactive board, we have achieved progress. Together, we have worked to dispel the negative narratives that once plagued the Commission, aiming to make that a thing of the past.

"Similarly, we have adopted a leadership style that aims to instill confidence in our people, prioritising their well-being through constructive collaboration and mutual respect. The objective of this retreat is to further align the board and management of the Commission with Mr. President's Renewed Hope Agenda," he said.

He further said: "The retreat will afford us the opportunity to propose strategies for the re-introduction and reestablishment of coordinated development to its proper place in the Niger Delta discourse, design implementation of ideas and ideals that will remind members of the board and management that we are confronted with a larger responsibility of nation building."

Other top former and present officials of the Commission that attended the retreat included Timi Alaibe, a former managing director and chief operating officer who presented a paper on sustainable development and strategic imperatives; Frank Nweke Jr, a former minister and former Director General, Nigeria Economic Summit Group, among others.

It may not have been the first retreat organised by the Commission, but with the innovative ideas and pledges from the board and management, as well as the need to show results, it could only be a matter of time before the new era for peace, vitality and development takes the centre stage in the Niger Delta.

Political Strokes

with
Zebulon Agomuo
08023283822



The 'rude boy' and the Balaam's ass

Last week, a boy in Niger State, North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria was in the news. He trended on the social media and attracted the attention of both Federal and state governments.

The boy reportedly went beyond his brief in a mere primary school debate.

If he did not touch the government in a way that rankled, perhaps, by now a number of philanthropists and donors would have been making all manner of scholarship gestures given the high level of brilliance, bravery, courage and sheer oratory he exhibited.

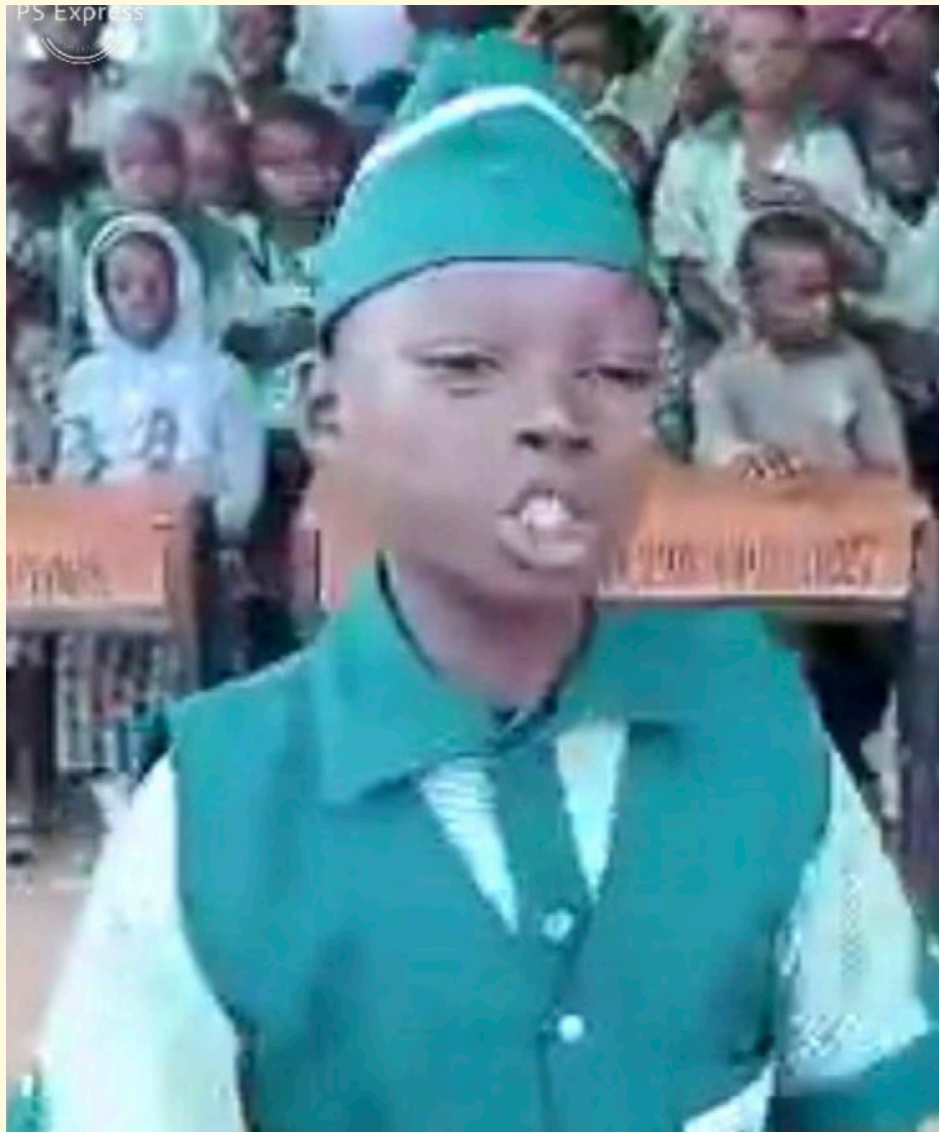
But he has attracted to himself reprimands and opprobrium from the government quarters.

Apparently dissatisfied by the state of affairs in the country, the lad went overboard. He lampooned the nation's handlers and had no good words for corrupt and greedy leaders.

If he could invoke thunder to end the political career of such corrupt leaders, he could have easily done so going by his level of disappointment in their style of leadership.

He did not know that for him to effectively call thunder to fire anybody or bring fire from heaven in the manner that Prophet Elijah did, it takes more than a wish.

Truth be told, the situation of the country is no longer palatable. Children even know



what is going on. Their parents can no longer pay their school fees. They cannot feed well. These children have ears and eyes to hear and see what

is going on in society.

It was on the basis of what he hears, sees and feels that the boy spoke angrily as "e dey pain him reach."

He critically deplored the economic and political woes of the country, blaming corrupt leaders.

In a video that has since

gone viral on the social media, the ten-year-old boy was heard bemoaning the state of affairs in the country and asserting that "starvation, hunger, and premature death are the order of the day."

He then went on to ask thunder to strike and eliminate all greedy leaders, so Nigeria can have peace.

In all the narratives on the social media, most people speak in tandem that the boy spoke nothing but the truth; nonetheless, it was too big for him to utter. He spoke about how the leaders have become selfish and only care for themselves. He spoke about the high rate of poverty in the country, vis-a-vis the opulence in which the leaders live.

But some people have likened the lad to the donkey that spoke to its owner at a critical point.

They recalled that on the day that Balaam, a seer, was going to curse the people of God after he had been severally warned by God never to do so, his donkey (ass) spoke to him.

He had been contracted to do a hatchet man's job for huge pay. Although he tried to resist the urge, the money involved was huge and he could not resist it. He was so blinded by the huge offer that he could not see an angel standing before him. His donkey saw the angel instead, and refused to move again. Balaam started to hit the ass so badly that the animal spoke out. The rest of the story is in the Holy Scrip-

tures.

Let us assume for the sake of illustration that the rude boy represents the Balaam's ass/donkey. The leadership of the country seems to have spurned all entreaties to do things the right way. The political leaders have continued in their squandermania and debauchery while the country burns. They can be likened to King Nero, who fiddled while Rome was on fire. The sign of a sick country is all over the place. The failure of leadership has dominated discourse everywhere- work place, religious centres, drinking parlours, supermarkets, and the media is awash with the frustration of Nigerians. Yet, the situation has continued to worsen. So, when the rude boy stepped out to oppose the motion that "voting should be made mandatory in Nigeria," he lost himself, as it were. Another power took over him like in the case of the Balaam's donkey.

When he made mention of thunder and aero plane crash-landing- he particularly referred to "corrupt and greedy leaders." It was not a blanket negative wish. Could it be said that the boy had come across a portion in the scriptures that said "suffer not a witch to live"?

So, the argument out there is that it is only those that know they are corrupt that should have an axe to grind with the boy's outburst. A clear conscience fears no accusation.

Why Kazuare and his team must reform varsity VCs too

President Bola Tinubu has appointed Maj-Gen. Suleiman Kazuare (rtd), a former director-general, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and four others to form a special committee on campaign against social vices in the tertiary institutions.

The disclosure was made in a statement issued last Sunday by Sunday Asefon, senior special assistant to the President on Students Engagement.

According to him, the move was to address the growing concern of social vices plaguing tertiary institutions across the country.

He said drug abuse, sexual harassment, cultism, cyber-crime and academic dishonesty among others are some of the social vices which hin-

der academic performance and personal development of some students.

Asefon added that those vices did not only hinder academic performance but also threatened the overall safety and well-being of students thereby casting a shadow over the vibrant environment of tertiary institutions.

"The formation of the special committee underscores a significant commitment of the renewed hope agenda of President Bola Tinubu to safeguard the future of Nigerian students.

"And also, the need for a comprehensive and collaborative approach in tackling the menace of social vices in Nigeria's tertiary institutions," he said.

The development is commendable. But it is my opin-

ion that the torchlight must first be beamed on the vice chancellors of the Nigerian universities who many people believe have helped to foul the air on campuses and also to bring the entire country on her knees

A few years ago, Professor Attahiru Jega, then chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), had thought that co-opting vice chancellors into the nation's electoral process would help enthrone the desirable leadership that the country needed through a credible, fair and transparent process.

So, Jega decided to employ the VCs as returning officers during general elections. That move seems to have worsened the nation's electoral process in the esti-

mation of many Nigerians.

The VCs, who before then, were not concerned about what happened outside the four walls of their universities or what the politicians did with the wealth of the country, were wao-ed with the huge amount of money politicians were doling out just to have elections go their way.

As soon as a number of them began to receive such hefty bags of naira and big envelopes stacked with foreign currencies for "a job well done," after presiding over elections, the country has sunken deeper in morass.

Each election year since Jega introduced the VCs has been worse than the previous ones.

Today, while the VCs and professors involved in the na-

tion's electoral process have become stupendously rich, their appetite for more money has continued to grow.

Now, when the President announced a committee to look into the rot in the nation's Ivory Towers, many Nigerians' thought that the Kazuare-led panel should do well to begin with the VCs and the professors that had ever taken part in supervising any election in the country since the Jega days.

The thinking is that after exorcising the spirit from the top, dealing with the issues that form the terms of reference of the work would have been more than half solved.

The ivory towers may have become the more polluted since the vice chancellors started to frolic with politicians and collecting for-

eign currencies.

While they chase after more money through contracts, which they were not used to do before, with their appetite for vain things growing, they are distracted from presiding over the universities. In their distraction, the lecturers under them are doing all sorts of things with equally desperate students.

Was it not because they began to mix up with politicians, attending all manner of nocturnal meetings with them that they began to adopt the mannerism of politicians. So, the university environment is so corrupt nowadays that the Kazuare's team must wear thick gloves to be able to do the necessary burrowing into the depth of the rot.

Politics

I came into the gubernatorial race on conviction to serve Edo people - Ighodalo

Asue Ighodalo, a corporate lawyer and former chairman of Sterling Bank and Nigerian Breweries, is the gubernatorial candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Edo State. In this interview, he spoke on the controversy trailing his emergence, plans for the state, among other issues. Excerpts by INIOBONG IWOK

People keep tagging you the governorship candidate of Governor Obaseki, how do you react to that?

I came into the race by myself and I was asked by a number of friends, elders to consider taking up political office and I then prayed about it and discussed it with my family and partner in my law firm and then took the decision to do it.

Many things have affected my thinking and moved my thinking towards public office. I have been involved in a lot of public service over the years; in Edo state I have been in the economic team since 2008. I was in Oshomhole economic team from 2008-2016. I was asked by Governor Godwin Obaseki to chair the Alagudairo Limited by guarantee, which every year organised the economic submit of the state and had a board that periodically advised the government on economic policies.

I was chairman of the Nigerian economic summit for four years and even when I served on the board of the Nigerian sovereign investment authority for four years, there were a lot of public related activities that we were engaged in, infrastructure development and all of these came to me when I was been talked to about considering public office it makes me to shift favourably towards that thinking.

I suspect that for many people it is convenient to set a narrative to distract fact and remove from the issues. I have also said many times before that when you look at the aspirants there are many people that are closely related to Governor Obaseki and even friendlier with him than me. So, I never understand why the tag that I'm the Governor Obaseki candidate.

I don't think it is a problem anymore, I have managed to reach out to Edo people about what I think is important; economic, social issues, unemployment, security, I'm quite clear and I think Edo people now know who I am and stand for. Governor Obaseki and I have been friends for over forty years and I think he knows what I stand for, I respect him tremendously and I think he respects me too. I have worked as a corporate lawyer on the same side with him and we have been together. That is why he invited me to work with him in

We should not bring the party into disrepute, if you join a party, you should always abide by the rules of the party. We have a constitution which was updated up till 2017, we have electoral guidelines and the party has an internal mechanism for resolving disputes; I find it very strange that people resort to self-help

his economic team. But I came into this process by myself, encouraged by my friends and elders from Edo State and I have not regretted one moment coming into this race. I see a pact for the state in a way that I can contribute toward moving the state on the pact of prosperity and I'm glad I have come into this process and I would give it my all. I thank God we have gone through the first stage; I would do well by talking to the people, getting across to the people and do well by winning the election in September.

Philip Shaibu conducted a parallel primary in which he was elected candidate. What is your take?

When you hold an event in your house you can give it any name you desire, I'm sure the party will deal with this issue with the deputy governor, so we don't get into unnecessary disrepute.

Some delegates said they were denied accreditation. What is your view on that?



I think the accreditation process went very well, you know we had ward congresses where we elected three ad hoc delegates from each

ward, I think we had 192 wards and ended up having 572 delegates that were elected. The results went up to the national working committee of the party and based on the result, they were validated and confirmed based on the result and the delegates elected. We had the national delegates election a week after

that was validated and confirmed and a list of elected delegates that would take part in our primary was confirmed by the national working committee of the party and was published and circulated to APC members in Edo State that is involve in this process, that is the list that was used to conduct the primary.

I saw the list and photo, names and particulars of the delegates. So, everybody that was in the list went into the accredited centre and were then led into the venue of the primary.

We followed the constitution of the party; we followed the guideline that was set down for the election. I want to commend the national working committee of the party they did well.

I did not see any proper delegate complaining, anybody can draw up a list in their bedroom and say that is the list of delegates.

We should not bring the party into disrepute, if you join a party, you should always abide by the rules of the party. We have a constitution which was updated up till 2017, we have electoral guidelines and the party has an internal mechanism for resolving disputes; I find it very strange that people resort to self-help.

I don't think it is the proper way to proceed, I don't think that people that seek to lead should not follow the law and the rule set down and behave in a manner that would bring any credible organisation into disrepute.

I think the primary election went well, and especially from the feedback I have received.

I thank the local organising committee for the organisation that was put in place. If you are not validated by the national working committee you could not come into the accreditation centre and demand to be a delegate.

We are not in the jungle and would abide by the rules and regulations and I thank many party members that came from far and wide to abide by those rules and regulations.

We had a smooth and transparent effective primary election that was presided over by Governor Lawal and Governor Sherrif of Delta State. We had a strong panel that had a former senator and advocate of Nigeria, everything went well, I give kudos to the nation working committee.

Are you concerned the division in PDP would impact on the chances of the party at the poll?

I think the party would deal with the issue, I don't think anybody would just wake up and want to do something con-

trarily against the party and want to get that validated we are not in the jungle anymore when everything was forced. There is a lot of work to be done now, I am not losing sleep. We have to unite the party and get members together and forge ahead.

Certain person went to court to stop the primary. What is your take?

There would always be contestation and dispute in any gathering of humans; it is how those disputes are managed that matters. We have a strong internal mechanism for resolving disputes in the party and as a last resort we have the court when cases become difficult; it can go from the lower court to the highest court in the land. We must abide by the rule of law. All these issues would go through the normal judiciary process after they had gone through our own internal process in the party. I became aware that a certain person filed an injunction in court to stop the process after the primary and the court did the right thing.

There were a number of judiciary decisions which validated the position of the federal high court judge, but I think it is the proper thing and that confirms my thought that we are not in the 81 century and there is a process, precedent and the judge followed that process. I am not too worried that once we abide by the rule of law things would take their natural course. There would be a dispute but it would be resolved. I am not too worried as many people may think I may be at this time.

What ideas of funding do you have for infrastructure for the bypass and Warri Sapele Road?

For the funding I discussed with you a number of times that there are different ways of funding.

If you remember the government of Edo State just recently had a concession arrangement with a group of DFIs on how to fund Benin-Asaba Road have discussed it before, I had a pet project for example, the Benin-Achi Road for instance, we would raise funding, and we would raise infrastructure finance. The issue with raising

We would start a system of local policing where every local member of the community would be responsible for security in his or her area and would be able to give that information to the local police forces

funding is for the funder to trust the process; if they know there is a way the money would not leak and would go to the project it was met for there would not be a problem.

I am not too worried about finding appropriate cheap funding, I have been raising funds commercially and corporate in the last thirty years on project financing and transaction.

So, I'm not too worried about finding appropriate well priced, cheap funding, and attracting infrastructure to Edo State.

All kinds of funding, green funding, blended funding, creative funding, there is a lot of money out there; there is at least 17 trillion dollars, earning zero interest that we can attract if there is trust in the governance process, if there is transparency.

I don't worry too much about what we need to do is to be focused, put together the right team and meet the people in their point of needs.

There is so much to be done, Inflation is high, the continued devaluation of the naira. I was in the market the other day and I saw that people are suffering a lot; what we need is to have the right team.

I don't think we would not be able to deal with many of the problems; the only problem is that we have to prioritise, because again you would take time to build trust because when you build trust you get more funding.

So, you prioritise during the period you are trying to build trust, I know that by God's grace we would do this and attract funding.

What governance model are you adopting?



Governance model would be fully inclusive, our government would be accessible and we would go down to the grassroots and meet the people to see what the problems are.

We would have three regional

development agencies across the state, so that we look at the comparative advantage point through the state. We look at the soil type we have and what is best planted where and how to attract industries.

I think the key thing with Edo State is to sit back and look at what we intend to do to alleviate the suffering of the people.

There are so many things we can do, we can start with tourism; but I think when we talk to people of Edo State there are three things that bothers them that is; insecurity, inflation and unemployment.

There are issues like water lights, all those infrastructure things and roads.

So, we would look at the developmental and the things that would speed development in the state. We would work with the federal government to start local policing.

We would start a system of local policing where every local member of the community would be responsible for security in his or her area and would be able to give that information to the local police forces.

We would ensure that we have adequate security; anybody that steps into Edo State would know that the security position is strong.

And another thing is that we must have effective sanctioning, nobody would be able to get away with criminal acts within the state.

The problem we have is that there is no effective sanctioning process, people commit offences and they don't face sanctions that is not good. We would look into our criminal law to ensure that we have sanctions that fit the crime that is committed.

Politics

Guber poll: All eyes on Edo after conclusion of primaries by leading parties

INIOBONG IWOK

The gubernatorial primaries generated public interest across the country in recent weeks, perhaps, due to the caliber of the aspirants in the race.

The stage is now set for what is expected to be a keenly contested electioneering process that would culminate in the election of the incumbent Governor Godwin Obaseki.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has fixed September 21 for the conduct of the off-cycle governorship election in the state.

Although, most of the eighteen political parties are expected to present candidates for the election, the main contenders would be Olumide Akpata candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Asue Ighodalo

of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Monday Okpebholo, candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

The last few weeks before the primaries have been full of intrigues and power play, within the camps of the three leading parties, which saw aspirants trying to outsmart one another and engaging in power tussle in a bid to win their party's ticket.

The APC conducted its governorship primary twice as the process was marred by intrigues and power play, but in the end Okpebholo emerged in the second primary conducted last Friday.

Similar drama was seen in the PDP where the deputy governor of Edo State, Philip Shaibu held a parallel primary at his residence where he was elected the governorship candidate.

But Ighodalo was elected the party's candidate in the primary recognised and supervised by the INEC officials.

Although Shaibu insists he remains the authentic candidate of his party, the days ahead will prove all things.

In this analysis, we profile the three leading candidates, their strengths and weaknesses ahead of the commencement of campaigns two months from now.

Olumide Akpata

Akpata was born October 7, 1972. He was a senior partner and the Head of the Corporate and Commercial Practice Group at Templars law firm in Nigeria until his resignation on 31 August 2023 to enable him pursue partisan politics.

Strengths

Akpata may be new in partisan politics, but he is not someone to be under-rated considering his pop-



Asue Ighodalo



Monday Okpebholo



Olumide Akpata

ularity largely due to success in the legal profession.

Akpata was a former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), who emerged victorious on the back of large following among young lawyers who voted massively for him to become the First non-Senior Advocate of Nigerian (SAN) to be elected President of NBA in 28 years. The 30th President of the NBA in 2020.

Many political watchers say his strong political dexterity deployed to defeat other strong contenders in the NBA election in 2020 was an indication of his capacity and unpredictability.

Akpata may not have the political structure some other leading candidates can boast of in Edo State, but what is apparent is that he can match his opponents financial weight which is crucial in electoral success in Nigeria.

There are reports that Akpata's gubernatorial bid is supported by some notable political leaders in Edo State and that they have vowed to work for his victory in the September poll.

Akpata brings his unique perspective and ideas to the forefront, poised to play a role in shaping policy decisions and advocating for issues that align with the masses.

The LP may not have wide following in Edo State like the PDP and APC, but observers say he may be the candidate to beat.

Speaking recently, the ex-NBA president said he decided to contest the election on the platform of LP because it is the only people-oriented political party.

Akpata had said consistently that he had the experience and the capacity to lead the people of Edo State if given the chance.

"My interest is for the people of Edo State. And what I find out in politics and governance in Nigeria today is that the people have been taken out of the equation. Nobody cares about the people," Akpata said.

Weakness

Just like the PDP candidate, Akpata is a greenhorn in mainstream politics, his decision to join the Edo gubernatorial race came as a surprise to many observers within and outside his state because he was not previously associated with any political party in the country.

Akpata is not known to be in control of any political grassroots structure in Edo State, although he has attained some level of popularity due to success recorded in his legal practice, but observers say this may not be enough for him to win the gubernatorial election in September.

Also, some analysts have questioned the spread of LP in Edo State, saying that compare to the ruling PDP, the party do not have the spread and large membership to give victory to Akpata come September.

Similarly, there are those who fear that the current internal wrangling in the LP at the national level, may come back to hurt the party's candidate in Edo if there is no mechanism put in place to resolve issues urgently.

Asue Ighodalo

Ighodalo is a Nigerian lawyer. He is from Okaigben, Ewotimi, Esan South East LG, Edo State, Nigeria. He is alongside Femi Olubanwo, a founding partner of the law firm of Banwo-and-Ighodalo, a corporate and commercial law practice in Nigeria specializing in advising major corporations on Corporate Finance, Capital Markets, Energy & Natural Resources, Mergers & Acquisitions, Banking & Securitization and Project Finance.

Strength

Ighodalo is a successful boardroom general, who is widely known in the corporate sector having chaired Sterling Bank and Nigerian Breweries.

Although some of his critics say he has little political acumen, that can also be said about the candidate of the LP, Olumide Akpata.

But Ighodalo is contesting as candidate of the PDP, which is the ruling party in Edo State and he is bound to get the full support of the incumbent governor.

Observers say the support Ighodalo enjoys from the incumbent gov-

ernor should be a source of worry for other candidates, considering that the PDP perhaps, boast of the most formidable political structure across Edo today.

Observers say Ighodalo's wealth of corporate experience, and vast connection across the country over the years make him suitable for the number one seat.

Ighodalo has also been involved in various public and private sector initiatives. With such attractive credentials, many people say that he is the "round peg in a round hole" for Edo State and his governance would lead to prosperity in Edo State.

Analysts say Ighodalo's leadership qualities, managerial abilities, and track record in various capacities would be critical when determining his suitability for the governorship position in Edo State.

Weakness

Many people in Edo and beyond see Ighodalo as the anointed candidate of Governor Obaseki, and many political stakeholders in the state may not be happy that Governor Obaseki would impose a successor on them.

Another crucial factor that may work against his candidacy is the current disagreements between him and the deputy governor of the state, Shaibu, on who is the authentic gubernatorial candidate.

Shaibu, in recent days, has vowed

to work against the PDP if he is not declared the winner of the election. Observers say if these issues are not resolved and the party remains divided going into the governorship election, it may work against the chances of the PDP's candidate, while polarising the party.

Furthermore, considering the instability of the party at the national level to resolve the crisis that emanated from the 2023 polls, there are fears that several party chieftains may work for opposition candidate in the poll.

Monday Okpebholo

Okpebholo is a senator representing Edo-central senatorial district. He was born on June 12, 1970.

Okpebholo, is from a humble family and hardworking family. He attended the Uromi Elementary School in Edo State, thereafter, he attended Uromi Grammar School.

He went to the University of Benin where he studied agriculture economic and bagged a bachelor degree in the course in 1986.

Strength

To some close watchers of happening within APC in Edo State Okpebholo winning the primary did not come as surprise to them, judging from the fact that the people of Edo Central have been clamouring that the people of the region should succeed incumbent governor.

Edo guber: One party, parallel primaries, multiple candidates

IDRIS MOMOH, Benin

Edo State has been in the news in the last few days over the conduct of governorship primaries by political parties.

It is no longer news that the Independent National Electoral Commission has scheduled the off-cycle governorship election for Edo State on September 21, 2024.

It is not also news that the commission had released the time table and guidelines to registered political parties that would be participating in the election. The time table and guidelines include, collection of expression of interest and nomination forms by intending aspirants, screening of aspirants and conduct of primaries to nominate candidates for the individual party.

The setting on stage of the electoral processes by the commission provoked the political aspirations of many politicians who are desirous to occupy the Dennis Osadebey Government House soon-to-be vacated by the incumbent Governor, Godwin Obaseki after eight years in office.

In the quest for the actualization of their political dreams, aspirants on the platforms of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) among others as well as not too pronounced ones embarked on statewide tour across the 192 wards and 18 local government areas for consultations and wooed stakeholders in the Edo State political space for support to emerge governorship candidate in their respective political parties.

The resignation of the chairman of the committee, Seyi Makinde over the alleged handling of the electoral materials for the congress and the subsequent continuation of the congress by Peter Mbah, the governor of Enugu State who was deputy to Makinde did not however, go down well with the members of the Legacy Group of the party who boycotted the congress.

The legacy group are mainly members of the party before Governor Obaseki defected to the party in 2020 for the realization of his two-time aspiration. They also alleged that the process had been hijacked by the state Governor to favour his preferred candidate which is Asue Ighodalo, the immediate past Board Chairman of Sterling Bank.

The aggrieved nine governorship aspirants include Philip Shaibu, the State Deputy Governor, Omoregie Ogbeide-Ihama, the immediate past House of Representatives member representing Oredo federal constituency, Anselm Ojezua, Felix Akhabue, Omosede Igbinedion, Osaro Onaiwu, Hadizat Umoru, Arthur Esene, and Martin Uhomoihi.

At the date for the primary which was February 22, 2024, the Party conducted parallel primary which produced two candidates namely Philip Shaibu, the incumbent deputy governor of the state and Asue Ighodalo, the immediate past Board Chairman of Sterling Bank among others conglomerates.

Shaibu was declared candidate by Moses Batholomew with 302 votes at a residence at GRA, Benin City, while Ighodalo was declared candidate by Dauda Lawal, Zamfara state governor, who was the chairman as well as returning officer with 577 votes at Samuel Ogbemudia stadium.

Ugboaja, the returning officer for the primary at Lushville Hotel, the designated venue for the collation. Announcement had already been for eight local governments before the ex-

ercise got disrupted by political thugs.

Of the eight local governments Monday Okpebholo won six with 5,872 votes closely followed by Dennis Idahosa. At the venue, the political thugs allegedly working for one of the governorship aspirants invaded the collation centre and disrupted the announcement of the results.

The thugs also assaulted journalists and destroyed their gadgets such as laptops, cameras and Android phones.

The development laced with petitions by aspirants, and other stakeholders made the NWC to declare the exercise inconclusive and ordered for a rerun. At the end of the conclusion, Bassey Otu, Cross River state governor, who replaced Uzodinma as chairman of the primary as well as doubled as returning officer declared Monday Okpebholo candidate with 12,433 votes against 6,541 votes for Dennis Idahosa.

As APC exercise was described as not encouraging, PDP also came with similar crisis. Though, the party had been in crisis since the build up to the primary occasioned by the conduct of ward and local government's delegates congresses to elect delegates for PDP governorship primary.

The People's Democratic Party was, however, embroiled over the mode of conduct of ward delegates congress, list of the party electoral officers to conduct the congress among others.

The resignation of the chairman of the committee, Seyi Makinde over the alleged handling of the electoral materials for the congress and the subsequent continuation of the congress by Peter Mbah, the governor of Enugu State who was deputy to Makinde did not however, go down well with the members of the Legacy Group of the party who boycotted the congress.

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Politics

Tone down on your 2027 boasts, Eze advises Wike

...Says, he should rather be concerned about suffering Nigerians

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

A political commentator and publicist, Eze Chukwuemeka Eze, has cautioned the former governor of Rivers State and now FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, to tone down on his boasts over 2027 elections, saying Nigerians are swimming in suffering and anger.

Eze, a chief, rather sees Wike 2027 boasts as insensitive in the face of economic crisis. The erstwhile National Publicity Secretary of the defunct New People's Democratic Party (nPDP) and chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in a statement reacted to the boasts by Wike that he would have no obstacle in 2027.

Eze however, said it smacks of ridicule and manifest insensitivity to the plight of Nigerians who he said have been reduced to the status of hunger-stricken refugees in their own land.

He said for the FCT Minister to begin to talk about 2027 elections and how no one can challenge him in Rivers State at the polls when the administration under which he serves has thrown the country into the darkest period of economic woes in the annals of her history.

"It is ridiculous that while many Nigerians are dying in droves because of the hardship facing us as a nation, an opportunist like Chief Nyesom Wike the incumbent Minister of FCT in the Thanksgiving Service in honour of Senator Barinada Mpigi would be talking about 2027 general election and how nobody will be in position to challenge him and his group."

In a report titled, "I Don't Know Who Can Challenge Us In 2027", Wike highlighted that with the alliances his political



camp has formed, the 2027 elections will be a walk in the park for them.

The minister spoke of his readiness for the 2027 elections during a thanksgiving service by Mpigi in Koroma, Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State on Sunday.

"With the forces we have I don't know of anybody who can challenge us. I can tell you it is like tomorrow is 2027. For me it is still very far, I can't wait. The two leaderships of the party, APC is here, PDP is here; where can you find that leadership unity? Which state? It is only in Rivers that you can find that unity."

"This is the only state where the leading party will win for president, the opposition party will take national assembly in election that was done the same time, same minute and same hour. That is uncommon," Wike said.

In a statement made available to the media, Eze said with the confidence the

FCT Minister spoke on how he intended to 'win' elections in 2027, it is either the former Governor no longer operates from Nigeria or must be operating either from the Moon or the Sun not to observe the level of protests all over the country or the collapse of the Naira or the failure of our economy and the attendant hunger ravaging Nigerians.

"And all of these happened during a misplaced thanksgiving service by Mpigi who himself has no legacy of a tangible project to show for his wasted years in the Senate."

Eze said given the reality on ground, Nigeria has become a living hell on earth as food, cement, fuel prices continue to hit the roof. He said following the exorbitant cost of rice, garri, beans and other food items, Nigerians now go to bed each night hungry and these reality should concern any reasonable Nigerian who

is part of the government of the day like Nyesom Wike - the FCT Minister.

"As at the time Wike was making his outlandish utterances a litre of fuel was sold at N720, a bag of rice for N75,000, a basin of Ikwerre Garri N12,000 and N12,000 for a bag of cement."

"It calls for concern that in situation of economic hardship such that we have fallen into, where 46 Professors and others in UNIABUJA, FUTMinna according to ASUU died due to attendant hardship, valueless opportunists like Wike would be talking about elections without being mobbed."

Eze quoted the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Abuja zone of expressing deep sorrow on Monday over the loss of several of its members due to economic hardship, inadequate remuneration, and unfavorable working conditions prevailing in the country.

According to report from ASUU, at least 46 academics have passed away in universities within the Abuja zone, including the University of Abuja, Federal University of Technology Minna, Federal University Lafia, Nasarawa State University Nasarawa, and Ibrahim Babaginda University, Lapai.

The union, he stated, highlighted the recent demise of the professor, Johnson Oyero, an esteemed scholar in Fisheries at the Federal University of Technology, Minna, attributing his death to the lack of access to quality medical facilities.

In another development, Eze highlighted how Muhammad Abubakar, the Sultan of Sokoto, lamented the economic hardship in the country, saying Nigerians were hungry and angry.

The traditional ruler spoke at the 6th executive committee meeting of

the northern traditional rulers council (NTRC) which held in Kaduna state

"To make matters worse, we are faced with rising levels of poverty of most of our people; a lack of normal sources of livelihood for the common man to have even a good meal a day," he said.

"I have said it so many times and at so many fora that, things are not okay in Nigeria and of course, things are not okay in the north."

"To me, this government is a continuation of the former government; it is the same party."

The Labour will soon go on a two day nationwide protest, the Petroleum sector with the Drivers threatening to go on strike with Nigerians dying in droves and our children are being withdrawn from School and a fellow who calls himself a leader for lack of what go do is here preaching to Nigerians with guts on how he intends to win the 2027 general elections thinking that Nigerians are fools.

"Today, Nigerians are eating from the dustbin while in Lagos, Nigerians are being treated like animals while struggling for a hundred Naira loaf of bread and two tubers of yam but to Wike what matters most is how to rig the 2027 general election. May God have pity on him!"

Eze concluded by describing Wike's mannerisms at these trying times as ridiculous, insensitive, callous, careless, unfortunate and attempt to incite the angry and hungry Nigerians against Tinubu's Administration.

While urging citizens to continue in prayers with hope that things will get better, Eze called on Nigerians to be wary of Wike as a common enemy who do not mean well for the country and her people.

INEC finally reveals why IReV failed in 2023 presidential poll

INIJOBONG IWOK

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has revealed that the results of the 2023 presidential election could not be uploaded because the server returned "HTTP error" due to a configuration bug that was discovered after the presiding officers at the polling units could only upload the results of the National Assembly elections.

The commission stated this in a comprehensive post-mortem on the 2023 general election which was released just about a year after the presidential election was conducted and made available to BusinessDay.

The report documented the failure of the result viewing portal (IReV) during the presidential poll among others.

The commission stated that it moved swiftly to fix the problem

by creating and deploying hotfixes and the hotfixes resolved the "HTTP error" on the system leading to the uploading of the first presidential result at 8:55 pm on election day.

"Consequently, while the uploads for the NASS elections succeeded as the application was able to identify the respective state and build the folder hierarchy for the results organization process for the election, attempts to upload the presidential election results sheets, which does not belong to or mapped to any state on the database, failed. Instead, it returned a HTTP server error response," the report said.

The report stated that after the problem with the upload was resolved, the commission noticed a high volume of uploads on the queue and all results that were scanned but could not be uploaded due to the error were queued wait-

ing to be automatically processed.

INEC further narrated how the problem was first reported at 4 pm on election day and how it was partially resolved in four hours and added that the large poll of results waiting to be uploaded across the country slowed down the process.

The commission admitted that it was a key challenge that impacted on the public perception of the election and elicited widespread commentary across the country.

"To begin with, it is important to note that the IReV portal is one of the most significant innovations introduced by the Commission prior to the 2023 General Election to promote the integrity and transparency of the electoral process."

"As a public-facing website, the IReV portal shows the images of the original Polling Unit result sheets as recorded in Form EC8A."

"Another was that the of line queue requires the BVAS devices

to be switched on and connected to the internet for the upload.

"However, some of the POs had at the time left their PUs, and the devices had either been switched off or were out of internet coverage. Switched-off devices could not connect and upload the results sheets."

"The commission had to reach out to the POs of affected areas to switch on their systems and ensure internet connectivity for the uploads to continue. This accounted for the delay, with some of the results coming in the next day."

Many international and local observers viewed the 2023 presidential elections as not meeting the expectations of Nigerians despite promises by INEC in the run-off to the poll. The election results were rejected by many Nigerians who accused INEC of favouring the ruling party candidate, Tinubu.

Nigerians had to wait for weeks before the presidential results

could be uploaded to IReV, leading to widespread protests by opposition parties and their supporters.

Also, the results eventually posted on IReV were analysed by several media and civil society organisations with a conclusion that the votes for Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), were inflated in Rivers State while those of Peter Obi, candidate of the Labour Party (LP), were reduced.

Tinubu was credited with 231,591 votes while Obi had 175,071 votes in the official results.

The results posted on IReV appeared to show that Obi won Rivers with about 100,000 votes, which was however not significant enough to overturn the national gap of over two million votes between him and Tinubu on hand and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, who came second.

Crime watch

Killing the killer: Elimination of top killer and the gripping story of Rivers cult wars

...How scorpion tattoo, wide tooth gap, helped identify 2Baba's body
 ...His abduction exploits even minutes before he was killed
 ...Hope rises that body of butchered gallant police fighter, SP Bako, may be found after all

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The story of blood and fire that started on Saturday, September 8, 2023, seems to have ended on February 23, 2024. It began with the capture and butchering of a gallant police fighter, SP Bako Angbashim, at Ahoada area of Rivers State in circumstances still strange to this day, example, what was he doing in the evil forest of Ahoada, and how did he his back men escape for only him to die?

Now, it has ended with not just the killing of the suspected killer, 2Baba (Gift Okpara Okpolowu) but the display of his corpse to convince doubters who rejected the story of the killing told by the Rivers State Commissioner of Police, Tunde Disu, who said the wanted killer was killed on February 17, 2024.

Doubters seem to agree that 2Baba the kingpin and master butcher has died. They only admitted this when they saw not only the corpse but the scorpion tattoo on his left upper arm and the wide tooth gap that welcomes eyes to his face each time he spoke in the video clips that hailed him as 'Maximum'.

Scorpion as a motif signifies resilience and fighting spirit. So, as the over all commander of Iceland, he was seen as the chief fighter.

Last operations before he died:

He seemed to be so confident and fearless. His gang had taken over Ahoada West running a mini government levying sums on prominent persons who paid homage or ransom to avoid abduction or attack.

Even while the combined team of police, army, air force, and navy swam the skies and bushes looking for him, he still calmly demanded and collected ransoms.

A source within crime reporting network hinted that even on the day he died, he had few hours before called and threatened one of the biggest business women in Ahoada East and West LGAs to pay specific amount of money into an account he gave (account details withheld) or be kidnapped or killed. He was said to have given 12pm as of Saturday as deadline.

Sources confirmed that the lady was weeping profusely seeking help from deep media personalities on how to escape her ordeal. It is said that the lady is just one out of hundreds that were captives or under leash of 2Baba.

Action:

The world is now prepared to believe the police story that on February 17, 2024, at around 12noon, 2Baba and his gang attacked Okogbe town and Odiokwu community, destroying



CP that killed 2Baba

pipelines. Few hours later, operatives raided his new camp. Despite a fierce gun battle, 2Baba and his gang members escaped. However, at around 2pm, intelligence confirmed 2Baba's death after he lost consciousness and resuscitation attempts failed.

Efforts were in progress to retrieve the body of the infamous killer, while investigations into the Iceland cult's activities in the region continued.

End of the search:

On February 23, 2024, another Saturday, the next Commissioner of Police, Tunde Disu, summoned Crime Correspondents in what is often the police most gleeful moment. He called an update on a significant operation conducted by the Rivers State Police Command. "On Friday, February 23, 2024, based on credible information, our tactical operatives successfully located the shallow grave of Gift Okpara also known as 2Baba, a notorious Iceland cult leader in Ebrass, Ahoada West, Rivers State.

"We were able to recover the corpse of 2Baba, who was responsible for the brutal murder of former DPO Ahoada Division, late SP. Bako Angbashim on September 8, 2023, in Odumude community, Ahoada East Local Government Area."

He commended the various layers of power, force, and organs that helped to achieve the task, and disclosed the role of the Inspector General of Police in helping to design and plot and approve the plans. He mentioned the Air Force who bombed the areas suspected to be occupied by the gang. He said the state governor (Sim Fubara) gave

unwavering support. This was at a time many were wondering who in high places was shielding the king killer.

He added: "It is crucial for our citizens to recognize the importance of collaboration and support in our fight against crime. We urge the public to continue providing us with timely and accurate information that can aid in identifying and apprehending criminals. Together, we can create a safer environment for all.

"I want to assure the residents of Rivers State that the Rivers State Police Command remains committed to the safety and security of our state. We will continue our operations to apprehend other members of 2baba's gang and dismantle any remaining criminal networks. We call on the public to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities to the appropriate authorities."

Special intelligence:

While the police mounted their intelligence-driven operations, arresting 2Baba's contacts and allies to get more tips, some Crime Reporters were



Gift Okpara Okpolowu alias 2Baba

also picking the brains of their own sources within the cult groups around the state. These groups seem to know everything.

They it was that confirmed that 2Baba was actually dead. It was gathered that he was unconscious after the last attack (bombing) in the forest. His men took his limp body away. When he died, they buried him in Ebrass Forest and went on running. That was where the police found his shallow grave.

Cult gang leaders are usually the ones that end head hunting of a fugitive cult leader or group. This is because it attracts all security forces into the forests and creeks and all other illegal economic operations become standstill. It also leads to killings and arrests of other foot soldiers. The leaders usually hold meetings and decide to end the hunt by selling the wanted king so the bushes would be quiet again for their other activities to resume. Thus, the police began to harvest troves of intelligence which aided the hunt and led to successful execution of the 2Baba hunt. Before now, the police had run

round the state looking for the suspected killer.

At a point, 2Baba had hopes and began to record videos and voice clips to radio stations professing his innocence, same man that made an infamous video of how he tortured 2Baba and butchered his body.

How we prosecuted the hunt – police

The Rivers police command was under intense pressure at a point. They believed that the frequent change of divisional police officers in Ahoada and the Commissioners of Police in Rivers State was a ploy to confuse the hunt.

The police PPRO stated: In response to the heinous murder of SP Bako Angbashim, the courageous Divisional Police Officer of Ahoada Division, on September 8, 2023, in Odiumude Community, Ahoada-West LGA of Rivers State, the law enforcement agencies, including the Police, Military, and relevant stakeholders, have been unwavering in their commitment to apprehending the culprits and ensuring justice is served.

Viral videos revealing the brutal murder of SP Bako and the brazen display of weapons identified 2BABA and his gang, affiliated with the Iceland Secret Cult. A manhunt ensued, with the Rivers State Government and Nigeria Police offering a 100 million naira bounty for any credible information leading to 2BABA's arrest.

Upon assuming office as the Commissioner of Police for Rivers State on November 15, 2023, CP Olatunji Disu conducted an operational tour

to Ahoada local government, where the late DPO was murdered. The Commissioner urged officers to intensify efforts in apprehending those responsible for the gruesome killing. He also paid respects to the five innocent individuals— Charles Osu, Ogbobula Eja, Idaowukwa Felix, Paul Victor, and Achinivu Saturday Edi—who were tragically killed by 2BABA and his gang on suspicion of collaboration with the police. May their souls rest in peace.

The operation adheres to the philosophy of policing by consent, where police authority relies on public consensus rather than force. The Rivers State Police Command appreciates the support from stakeholders, enhancing intelligence-led operations and ensuring no injuries or casualties among law enforcement agencies in the pursuit of justice.

During the operation, more than 70 suspects tied to SP Bako's murder were arrested and prosecuted. However, 2BABA and his gang managed to escape arrest by withdrawing into the forest, exploiting the difficult terrain and strategically placing informants to monitor security forces' movements.

Undeterred, the police formed specialized teams, coordinating with the Army, Navy, Air Force, DSS, and NSCDC in joint security meetings. A resolution was reached, declaring that an attack on one agency is an affront to all, reinforcing their united pursuit of justice against the perpetrators.

Timeline of the Special Operation Targeting 2BABA:

On November 28, 2023, at 1600hrs, Commissioner of Police, Ola tunji Disu, formed a special joint operation involving Tactical Units and the Intelligence Response Team (IRT) to apprehend the wanted suspect, David Gift Okpara (alias 2BABA), and his associates. The operation aimed to capture those responsible for the murder of SP Bako Angbashim and recover their weapons and ammunition.

On November 29, 2023, a female associate of 2BABA was arrested, offering valuable insights into the fugitive's lifestyle.

On December 3, 2023, information revealed that 2BABA frequently visited a nearby community via canoe. Despite a two-week surveillance for an ambush using human intelligence (HUMINT), he abruptly stopped visiting, seemingly aware of the proposed operation to be launched.

On December 6, 2023, 2BABA executioner, Faithful Babington Joseph, seen wielding an AK47 in a viral gang video, was arrested at his Etche LGA hideout. He died from a gunshot wound sustained during a failed escape attempt.

December 13, 2023: Another



Crime watch

Namang's brutal killing calls for enhanced security architecture on the Plateau

NATHANIEL GBAORON

PLATEAU, one of the middle belt states in Nigeria, has been shaken by the shocking murder of Sylvanus Namang, a prominent figure and spokesperson for the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the state.

He was shot dead on a Saturday evening in Pankshin town, Pankshin Local Government Area of the state. The chairman of the party, Rufus Bature who confirmed the incident to journalists in Jos, said the APC spokesperson died from injuries sustained in the attack.

Namang's untimely demise has sent shockwaves through the community, igniting calls for urgent action to bolster security measures in the area.

Namang, Known for his vocal advocacy and dedication to his political party, was tragically gunned down in a brazen attack, leaving residents and political colleagues reeling in disbelief.

Gov. Mutfwang condemns act

The Executive Governor of Plateau State, Caleb Mutfwang expressed deep sorrow and outrage over the brutal killing of the APC spokesperson by suspected kidnapers.

In a condolence message, Governor Mutfwang described the incident as a heinous crime and a

barbaric act that violates the sanctity of human life.

He urged the security agencies to spare no effort in tracking down and bringing to justice the culprits of the dastardly act.

He said the untimely death of the State Publicity Secretary was a colossal loss not only to his family and the APC, but also to the en-

tire Plateau State and the nation at large.

He sympathised with the Mwaghavul nation, the APC, Plateau State and all those who knew and worked with the late politician.

In a statement made available to journalists in Jos by his Director of Press and Public Affairs, Gyang

Bere, Governor Mutfwang praised the late Namang for his unwavering faith, wisdom, diligence, commitment and resilience in the service of God and humanity.

He said he was a loyal and dedicated party man who contributed immensely to the growth and development of the APC in the state, adding that he was a compassionate and generous leader who touched many lives with his kindness and charity.

He noted that the late Namang would be greatly missed by all who knew him and benefited from his virtues and values.

The governor urged his family, the Mwaghavul nation, the APC and the people of Plateau State to find solace in the legacies he left behind and the memories he shared with them.

Governor Mutfwang equally sympathised with the family of late Sunny Okonkwo, who was also killed by the suspected kidnapers and prayed God to comfort the grieving family.

"The governor, on behalf of his family, the government and the peace-loving people of Plateau State, extended his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families, the Mwaghavul nation, the Igbo Community, the APC and prayed God Almighty to grant them comfort and the fortitude to bear the irreparable loss," the statement further read.



Ganduje urges meticulous investigation into the incident

Amidst the grief and shock following his tragic murder, the National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Abdullahi Ganduje, has called for a meticulous investigation into the incident.

Ganduje who made the call recently in Jos when he led members of the National Working Committee (NEC) of the party to a condolence visit to the state chapter of APC emphasized the importance of ensuring justice for the deceased and his family.

Represented by the National Chairman north, Ali Dolari, the national chairman stated, "The untimely demise of Namang is a great loss to our party and the nation. We cannot allow such heinous acts to go unpunished. It is imperative that law enforcement agencies conduct a thorough investigation to unravel the perpetrators of this dastardly act."

The APC chairman stressed the need for transparency and diligence in the investigative process, emphasizing that accountability must be upheld at all levels.

He urged relevant authorities to leave no stone unturned in their quest for truth and justice.

The chairman extended his heartfelt condolences to the family, friends, and associates of the late Namang, assuring them of the party's unwavering support during this difficult time.

Responding, the state chairman of the party, Rufus Bature who welcomed the delegation urged the party members to be security conscious in the face of growing insecurity in the state.

He appreciated the national secretariat of the party for identifying with the state chapter at the moment of grief.



As investigations continue, the Plateau APC community remains in mourning, with tributes pouring in for Namang, whose legacy as a dedicated spokesperson and political stalwart will be forever remembered.

Before becoming the state APC publicity secretary, the late Namang was a retired zonal director of the Federal Radio Cooperation of Nigeria (FRCN) north central zonal office situated in Lafia, Nasarawa state capital.

The state awaits the outcome of the investigation, with expectations high for swift action and accountability in bringing those responsible for his death to justice. His murder has galvanized public outcry and united voices in a collective demand for justice and security on the Plateau.

It is imperative that government authorities, community leaders, and stakeholders heed this call and work together to forge a path towards lasting peace, stability, and prosperity for all residents of the Plateau. Only through concerted and sustained efforts can the tragic loss of the veteran journalists serve as a catalyst for positive change and a brighter future for generations to come.

Police says not assassins but kidnapers killed spokesperson

But reacting to the killing, the Plateau State Command of the Nigerian Police said it received information that some unknown gunmen suspected to be kidnapers, numbering about seven (7) invaded the relaxation centre of one Sunny Okonkwo, located along Pankshin -Jos road, and kidnapped the owner.

According to a statement made available to BusinessDay in Jos by the Command's Spokesperson, DSP Alfred Alabo, while in the process, a customer, one Sylvanus Namang was shot dead by the assailants.

The statement reads: "On the 17/02/2024 at about 2000hrs we received information that some unknown gunmen suspected to be kidnapers, numbering about seven (7) invaded the relaxation centre of one Mr. Sunny Okonkwo, located along Pankshin - Jos road, and kidnapped the owner.

"On receipt of the information, the Commissioner of police, CP Hassan Steve Yabanet, directed the Area Commander and DPO Pankshin to arrest the suspects and rescue the victims.

"The Area Commander and DPO immediately swung into action, engaged the hoodlums in a gun battle and due to our

superior gun power, we were able to foil the kidnap attempt. The suspects ran away with serious gunshot injuries, the victim was rescued and rushed to the General Hospital, Pankshin for treatment of both bullet and machet injuries.

"After much struggling for his life, the victim was later confirmed dead by the medical doctor.

"The Commissioner of Police, Hassan Steve Yabanet, uses this opportunity to console with the families of the deceased and assures them that the Police is doing all within their power to ensure that the suspects are arrested and prosecuted in accordance to the

laws of the State."

The command also said that one suspect has been arrested in connection with the kidnap of the two Catholic priests in Pankshin Diocese, and is currently assisting the Police in arresting the remaining suspects.

"The CP urges the general public to always feed the Police with useful, timely and accurate information to enable the police keep Plateau State safer for all of us to live in."

As investigations into his murder continues, the incident has highlighted the pressing need increased security protocols across the Plateau.

Plateau State, characterised by its diverse ethnic and reli-

gious makeup, has experienced recurring episodes of violence and unrest in recent years.

Tensions often simmer beneath the surface, exacerbated by issues such as land disputes, resource competition, and political rivalries. Namang's murder serves as a stark reminder of the fragile peace that exists in the area and the ever-present threat to the lives of its inhabitants. In response to this heinous act, there is a resounding call for authorities to take decisive action to enhance security measures and restore confidence in the safety of the Plateau community.

This includes bolstering law enforcement presence, implementing intelligence-driven policing strategies, and fostering community engagement initiatives aimed at fostering trust and cooperation between residents and security forces.

Moreover, there is a pressing need for comprehensive efforts to address the root causes of violence and instability in the region. This entails addressing underlying grievances, promoting dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting groups, and investing in socio-economic development programs that offer viable alternatives to violence and extremism.



Killing the killer: Elimination of top...

Continued from page 19

female associate of 2BABA was apprehended.

December 15, 2023 (0100hrs): An attack was launched against 2BABA, but he evaded capture due to information provided by his network of informants in various communities. His camp was subsequently destroyed, prompting him to relocate.

December 23, 2023: Operatives arrested a nurse and an informant who provided information to 2BABA leading to the killing of five individuals in his community. The nurse also facilitated logistical support for 2BABA's gang, including food, illicit drugs, water, and gathering information on police activities. Both suspects are currently facing legal proceedings.

December 31, 2023: A multi-agency attack was launched on 2BABA's camp, resulting in his narrow escape and subsequent relocation.

From January 19, 2024: Operatives successfully deployed advanced technology, revolutionizing their approach to the operation and gathering crucial intelligence.

On February 1, 2024, it became clear through continuous surveillance that

2BABA strategically selected a campsite with difficult terrain to discourage land-based attacks, necessitating the use of canoes to reach the location.

On February 10, 2024, the command shared essential information with the Air Force. Around 19:30hrs on the scheduled day, the Air Force executed an aerial assault, causing significant casualties and injuries to 2BABA and his gang.

On February 17, 2024, at around 12:00hrs, 2BABA and his gang attacked Okogbe town and Odiokwu community, destroying pipelines.

At 04:00hrs, operatives raided 2BABA's new camp. Despite a fierce gun battle, 2BABA and his gang members escaped. However, at around 14:00hrs, intelligence confirmed 2BABA's death after he lost consciousness and resuscitation attempts failed.

Efforts are in progress to retrieve the body of the infamous killer, while investigations into the Iceland cult's activities in the region continue.

The Rivers State Police Command remains resolute in its duty to protect the lives and property of the citizens, and it will continue to employ all necessary resources and strategies to ensure a safe and secure environment

Society Extra with

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Rep Tunji Akinosi celebrates in style

Honourable Tunji Akinosi, the Ogun federal lawmaker representing Ado/Ota Federal Constituency had a reason to celebrate a few days ago. Hon. Akinosi who is the Deputy Chairman, House Committee on Alternative Education added another year in fine style. For Hon. Akinosi, it was a moment to step back in history and reflect on God's mercies over the last few decades. A man of strong faith, Hon. Akinosi known for his business-like approach to issues took time out of his busy engagements to celebrate his big day. The lawmaker who is married to a top banker was treated to a classic birthday dinner by his wife. Expectedly, he was surrounded by loved ones including his wife and a few close friends and associates.



Described as a servant leader, Hon. Akinosi is one of few professionals in politics. Since his electoral triumph in the last Na-

tional Assembly election, Hon. Akinosi has covered himself in glory with commendable representation. Apart from lobbying to facilitate infrastructural projects

to his constituency, the energetic politician has also embarked on a range of empowerment initiatives to improve the socioeconomic status of his constituents. Recent-

ly, the federal lawmaker doled out various items including bags of rice and cash to market men and women, youth associations, community development associations, NGOs, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), League of Imams, Baales and traditional authorities across the length and breadth of his constituency as part of his annual end of the year philanthropic initiative.

Hon. Akinosi who is serving his first term as a member of House of Representatives has demonstrated a commendable passion for service to humanity. He is a man in a hurry to impress his constituents. To say that he has hit the ground running is simply stating the obvious. Hon. Akinosi is proving to be a breath of fresh air in terms of effective representation and integrity in public service. His birthday was another opportunity to celebrate a man whose passion for excellence in the political landscape is unmatched.



Inspiring humanitarian strides of Nasahaira Belisa Morales

The name Nasahaira Belisa Morales might not ring a bell in an everyday day setting but her humanitarian works can best be described as commendable. A proud daughter of a Curaçaoan father and a Columbian mother, Belisa as affectionately known is a kind hearted woman. Maybe because of her background, she has so much love in heart to give. Her capacity for compassion has never been in doubt. Interestingly, Belisa embracing a life full of diverse experiences outside her comfort zone has found a new home in one of Africa most populated countries, Nigeria. Since 2021, she has made Nigeria her second home. Not only that she is living life to the fullest in Nigeria. And most importantly, she is spreading love across the country through her many acts of kindness.

Described as a woman of many passions, Belisa is on top of her game in the entrepreneurial world. She is the founder and head honcho at House of Royals, a business development company. Proving that there's more to her than her background, Belisa is creating her own footsteps and scaling new heights effortlessly. She is the co-owner of the beauty hub known as Callix NG and the magic wand be-

hind one of the high-end rooftop restaurants in Lagos. But that's not the story. Unknown to many, Belisa has had more success in her philanthropic ventures than in business. She's been involved in philanthropic ventures right from the tender age of 15 with Beautiful Helping Hands in Curaçao. She has evolved over the last few decades yet retaining her spirit of compassion and empathy. In Nigeria she has carried various initiatives including visitation to Lagos State correctional centre located at Birel Avenue in Yaba axis of Lagos. At the rehabilitation centre for teenage boys, she doled out materials including 250 bags of sachet water. She equally visited Paceaali School of the blind in Lagos. She has continued to contribute her quota to the upliftment of the disadvantaged in the Nigerian society.

An epitome of beauty and brain, Belisa boasts an enviable educational credentials including a degree in International Law and European Law at The Hague University of Applied Science in the Netherlands. She is known for her strong work ethics and commitment to excellence. She's always willing to offer a helping hand whenever she's called upon. Her bright personality has won her a lot of admirers from all walks of life.

Ayisat Gbajabiamila pays last respect to dad

Dr. Ayisat Gbajabiamila, a renowned medical expert and founder of Ayisat Gbajabiamila Foundation, a non-profit organisation, NGO, dedicated to the welfare of the less privileged joined the league of people whose fathers are up in the skies. The kindhearted woman of substance lost her beloved father, Alhaji Abdulfatai Ishola Gbajabiamila aka Baba Kaduna who died on 9th of February, 2024 aged 87 years old. Described as a shining light of the Muslim faith, Baba Kaduna according to people who interacted with him during his lifetime lived a fulfilled life worthy of emulation. He was a kind man who pursued peace with all men. It was understandable why his demise left so many people including his children heartbroken. He was a good man.



To honour his memory, Dr. Gbajabiamila alongside her siblings organized a befitting 7th Day Fidau prayer for late Alhaji Chief Abdulfatai Ishola Gbajabiamila. The 7th Fidau prayer held at Princess Lilian Health Farm in Isheri/Osun attracted the who-is-who in the Nigerian High society including revered Muslim clerics

and top socialite. The turnout of high-profile personalities at the 7th Day Fidau Prayer speaks volumes about the pedigree of Dr.

Ayisat Gbajabiamila. A woman of high social ranking, Dr. Gbajabiamila has carved a niche for herself in both her career and hu-

manitarian world. And it's no surprise that high-profile individuals from all walks of life took time out to share in her grief and pay their last respect to one of the most important men on her life. The White&Green themed 7th Fidau prayer was colourful and full of prayers for the departed soul and the family he left behind. Not only that, there was plenty to eat and drink as Dr. Gbajabiamila spared no expense in ensuring that her guests had a memorable time.

As expected, the roll call at the 7th Day Fidau prayer parades top socialities like Abbas Akande aka Obesere and other celebrities. The presence of media giants like LTV Channel 8 crew and City People Events crew also added glamour to the event. The Lagos State Government Security team provided water tight security at the event. And there were no ugly incidents of any sort. Cocktails was handled by Chill at Cocktails while the sumptuous meals served at the 7th Day Fidau prayer were handled by Chef Adetutu and Chef Dayo of Amala Zone. It was truly a colourful day for Dr. Ayisat Gbajabiamila and her siblings.

Hon. Abayomi Bello's Midas Touch

Abayomi Bello, top businessman and chieftain of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is a man synonymous with compassion and excellence. His large heart has won him a wide network of admirers in his home state of Kogi where is a force to be reckoned with. Abayomi who hailed from Kabba-Bunu/Ijumu Federal Constituency Area of Kogi State has covered himself in glory in the business community. He has built a business empire playing strong in key areas of the Nigerian economy. Through his

many businesses located in Kogi State, Abayomi has been able to lift hundreds of people out of poverty. Call him a passionate community developer and you won't be wrong. Abayomi who has had incredible success in his businesses thanks to his resilience and positive attitude has continued to shine his light on humanity. He's a man blessed with a magic wand. And he's happily spreading his wealth amongst his people. That's the hallmark of the Abayomi Bello brand.

Abayomi who once contested for

the Jabba-Bunu/Ijumu Federal Constituency ticket under the PDP platform has demonstrated that his love for the people of his community is beyond selfish gains and personal gratification. A man of many parts, Abayomi in spite of unsuccessfully political ambition has not stopped his interventions in the development of his community and state in general. He has invested huge personal resources into philanthropic ventures ranging from educational support, human capital development and entrepreneurial initiatives. For



Abayomi, it's the people first, whether in power or not, the welfare of the less privileged must be taken care of. He has taken up the challenge of providing leadership and impacting the lives of people in his community.

Known for his developmental politics, Abayomi is one of the biggest private employers of labour in Kogi State. He's a committed grassroots man who is willing to go above and beyond to bring prosperity to his people. Described as a selfless man full of milk of human kindness, Abayomi has done a lot in the area of service to humanity. No doubt, he's indeed a great ambassador of Kogi State and one of God's gifts to humanity.

Bliss with Nonye Ben-Nwankwo

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I didn't invest because I had no advisers – Ruggedman

Back in the days rap artiste, Micheal Ugochukwu Stephen, popularly known as Ruggedman, has said he didn't invest properly especially when he was famous, because he didn't have good advisers.

In an interview with Chude Jideonwo's WithChude, Ruggedman said the best thing any entertainer should do is to invest wisely especially when he or she is reigning.

He said, "The industry didn't leave me behind. Things changed, music changed, production changed, and that was exactly what happened to us. What happens is that you come out; God gives you the big 'blow', you become famous. Nobody reigns forever. I knew that nobody reigns forever, so the best thing you can do for yourself as an entertainer and in life is that you make the best of it. Build the bridges you can build, invest. Although I didn't invest, because there was nobody around me who could have advised me when I was coming up."

Speaking on how he moved from being a musician to an actor, Ruggedman who featured in Jim Iyke's No Bad Comment, and



Toyin Abraham's Ghost and The Tout too, said he is an all round entertainer.

He said, "I am an entertainer. When I came up, I was rapper but now I am into acting, I have a radio show, and I have a character that I created in skit making. I have always acted; my first feature in a movie was before I became Ruggedman. This was from 1993 to 1995, with the late Francis Agu. He used to live on my street in Akoka (Lagos). I woke up one morning and asked myself, 'what haven't I done', and acting was one

of the things that came to mind. I spoke to him about it, and he invited me for an audition."

In the interview, Ruggedman, talked about the brouhaha he faced with singer, 9ice and his ex wife, Toni Payne.

He revealed that he introduced 9ice to Toni to promote his music on her website.

"I later discovered they were involved but had no issue with it."

However, he said he noticed a situation that caused him concern in 2010 which led to a rift between him and 9ice. He shared

that he wasn't even invited to their wedding, which further fueled the tension.

Talking about 9ice's song "Once Beaten Twice Shy," which many had felt their lyrics centered on Ruggedman and Toni Payne, Ruggedman said he had confronted 9ice about it.

"The saddest part for me was the fact that it now dawned on me that when that album came out, 'The Tradition,' it wasn't moving until that rumor started. From 'have you heard the song where 9ice said he caught his wife,' it moved to 'have you heard the song where 9ice said 'Ruggedman and his wife'"

"I called 9ice and expressed my concern about the song and how people were misinterpreting the lyrics, believing they were about his wife and me. But 9ice insisted that everyone handle their own reputation.

"A lot of people started buying the album just to hear what he was supposed to have said. It really hurt me because I felt like he threw me and his ex wife under the bus just so he could sell CDs."

He said that 9ice apologized six years later, but he felt like they both lost a lot because of that season.

Star Radler hosts the love experience

It was fun galore recently when the Star Radler brand hosted The Love Experience in Lagos.

The Love Experience was an evening etched in the memory of all the attendees as they got the premium treatment from the moment they stepped into the warm ambience as Star Radler went all out with the food, music, and coziness evoked by Valentine's Day and the profound essence of love.

Surrounded by picture-worthy spots perfect for capturing memorable moments,

ing main courses accompanied by soft, soulful music playing in the background. The second Love Moments session featured delightful desserts and DIY cocktails, creating a perfect interlude for guests to unwind and connect while being serenaded by the enchanting notes of a violinist.

What's a celebration of love without a couple's dance? Partners swayed to the rhythmic beats, infusing the evening with an aura of pure romance.

As part of Star Radler's Refresh Your Love Campaign,



the attendees got busy posing for photos before participating in icebreaker games that got them on their feet in no time.

To kick off the evening, guests were treated to delicious starters served amidst the endearing melodies of a talented violinist during the first Love Moments session. The combination of music and delectable treats was just the perfect combination that the night needed.

The night didn't end there, as guests enjoyed mouthwater-

eight lucky winners attended the exclusive event with their partners after participating in an interactive Instagram Live session with brand ambassadors Erica and Elozonam, and activations across select stores in Lagos.

After an amazing night of love, laughter, and bliss, the happy guests went home with specially curated gift boxes that contained a diffuser, candle, and flavours of Star Radler - Citrus & Red Fruit, kickstarting the season of Valentine's.

Knorr celebrates World Eat For Good Day

KNORR seasoning brand has marked the 'World Eat for Good Day' on February 19, 2024, with a new movement to inspire people to change the world by changing what's on their plates.

During the event held at their Lagos headquarters, Knorr unveiled 14 'Eativists'. These are people who believe in incorporating veggies into their meals and consciously opt for options that benefit both themselves and the planet, inspiring others to do the same.

The highlight of the occasion was the launch of a film featuring personalities such as Tobi Bakre, Taymesan, Anu Bakre, Mory Coco, Kaylah Oniwo, Linda Ejiofor-

Suleiman, Nancy Umeh, Chef Derin, Chef Cupid, Chef Roux, Diary of a Kitchen Lover, Zeelicious Foods, Chef Fregz, and Dr Robert; all unveiled as Eativists. Although they are from diverse backgrounds, they all embody the ethos of eating for good.

Arinze Madumere, Knorr's Brand Manager, emphasized the significance of the Eat for Good movement. He said, "At Knorr, we believe that what's on your plate has an impact, not just on your personal health, but the environment as well.

We have strategically chosen Eativists to inspire people to eat a wider variety of foods, more vegetables, more plants, and less meat. With these small, significant changes, we can op-



imize our health and improve environmental sustainability."

World Eat For Good Day, observed globally on February 19th, serves as an awareness about the importance of sus-

tainable and healthy eating.

With Knorr leading the charge, let's all embrace mindful eating habits to change the world by changing what's on our plates.

Celebrities gather for Showmax re-launch

Africa's streaming service, Showmax, celebrated its highly anticipated re-launch in style in Lagos, recently and it was a night of fun, fashion and more fun.

The launch event brought together Nollywood heavyweights, reality stars, media executives, and fans for a captivating evening.

Hosted by popular media personality Bolanle Olukanni, the event marked a new era of entertainment as the streaming platform officially celebrated the new app and an entirely revamped product suite.

The event also doubled as the exclusive screening of the romantic comedy Dead Serious produced and directed by Moses Inwang and stars Sharon Ooja, Emmanuel Chuk-

wuemeka Ejekwu, known as Sabinus, Nollywood veteran, Nkem Owoh, Lilian Afegbai and many more.

The night commenced with an insightful welcome note by John Ugbe, the CEO of West Africa, MultiChoice about the implications of the new Showmax on entertainment in Africa.

"Today, we mark a historic milestone and a new era of streaming supremacy. With MultiChoice's commitment to elevating African storytelling and the strategic partnership with Comcast's NBCUniversal and Sky, the new Showmax is poised to revolutionize the streaming landscape in Africa."

"At the heart of it, the new Showmax focuses on African content, showcasing diverse narratives and our

rich cultural heritage. With exclusive African originals and collaborations with local talent, we aim to amplify African voices across Africa, ensuring that we nurture talent, promote diversity and drive industry innovation," he said.

In his supporting remarks, General Manager of Showmax Nigeria, Opeoluwa Filani, highlighted the app's capabilities saying:

"The New Showmax is a best-in-class offering in effortless viewing that can withstand rigorous concurrent streaming."

"What excites us most is how we at Showmax are able to live out our purpose as a brand, where we are making it effortless and affordable to connect you to the content that you



love," he added.

While the star of the evening was the new Showmax, the exclusive screening of Dead Serious was not far behind. With its blend of talented actors, hilarious moments, and a didactic turn, the film took the esteemed guests on a delightful rollercoaster ride.

Stars who got a firsthand screening of the romcom included Folu Storms, Enado Odigie, Kalu Ikeagwu, Uti Nwachukwu, Noble Igwe, Hero Daniels, Taaooma, and ex-Big Brother stars Beauty Tukura, Apet Modella and Miracle OP. Also present at the event were cast from Showmax Nigeria originals including Wura, Flawsome, AGU, Cheta M and The Real Housewives of Lagos and Abuja.

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Bold ambitions and uncertain paths in the African Union's new ten-year development plan

The African Union (AU) has set a bold target of producing 100,000 PhDs from Africa over the next decade. The AU stated that twenty percent of the output should come from STEM fields.

The target is embedded in the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP) of the AU, focused on accelerating the implementation of the vision of "Africa We Want."

The AU's Agenda 2063: Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2024-2033), or STYIP, was launched on February 13 with its development agency, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

AU hopes there will be a significant increase in enrolment rates in higher education across Africa in the university and technical and vocational education (TVE) sectors. It noted the lack of employability skills across African higher education but plans to reverse it.

African education should significantly increase the focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. It also notes an enhanced role for the film, literature, theatre, music, and dance industries in creating jobs.

The AU set a further target of a ten percent contribution to global scientific research output by Africa from a base of merely one percent.

In the latest document released on 13 February 2024, the AU outlined seven goals or "moon shots" for the next ten years. They are:

1. Every AU Member State

attains at least middle-income status.

2. Africa is more integrated and connected.

3. Public institutions are more responsive.

4. Africa resolves conflicts amicably.

5. African culture and values are explicit and promoted.

6. Africa's citizens are more empowered and more productive.

7. Africa is a strong and influential global player.

To make education a pillar for African development in the next ten years, the African Union Commission underlined the need for enhanced internet connectivity to drive innovation and a 10 percent contribution to the global scientific research output as areas of improvement.

Current estimates are that Africa produces at most 30000 PhDs annually. According to the World Intellectual Property Organisation, Africa also ranks the lowest in research and patent output. Patents are an index of the capacity to convert intellectual property into viable products or services.

The African Union chairperson, H.E. President Azali Assoumaï of the Union of Comoros, said in a foreword to the 76-page report that the AU was entering "A Decade of Acceleration." He noted, "The first decade has been a decade of convergence. Africa is increasingly taking common positions on critical issues concerning the continent's development. Regional economic commissions are getting stronger, and continental frameworks are increasingly becoming the guiding instruments for negotiation and action with bilateral and multilateral partners."

The line "taking common positions on critical issues" sounded nice until three countries pulled out of ECOWAS recently. They have a position contrary

"African education should significantly increase the focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; it also notes an enhanced role for the film, literature, theatre, music, and dance industries in creating jobs"

to other countries' views in the hitherto 16-nation bloc.

The second ten-year plan is part of Agenda 2063 of the African Union. H.E. President Allasane Quattara of Cote d'Ivoire is the Agenda 2063 Champion. The African Union Commission (AUC) is the implementation agency chaired by Moussa Faki Mahamat.

The AU envisions "an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its citizens and representing a global force in the global arena."

AUC chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat stated the urgency of refocusing Africa's aspirations. African nations must transform their higher education to focus on skill delivery and employability.

AUC urged African countries to increase their net enrolment rate for university education to about 50 percent and that of the technical and vocational

sector to about 60 percent. It decried the situation whereby many students from African tertiary institutions leave school without getting the skills required for the workplace and urged African nations to revamp their curriculum.

It recommends that 40 percent of all African graduates come from STEM disciplines.

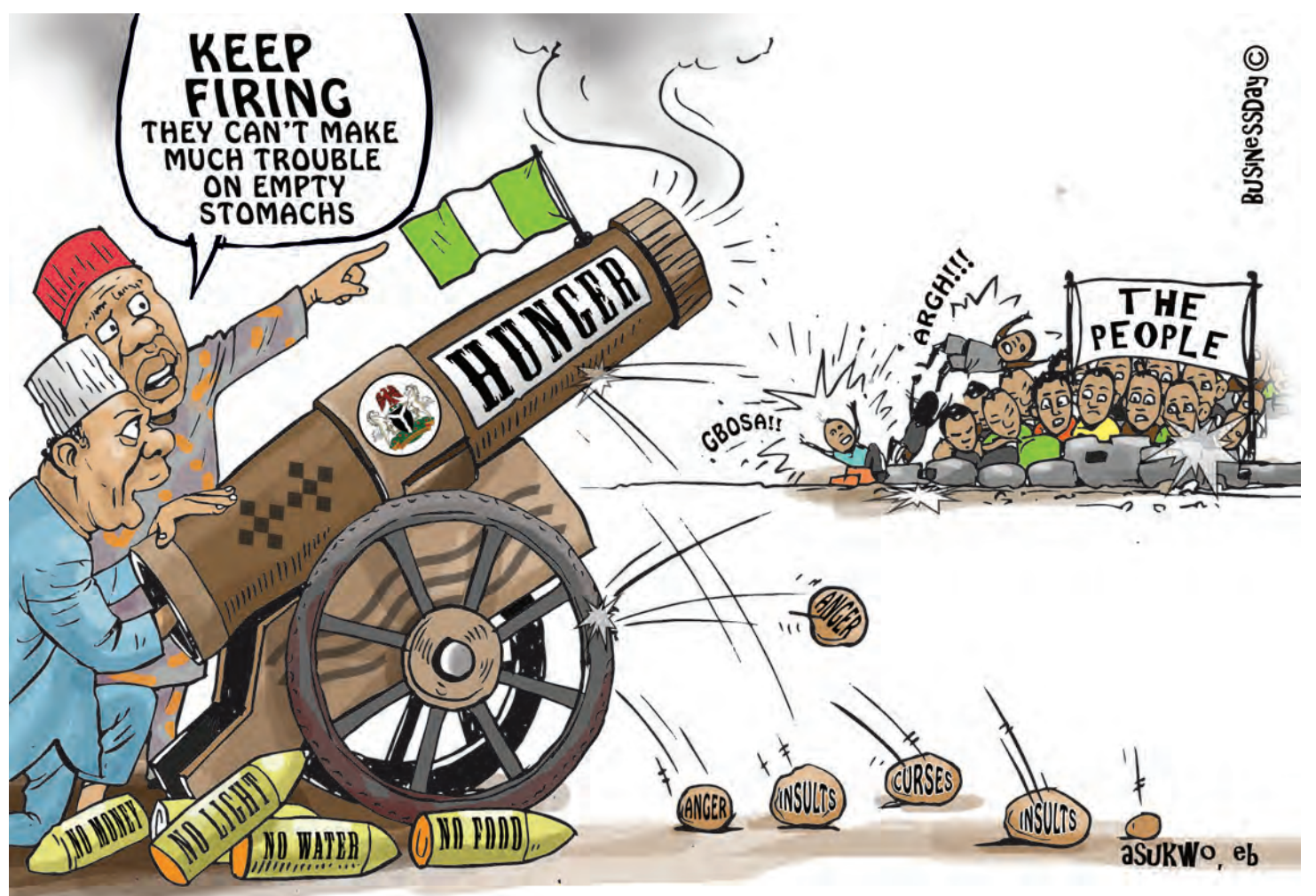
The AU's Decade of Acceleration has promising prospects. These include accelerating development as it outlines concrete goals in critical areas like economic growth, infrastructural development, and poverty reduction.

The plan speaks of boosting intra-African trade by removing trade barriers and fostering regional integration to create a larger, more dynamic African market that attracts investment and promotes job creation.

Investing in human capital is a robust part of the plan. It focuses on education, healthcare, and skills development, with ambitious targets in STEM. Then, it prioritises conflict resolution and strengthening security institutions to create a more peaceful and stable environment conducive to growth.

Navigating the risks is the acid test. Transforming ambitious goals into concrete action, strong political will, efficient governance, and adequate financial resources by all 54 countries. We should follow the HR mantra about past performance as a predictor of potential. On that score, we worry.

The plan acknowledges climate change but lacks a comprehensive strategy to mitigate its impact, a critical concern for a continent already facing its consequences. Then there is the issue of external dependence. Curiously, the plan's success hinges on attracting foreign investment, raising concerns about potential neo-colonial influences, and ensuring benefits reach African communities.



Perspective



COLLINS OKEKE

Introduction

Nigeria has huge opportunities in the transportation sector to generate revenue, create jobs, and facilitate movement for business and leisure. Unfortunately, over the years, we have not been able to take advantage of those opportunities largely because of inadequate infrastructure, high operating costs, weak or suboptimal regulations, limited skilled capacity, financial difficulties, and more recently insecurity. These challenges cut across all transportation sectors including rail, road, aviation, and maritime. To successfully develop a multimodal transport system, we first need to understand why these challenges have persisted and then proffer workable solutions. In this article, I identify 5 cross-cutting legal and policy failures. I have also outlined legal and policy priorities for transportation in Nigeria.

Cross-cutting legal and policy failures

1. Over-centralisation and federal dominance –

The federal government currently dominates the entire transport sector, not effectively engaging states and local governments. This denies states and especially local communities the opportunity to participate in tackling pressing transport challenges like insecurity. The fifth alteration to the 1999 Constitution, which now allows States to participate in rail transportation is a step in the right direction. However, a lot more devolution of transportation powers needs to take place. States should be allowed to manage inland waterways, federal intra-state roads, etc.

2. No harmonised policy on transportation – Since Independence, Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Transportation has developed at least 7 transport policy documents, some of which include: the 1965 Statement of Policy on Transport; the 1993 Transport Policy for Nigeria; the 2003 Draft National Transport Policy Document; the 2008 Draft National Transport Policy; the 2010 Draft National Transport Policy; the 2013 Draft National Transport Policy; and the 2021 Draft National Transport Policy (being the latest). Most of these have remained as drafts and were not implemented. Each state and transport sector (Aviation, Rail, Road, Maritime) has its own policies, most of which sometimes contradict each other.

3. Overlapping institutional mandates – Nigeria's transport sector currently has too many regulatory agencies with unclear responsibilities. The result is competition over funding and resources, weak inter-agency coordination, administrative bottlenecks between agencies, inter-agency frictions over operational areas, etc. This makes coordination extremely difficult. For example, there is a conflict between the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency and the Nigerian Ports Authority (NIMASA) over wreck removal; NIMASA and the National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA) are also in conflict over who controls the inland waterways. The same applies down the line among the other agencies.

4. Weak Enforcement and Implementation – Enforcement and implementation of policies, laws, and regulations in the transport sector are often lacking due to corruption, inadequate

Developing a multi-modal transportation system: Legal and policy priorities for Nigeria

capacity, and insufficient funding. Several airports, airlines, and maritime operators flout stipulated safety standards in their operations, landing procedures, and maintenance schedules due to oversight gaps. Vandalism and trespassing of railway tracks, equipment, and properties is rampant as there is deficient security and enforcement to protect such transport infrastructure

6. Inadequate private sector engagement – This is mostly a result of complex regulatory requirements, limited incentives, and poor contract enforcement. Policies and regulations governing transportation are crafted without sufficient private sector inputs and perspectives, leading to business-unfriendly policies. There is minimal private sector participation in the development of inland water transport infrastructure and services, leading to the underutilization of Nigeria's vast river systems. Additionally, private companies play negligible roles in railway operations, leaving rail transportation underfunded and

governing the various transportation sectors to enable much-needed modernization. Key laws requiring amendment include - the antiquated 1955 Railways Act to allow private concessions and public-private partnerships in railways; the 1954 Ports Authority Act to repeal constraints on private port operators and increase privatization; the 2006 Civil Aviation Act to empower the NCAA regulatory agency to enforce stricter safety standards; the 2004 Highway Development Act to attract private infrastructure investors through fairer returns; and the 2004 Inland Waterways Act to provide impetus for private sector partnerships in boosting inland water freight and passenger transportation channels.

3. Enact pending legislation before the National Assembly – There are several pivotal transport sector reform bills pending before Nigeria's National Assembly that need to be urgently passed to enable a comprehensive revamp. These include – the National Transport Commission



inefficient, apart from select attempts at railway concessions. Most federal roads are funded solely by the government, with very little private sector involvement through public-private partnerships (PPPs), which leaves the roads in poor shape.

Legal and policy priorities

1. Harmonized transportation policy supported by legislation – Nigeria would benefit greatly from the development of a harmonized national transportation policy that is supported by legislation, and which integrates all levels of government and the private sector. The Federal Ministry of Transport should play a coordinating role in this regard. Such a multimodal policy would facilitate coordinated infrastructure development, balanced transport investments across regions, unified regulatory standards, robust planning from shared data forecasts, and increased private sector capital. This would eliminate duplicitous efforts through synchronized complementary build out of assets like roads, rails, airports, and seaports. An overarching set of operational, safety, and customer service regulations would also allow better sector oversight. This, in turn, would improve efficiency, quality of service, safety, and cost optimization for both passenger and freight movement by consolidating the strengths of public agencies and private companies across aviation, land, and water transportation.

2. Update existing legislation – There is an urgent need to update existing legislation

Bill to formulate integrated policies across all transport modes and manage safety regulations and consumer protections; the Ports and Harbours Bill to commercialize ports operations and drive efficiency through privatizations; the Railway Development Authority Bill to setup an independent agency that can expand the railway network via private investments; the Road Sector Reform Bill to increase private sector participation in road infrastructure projects; and the National Transport Policy Bill to institute an overarching policy that interlinks aviation, rail, maritime and inland water transport strategies using global best practices customised for Nigeria.

4. Streamline regulatory institutions – Nigeria needs to streamline the complex array of regulatory institutions governing the transportation sector to improve efficiency and reduce costs. This can be achieved by consolidating all road transport agencies under a Federal Highways Authority; merging aviation bodies like FAAN, NCAA and NAMA within a unified Nigerian Aviation Commission; privatising ports management while an expanded Ports Commission oversees regulations; expanding the Rail Transport Safety Commission into a broader oversight mandate; instituting a private sector-supported Automotive Control Authority for vehicular inspection regimes; and setting up an apex Transportation Commission/Ministry to coordinate policies and data sharing across the consolidated entities - covering aspects like infrastructure integration,

safety/security assurances, operational efficiency and service delivery enhancements for a holistic advancement of Nigeria's aviation, rail, road, maritime and inland water transport networks.

5. Privatize and commercialize through PPP – This promises immense benefits including - injecting billions of dollars of private capital annually to bridge huge public infrastructure funding gaps; driving major efficiency improvements in cost optimisation, operational excellence and service quality; enhancing technology utilization for customer experience, safety and transparency; reducing public sector budgetary and operational burdens to focus more on policy oversight; and injecting world-class technical expertise, managerial competencies and global best practices to holistically transform Nigerian transportation.

6. Incentivise transport education and growth of maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facilities. Nigeria needs to incentivise transport education and growth of Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facilities by providing tax rebates and import duty waivers for certified training institutes and MRO centers; subsidizing enrollment fees for technical transport courses via a dedicated Fund to aid affordability; allocating free land or preferential leases at airports and seaports to attract global MRO players; making MRO experience mandates for licensing renewals to compel local facility usage; implementing preferential local content in tenders for contractors evidencing skills transfer; and extending export incentives and tax credits for indigenous MRO firms to support their expansion - all towards addressing the strategic skill gap challenges and strengthening maintenance capabilities vital for advancement of Nigeria's aviation, rail, road and maritime transport sectors.

7. Strategy on insecurity. Nigeria requires a well-coordinated strategy between federal and state agencies to tackle endemic insecurity in the transport sector via setting up a multi-agency joint taskforce for intelligence sharing and unified patrols; installing sophisticated surveillance systems like sensors, drones and AI-based analytics software integrated for proactive threat response; incentivizing community participation for intelligence gathering on risks; reviewing insurance policies and compensation models to support operators suffering losses; criminalizing activities like rail vandalism etc. to enforce maximum deterrence penalties; and training specialized security units dedicated to safeguarding critical airport, railway, maritime and highway transport infrastructure.

Conclusion

Nigeria has enormous potential to advance its multimodal transportation networks across aviation, rail, road, maritime, and inland waterways. However, several structural issues such as over-centralization, fragmentation, weak institutions, inadequate infrastructure, and insecurity have severely constrained tapping into those opportunities. Implementing the outlined legal and policy priorities focused on greater harmonisation, updating legislative frameworks, consolidating regulatory bodies, increased private sector participation, capacity building, and security improvements promises to set Nigeria firmly on the path towards modern, efficient, integrated, and world-class transport amenities. The time is now for Nigeria to make these pivotal unified, collaborative, and progressive reforms that put in place the enabling conditions for transport operators, investors, and customers alike to thrive.

Okeke, associate partner & head, Public Sector Practice Group, Olisa Agbakoba Legal (OAL), writes from Lagos.

Perspective



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Viewpoint
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By uniting Tech and Creative Minds, the “Dancinematic Universe” as an example is primed to catalyze Nigeria’s \$100bn Creative Culture Export Target by 2030

of The Black Book’s investors, said that she decided to fund Nollywood films because of the industry’s long-term financial potential. Olumide Soyombo, the founder of Voltron Capital, said that “he’s investing in Nollywood films to drive profitability in the industry.” In previous times, filmmakers rely on relationships, unlike founders in tech space who know where to go when they need funding. Further challenges for the filmmakers ensue as Anita Eboigbe explains it can be solved by more money, “Right now, there are monopolies everywhere that can only be disrupted by more money. When it comes to streaming platforms, there are still a lot of negotiation problems that haven’t been solved. These boil down to how we handle the process, and to fix this, we need money,” she said. Hence, tech operators with their innovative mindset, bring critical solutions to the table. In fact, Plumptre’s Volition Cap also provides structure around film investing by creating a model that “looks like traditional African cooperatives.” For The Black Book, investors participated via “relatively small ticket sizes,” said Plumptre, and were supported by more prominent institutional investors. She added that the film’s investors earned dollar payouts because Netflix took up the movie.

Another significant challenge the creative film industry faces is the lack of production talent and physical infrastructure. Victoria Popoola, CEO of TalentX Africa, a film-financing marketplace that has invested “close to \$1 million” in Nollywood films, also echoed the same thoughts. She believes that “there’s a critical need for investment in more distribution infrastructure” and “a need to rethink the cinema experience.” To address the talent problem, Popoola and Plumptre said that their firms were open to partnerships. It is in this less travelled space of acquisition of non-tangible creative assets, talent problem-solving, rife with unprecedented mutually beneficial partnerships between the tech and creative industries, that innovative creative startup IPs like the Dancinematic Universe comes in.

The Dancinematic Universe: A Perfect Example

Nigeria came to Gunter Pauli’s Blue Economy party 30 years late as it usually does in most cases of globally impactful innovations. This lateness is evidenced by the recently dedicated ministry to the creative industry, 30 years after many countries had been enjoying its benefits. In an unprecedented turn of events, with the Dancinematic Universe, Nigeria now has the unique opportunity to come up with a never-done-before entertainment concept with the Nigerian music-dance-film industries all at once as its backbone.

A Dancinematic, as defined by its creator, Tunde Ayinla, is “The art of making music visual through creative dance storytelling with a world-class cinematic delivery.” A few years ago, I had the honour



of working with him as a tech operator on an advert for a NextGen Smart Home Technology, marking my first voyage into the Dancinematic Universe where I had my firsthand insight into what it is and its vision of global domination as its own stand-alone IP. In fact, the advertisement part of it is just one of its many self-sustainable ‘planets’. As a revolutionary non-tangible asset, it is a fusion of all fields in the creative industries (dance, music, acting, comedy, fashion, modelling, creative writing, cinematography, editing, digital marketing, advertising, branding, graphics designing, visual effects, animation, drawing, poetry/spoken words and loads more). It is a treasured find as a ‘Blue Ocean’ for the Nigerian creative industry to get out of the ‘Red Ocean’ of bloody competition by creating uncontested market space in the global creative industry in its first few years of its peak period. Indeed, it’s a unique early branding tool for ‘Destination 2030’ in its entirety to be used as some sort of drastic measure to catalyze Nigeria into the world’s entertainment capital in a much shorter period while at once getting lead creatives from all fields to associate with ‘Destination 2030’ with just one universal project because of its unprecedented flexibility. It is also primed to engender a job-creating platform, a skill-acquiring platform for self-sustenance, mentoring and international experience-sharing platform and attractive foreign exchange income stream in the creative industry for thousands of creatives to be employed. As a creative culture export IP, the release format of its in-world materials and events is the most innovative part, creatively and business wise, to which I’m not at liberty to disclose as of now as it’s essential to the unique piecemeal experience of the Dancinematic Universe itself.

A Gift of Culture in Rainbows to ‘Destination 2030’

The Dancinematic Universe is so well detailed to contain every form of art there is. Combine that with the impeccable timing of the first-of-its-kind blossoming marriage between the tech and the creative industries, one can claim in this moment in history that it’s a gift of culture in rainbows to Nigeria’s Destination 2030.

Apart from the immediate ROI tech companies are now enjoying from their investments in the creative industry, the Dancinematic Universe provides the widest possible reach of product placement for the products of tech companies in partnership with it, across all forms of creative media as each medium has its own target audience.

Destination 2030, with its strategic need by default to focus at the moment on acquisition of time-consuming tangible assets like creative hubs, a Nigeria cultural expo, a national entertainment centre, a national art gallery, innovative publishing partnerships and a gaming sandbox project, building of a global standard film festival, a culinary academy led by a Michelin star chef and a fashion foundry to be combined with legislative, regulatory, policy and intellectual property reforms, could easily leverage upon the Dancinematic Universe, especially in its undeniable visibility once it commences as a stand-alone IP, as a multi problem-solving, non-tangible creative asset.

There are many other reasons this could be Nigeria’s blue-economy-like founding moment in the global creative economy but I want to believe by now that you’ve gotten the gist of it.

Call to Action

The Dancinematic Universe thrives on its unique IP structure, but true impact demands broader participation. We need to encourage creatives and tech actors to join forces, creating similar groundbreaking IPs that complement and expand the existing ecosystem.

Let’s bridge the gap between “Destination 2030” initiatives and creative startups like the Dancinematic Universe. Government agencies, private investors, and educational institutions can collaborate to provide resources, and talent development programmes, nurturing future generations of creative tech minds.

Recognizing and rewarding creative startups like the DU that showcase the power of pioneering tech-creative collaboration like this actually fuels motivation and inspires others of similar capabilities to follow suit.

The Dancinematic Universe is a powerful example, but it’s just the beginning. By fostering collective ownership, strategic partnerships, visibility, innovation, and collaboration, we can turn Nigeria into a global creative powerhouse, converting “Destination 2030” from a dream into a vibrant reality. The time to act is now!

Jumia: Navigating headwinds with efficiency and sustainable growth

KHALIL AMUSA

In the face of global economic turbulence and market headwinds, Jumia, Africa’s leading e-commerce platform, concluded 2023 with a narrative of resilience and strategic transformation. While its Q4 2023 results may show year-over-year decline in some metrics, a deeper analysis reveals a company laser-focused on operational efficiency, loss reduction, and sustainable growth.

From strategic choices to a stronger foundation:

Jumia’s 2023 wasn’t without its share of difficult decisions. Recognizing the challenging economic environment and its impact on consumer spending, the company took bold steps to streamline its operations. This included discontinuing activities with poor growth prospects, restructuring its business model, and implementing significant reductions in marketing spend. While these initial choices had a short-term impact, they were crucial in laying the groundwork for a financially stronger and more sustainable future.

Numbers telling a story of progress:

The results speak volumes about the effectiveness of Jumia’s strategic choices. In Q4 2023, the company witnessed a remarkable 90% year-over-year decline in operating loss, accompanied by an even more

impressive 99% drop in adjusted EBITDA loss. This dramatic improvement wasn’t achieved through aggressive cost cuts, but rather through a comprehensive approach focused on improved unit economics and operational efficiency. Further, decreases in sales and advertising expense, down 63% year-over-year, and general and administrative expenses, down 54% year-over-year, contributed to the decrease in losses. By optimizing logistics and marketing strategies, Jumia was able to achieve significant cost savings without compromising growth potential.

Redefining growth:

Jumia’s transformation goes beyond simple cost-cutting. The company recognized that sustainable growth cannot be built solely on aggressive marketing and customer acquisition strategies. Instead, they’ve shifted their focus towards building a foundation for profitable growth, prioritizing key categories like Phones, Electronics, Home & Living and Fashion & Beauty. This strategic shift involved several key initiatives:

Investing in Better Supply Chains: Jumia actively partnered with international brands and local distributors to improve product selection and availability in its priority categories. This resulted in a significant shift in category mix, with Home & Living and Electronics contributing a larger share of GMV.

Building Stronger Relationships with Vendors and Brands: By fostering closer collaboration with key stakeholders, Jumia secured better pricing,

improved product quality, and enhanced the overall customer experience.

Focusing on Efficient Marketing: Moving away from expensive, unsustainable marketing practices, Jumia embraced data-driven strategies and targeted campaigns, resulting in improved marketing efficiency and a 49% increase in “free channel” visits for Physical Goods.

JumiaPay: Expanding horizons:

JumiaPay, the company’s digital payment platform, is playing a crucial role in streamlining operations and enhancing customer experience. The integration of new payment methods, the rollout of “pay on delivery” options, and the development of BNPL solutions are paving the way for a more cashless ecosystem, boosting convenience and accessibility for customers. JumiaPay’s Total Payment Volume (TPV) stood at \$59.3 million in Q4 2023, marking a 10% decrease year-over-year. However, transactions inched higher to 3 million, a 41% increase year-over-year. Likewise, 45% of orders on the Jumia platform in Q4 2023 were completed using JumiaPay, up from 31% in Q4 2022.

Looking ahead: A brighter future beckons

While macro-economic headwinds are expected to persist in 2024, Jumia remains optimistic about the future. The company forecasts a return to topline growth in both orders and GMV, excluding potential

foreign exchange impacts. This confidence stems from their unwavering commitment to their growth strategy, which includes several key priorities:

Executing the Growth Strategy: Jumia will continue to focus on improving supply chains in its core categories, driving customer acquisition through efficient marketing channels, and expanding its reach into secondary cities across Africa.

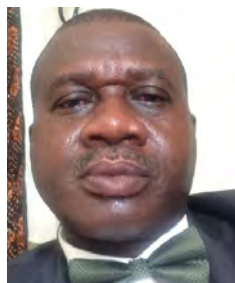
Leveraging Technology and Data: Ongoing investments in technology and data analytics will empower Jumia to further optimize operations, personalise the customer experience, and make data-driven decisions for sustainable growth.

Unlocking Potential in Key Markets: Nigeria and Egypt remain significant growth engines for Jumia. The company plans to implement targeted strategies in these markets, including improving supply chain efficiency, expanding partnerships with local vendors, and leveraging cultural nuances to reach new customer segments.

Jumia’s story is not just about surviving challenging times, but about emerging stronger and more prepared for the future. By prioritizing efficiency, focusing on core business areas, and adopting a more data-driven approach to marketing, Jumia has reaffirmed its position as a leader in Africa’s dynamic e-commerce landscape. As the company continues to execute its strategy and capitalize on its unique position, it is well on its way to truly shaping the continent’s digital future.

Amusa is a Financial Analyst from Lagos.

Perspective



KUNLE SOMORIN

On February 14, the people of Ogun State received a very unique kind of Valentine's Day present, as the governor of the state, Prince Dapo Abiodun rolled out palliatives worth over N5 billion to reduce hardship during the current cost of living crisis and to better the lives of people.

Prince Abiodun said at a news conference where he announced the rollout that his government was not oblivious nor insensitive to the challenges being faced by the citizens and would leave no stone unturned to ensure that succour comes to the people.

He appreciated the perseverance, patience and understanding of all residents in the state, assuring them that the present economic situation is just a transient phase that will soon pass. He also appealed to the people to take things easy with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu: "The Federal Government is not only steadfast in its commitment toward creating a brighter future for all citizens, but it is also trying hard to foster a society where prosperity and well-being of the entire citizens prevail," the governor said.

To address the challenges associated with the current cost of living crisis, a bitter but temporary pill necessary to address Nigeria's dwindling economy surgically, the Abiodun administration has commenced implementing a series of phased initiatives aimed at alleviating these burdens on all our citizens.

These initiatives include the provision of a minimum of five exercise books for all 850,000 students in our public primary and secondary schools, as well as a one-off N10,000 education support grant for at least 100,000 pupils and students in our public primary and secondary schools in the state.

Students of tertiary institutions were not left out, as Prince Abiodun announced the provision of N50,000 each to all 27,600 of its indigent students in tertiary institutions nationwide as an education grant.

In the health sector, the governor also declared that his administration would provide health insurance coverage for over 70,000

Abiodun's Riposte to Masses Suffering

beneficiaries, including pregnant women, children, the elderly, market women and other members of the informal sector. Prince Abiodun was very specific about pregnant women, who, under his "Ibidero Scheme", will enjoy free prenatal care, with an additional N5,000 per birth and free post-natal care in state-owned hospitals and primary healthcare centres across the state.

In addition, food palliatives, such as rice, vegetable oil and other items are going to be provided for 300,000 households across the state.

Also, as part of the initiatives is the commitment of N500 million towards the offsetting of the backlog of deductions from civil servants' entitlements inherited from the previous administration.

This, of course, is in addition to the payment of N10,000 transport allowance to all civil servants for the state. The allowance, first announced in July 2023, was extended in October of the same year to allow the state workforce to continue to cope with the effects of the subsidy removal. Prince Abiodun made sure that the transport allowance intervention does not only cover serving civil servants but also covers pensioners, who are senior citizens. Recall that the governor had raised pensioners' gratuities to N1bn quarterly to deal with 16-year outstanding owed senior citizens who had served the state diligently by his two predecessors.

The state government also approved hazard allowance for health and medical personnel, immediate release of letters of promotion in respect of 2021 and 2022, payment of March and April 2023 leave bonuses for public servants and immediate cash-backing for the quarterly payment of gratuities to pensioners.

In the transport sector, Prince Abiodun was the first governor to introduce the E-Mobility and Gas Mobility Programme with Compressed Natural Gas-enabled buses and electric-powered tricycles and motorcycles as alternatives to petrol engines.

These moves might be seen as not only politically expedient but deft to stave off the spiraling angst emblemized by protests by women and youths against high and harsh living conditions first on Monday, February 5, in Minna, Niger State, and spread to Kano, Sokoto and lately Oyo state. Abiodun's unusual largesse reminds one of Rule 13 law in Norman Schwarzkopf's autobiography, "It Doesn't Take a Hero".

In his exposition on leadership, the Unit-

ed States-Iraq war general exhorts: When placed in command, take charge. It is better to make a bad decision than to sit on the fence. While many of his colleagues in other state capitals are spending weeks and months planning, debating, holding meetings, forming committees, forming sub-committees, putting together proposals and tabling the proposals, and watching PowerPoint presentations, Gov. Abiodun seized the hour in the political sophisticated, yet highly volatile state. It was the same magic he deployed during the October 2020 #EndSARS protest that swept across the nation.

If he had not promptly announced these measures, it is not unlikely that the people's anger might have led to protests or in worse circumstances attack on public utilities like it happened in the other state capitals. Truth told it might not have been the best decision to reel out short-term measures in a situation where a well-thought-out strategy would have been preferred, but with these palliatives in place, he can continually make adjustments in alignment with other state governors and the government at the centre to bring assistance to the people.

As proud of these interventions as one would love to be, they are merely a fraction of the empowerment, social welfare and social development needs at this time. Everybody in a position of leadership at this time should understand the burden of statecraft. To paraphrase the words of Julius Nyerere, they should understand their privileged position is a call to duty to repay the sacrifice which others have made. They are like the man who has been given all the food available in a starving village so that he might have the strength to bring supplies back from a distant place. If he takes this food and does not bring help to his brothers, he is a traitor.

Prince Abiodun should also not be complacent because all is still not well with the people. He might have recorded some successes in the past like when in 2022, he empowered no fewer than 50,000 women in the state through the scheme known as "Oko'wo Dapo". At one of the scheme's validation exercises of ward facilitators, the governor disclosed that over N500m was saved via contributions by the beneficiaries in three local government areas of the state. The scheme has been hailed as intervening in the social well-being of traders, who constitute the backbone of micro and small enterprises in the state. The reality on the

ground now is that the women "lifted out of poverty" then have since returned to penury. The removal of fuel subsidy has eaten into their little savings.

Entrepreneurship has not been left out in the governor's investment in human development and social welfare. He launched the biggest Information Communication Technology (ICT) hub described as an innovation focal point that provides ideal conditions for entrepreneurs to collaborate, flourish and accelerate the growth of their businesses. The Ogun Technopreneurship Programme (OTP) was also created with the crucial objective of nurturing high-quality ideas in various industries to become tech startups and tech SMEs. But the people are waiting for the 5000 kilometres of fibre optic cables, and the spread of broadband to ensure access to the Internet across the state through the ambitious Ogun Digital Economic Infrastructure Project launched in April 2021.

Youth development and job creation have also so far received unprecedented attention in the state's history. This must continue to be a top priority. The Anchor Borrowers' Programme in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), has which has become the core around which youth involvement in agriculture revolves in the state must be strengthened to give practical expression to the promise of food security. As the current situation dictates, stakeholders are optimistic that the programmes will be scaled up to cover even more participants. After all, the governor during the electioneering campaign promised to turn the Gateway State into the Nation's food basket. The governor is even on record to have promised that the state would ensure the hosting of the best National Sports Festival in the history of the games. We can wait because this would take restless youths off the junctions.

Indeed, times are hard and the nation as a collective is passing through a lot, but we know a state where the foresight and anticipation of its governor has so far averted the kinds of protests being witnessed in other parts of the country. That state is Ogun, and its governor is Prince Dapo Abiodun who was crowned the Nation's Best Governor by the SUN Newspapers last week.

Somorin, former Chief Press Secretary to Gov. Dapo Abiodun writes from Crescent University, Abeokuta



CHICHI OKOYE

Tuesday, February 20, 2024 was the World Day of Social Justice and it serves as a stark reminder that achieving fairness and equity is the bedrock of every society.

When social justice is compromised, the very fabric of society begins to unravel. In Africa, the greater pressure is always on the Executive and the Legislature to ensure democracy, good governance and fight corruption.

However, equally important in upholding social justice is the role of a robust judicial

Championing social justice through the judiciary

system due to its interpretative, dispute resolution and enforcement role.

Yet the Judiciary in West Africa is plagued with a myriad of problems - inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, political/governmental interference, bribery and corruption. Biased appointments of judges and unfair removal of sitting judges continues to happen.

Sometimes the judicial system is manipulated to usurp constitutional rule, stifle dissenting groups, and to gag freedom of expression with the political opponents, the Media and CSOs.

This is compounded by inadequate legal aid against a backdrop of high legal fees for a sub-region where over 30percent of the population live below the poverty line. Rural populations and vulnerable groups in West Africa often face significant barriers to justice making it seem as though justice is on sale to the highest bidder!

Although these challenges are daunting, they are not insurmountable. What is required is to reform the judiciary, a strong governmental leadership and commitment to effect the reform and a civil society courageous to hold the judiciary accountable.

For instance, prioritising the development of legal infrastructure by investing in new courthouses, especially in rural and slum communities, upgrading existing facilities, establishing mobile legal clinics and leveraging technology for virtual consultations, legal aid hotlines, and community-based legal assistance programs to bring legal services closer to rural populations, can effectively address the challenges faced by those in remote areas.

Civil Society organisations and the Media and citizens must continue to be vibrant and courageous and lead the fight against bribery and corruption in the judiciary because the

Judiciary is not only vital to guaranteeing equitable justice, but also in ensuring the rule of law and sustainable development.

Businesses will not thrive, and investors are unlikely to invest in societies where justice is compromised. In an era of media pluralism, therefore, citizens must also be vocal and determined in holding the judiciary accountable through public support and applause when the judiciary do well and public naming and shaming, when they err. This will energise and embolden the judiciary to resist Executive and Legislative interference, deal with systemic corruption, demand for its own reforms to ensure fairness and equity in the judicial services to advance social justice.

*Dr. Okoye is the Regional Director, Ford Foundation, West Africa.
www.fordfoundation.org*

Perspective



DAVE BARO-THOMAS

Tough time never lags in Nigeria

tribe, party affinities, religion or region- Nigerians in unison are lamenting bitterly and begging for redemption?

Like the proverbial candle, the nation is not only lit at both ends by her leadership but aflame in the middle, fanned by massive corruption and activities of non-state actors through terrorism, kidnap for ransom, ethnic cleansing and religious bigotry that goes on unabated.

The closest we saw such a groundswell of discontentment over hardship, poverty, and hunger in the land was the IMF/World Bank-inspired Structural Adjustment Programme, SAP, under the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida regime with the consequences still rocking the foundation of the nation to date, however, if the rumour making the rounds is true, ironically, the economy today is administered by the voice of the president but guided by the hands of the IMF/World Bank.

So, it was nauseating when Adams Oshiomhole recently said on national TV that the evolving protests by Nigerians against the current spate of hardship are nothing new, priding himself on having led protests in the past, so the agitations today are no big deal, but the question is, are we supposed to have gotten use to hardship since it is nothing new?

How convenient for one to forget the pains of the masses when one moves from the place of advocacy to the corridors of power, and was the economy this bad when Mr. Oshiomhole led protests back then? Has he become poorer in the last 15 years, or has his fortune expanded? Little wonder activists do not make good public servants, and he may never in his lifetime know what Nigerians are talking about- I stand not to be corrected.

Frankly, Oshiomhole is inconsequential as far as this matter stands right now, and the gospel truth remains that this government must look inwards, or this roof will collapse and kill everyone because tough decisions geared towards the masses demanding more sacrifices are simply nonsensical economic approaches given many broken Nigeri-

ans littering the streets already, and directionless policies thrown everywhere.

With the current economic woes and the lack of strategic directions, sadly, it is clear that the best team assembled so far to manage the nation is between Obasanjo and Jonathan, and the reasons are straightforward – not ethnically driven!

Countries are evolving and building from good to great, and at critical junctures, their leadership took the gauntlets and birth enduring reformation and transformation, but Nigeria has suffered one bad headship to the other- no exceptions, and after 64 years, it has been jumping from frying pan to fire at the turn of every change of government.

Anyone who thought life would be easier post-subsidy removal must be a joker, but who ever imagined that there was no outright plan and direction - otherwise, how can a leadership yank off the nerve of the economy without robust strategies to mitigate the impact and what happened to fighting the fuel subsidy corruption and taking things one at a time, are the fuel subsidy crooks untouchable, invisible and invincible, so, Nigerians must go through the tough times because it never last, right?

It is about time this administration did a dispassionate appraisal of these IMF policies forced down our throats because the protests are about to get messier as more states will join soon - any nation with such massive protests could stand on the precipice because the welfare and security of the people are not just the primary purpose of governance, but the acid test to measure a reasonable and wise government.

Without holding forth for this administration, Nigeria was due for the tough decisions of subsidy removal and naira float but without the shock absorbing mechanism and attendant backlash robustly interrogated- was one-way traffic to the den of hungry lions, and, painfully, the unfolding eco-medical prognosis and medications thrown at the problem lack efficacy.

So, here we are in a country where tough time

never lags, and it has been an endless downward slope and shammed promises orchestrated to hoodwink gullible Nigerians- from 2015 till date, the nation has fallen flat on its face on all economic fronts, and the renewed hope agenda looks stronger in print than in reality. The way out of this wood stares at us in the face, and we must answer the tough questions.

Can we point to one decent country where a thriving black market for FOREX competes with the official markets, yet we want the Naira float to work? Can a country escape food shortage where insecurity destroys agriculture? If agriculture fails, can food inflation (34.41percent) be wished away? To add insult to injury, Nigerians are still searching for the gains from the subsidy removal, and a president who should know better is not negotiating with the reckless state governments instead of returning to the Okonjo-Iweala's model of saving for the rainy day but throwing money at them to cushion the impact of the hardship at the state level. History always repeat itself here, what a shame!

To put matters in proper perspective about the IMF/World Bank policies, the bank seems not to approximate the peculiarities of the African problems or the aged-long distortions and systemic failures fostered by our collective value failings and inability to stand up to our leaders and get things done correctly, or could this be neocolonialism in disguise.

It is one thing to have the courage to do the right thing, but another kettle of fish to have a clear roadmap and painfully, the present economic team lacks what it takes. Nigerians will be pleasantly surprised if the dollar ever reclines or fuel pump prices plummet, but the laws of gravity never work in this clime.

In conclusion, Robert Schuller affirms that "all it takes is one idea to solve impossible problems," but it is glaring that Mr. President and his team are groping for that joker without much success. Aluta Continua Victoria Ascerta!

The book *Tough Times Never Last, But Tough People Do* by Robert Harold Schuller- was a global phenomenon and an all-time bestseller cutting across the iron veil of race, religion and cultures - it resonates with all human spectrums, captures the inevitability of struggles and desires of man to break free from poverty, deprivation and indignity occasioned by socio-economic hardship.

From its inspirational framings to the aspirational possibilities, the content keeps afloat any drowning man and provides the navigational compass for shore-bound initiates.

Has President Bola Ahmed Tinubu foisted on Nigerians tough times, untold hardship and sufferings across the country? Touted the most prepared politician for the exalted position in the country, was Mr. President confronted with the dilemma of either flowing with the tides of a broken economy since 1960 or taking bold steps to recover the nation through tough decisions because it appears to be stuck in a vicious circle, with the end of the tunnel dimmer than ever.

As agitations and protests against hardships and a failing economy heighten, one wonders why it took Nigerians this long to rise from this deep slumber.

From the dusty streets of Niger State to the ancient city of Kano, Ibadan and down to the commercial capital of the nation, Lagos, protests against hunger in the land are gathering muscles, but how did we get here - where irrespective of

Illuminating hope: Empowering Niger Delta with sustainable access to electricity



ANTHONY OSIBAJO

needs of its population. Electrification is a fundamental driver of socioeconomic progress, improving the quality of life and fostering economic growth.

However, in the Niger Delta, where geographical and infrastructural challenges make connecting communities to the national grid difficult, off-grid solutions become essential. Studies indicate that the region has significant potential for harnessing renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy.

Despite the potential of renewable energy, the Niger Delta still faces obstacles in its implementation. These obstacles include problems with institutions and policies, technological difficulties, incomplete data, sociocultural aspects, financial limitations, political hindrances, and limitations on decision-making. Collaboration between communities, investors, and developers is essential for the success of these initiatives.

With the huge population in the coastal communities across Niger Delta living without electricity, there comes a need for a model that is sustainable, easy to replicate, and reduces the risks of investments in off-grid areas like the Niger Delta coastal communities. An example of such a model is the Access to Energy (A2E) model promoted by the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND). PIND's A2E model provides reasonably priced renewable energy, which boosts income and productivity, creates new job opportunities, and elevates the general quality of life of these communities. It also advances Goal 7 of the United Nations Sustainable Development

Goals.

The model's core involves reducing risks for investors and power developers, incentivizing them to provide energy services to these underserved areas while ensuring community stakeholders are involved in decision-making processes and own the project outcomes.

PIND initiated its Access to Energy project in 2018, and by 2022, it had improved the livelihoods and well-being of over 10,000 residents in these communities, benefiting close to 3,000 homes and businesses. PIND has facilitated the development of about 40 solar mini-grids in majorly coastal communities, working with power developers, investors, and local stakeholders. It also continues providing Technical Assistance to support off-grid mini-grids using renewable energy solutions in several communities across the Niger Delta, such as Ogheye, Ogbinbiri, Opia, Gbokoda, Kpokugbene, Gbagira, Akinsolu, Molutehin, Ugbo Nla, and Obe Jedo, Lomileju, Awoye, and Odofado.

Locals in these communities attest to the benefits of increased electricity supply, pointing to its role in lowering crime, improving security, enabling children to study at night, supplying vital healthcare services in clinics, and revitalizing small businesses.

The A2E model promoted by PIND is indeed a game changer. In 2023, it was incorporated into the USAID Power Africa Health Electrification and Telecommunication Alliance (HETA) project, focusing on providing electricity to healthcare facilities besides households and businesses. At the end of the

project, 12 healthcare facilities across the Niger Delta were electrified, with 187 micro, small and medium enterprises, 466 households, and over 2800 people benefitting from the power connection to the facilities.

With the Niger Delta Development Commission and Petroleum Industry Act-established Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs) looking to promote the use of clean energy/developmental projects in the region, there is an opportunity to adopt a sustainable model that will not only provide clean and reliable electricity but also empower the community stakeholders to participate in sustainable development actively.

As we approach a moment of reckoning, the achievements made possible by the A2E model in the Niger Delta highlight a universal reality: having access to energy denotes empowerment rather than just power. It represents opening doors of opportunity for people who have long been marginalized. It serves as a reminder that development is possible when creativity and willpower come together.

Anthony Osibajo is the coordinator, Access to Energy at the Foundation for Partnerships Initiatives in Niger Delta (PIND), a non-profit organisation that promotes peace and equitable economic growth in Nigeria's Niger Delta region through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Since 2010, PIND and partners have been contributing to strengthening and stabilizing the region by reducing poverty, powering coastline communities, nurturing youth employment, fostering stability, and enabling development.

Environment

Pollution: Rivers' women urge Fubara to halt oil firms' divestment

As oil companies set to divest in the Niger Delta, some women organisations and other non-governmental organisations have asked the Governor of Rivers State, Siminalayi Fubara to do everything within his power to halt the on-going process of divestment by multinational oil companies that want to live without ecosystem restoration.

The group made the call at a Press Conference titled: 'Niger Delta women say no to divestment without ecosystem restoration,' in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

In her presentation on behalf of the NGOs, Constance Meju explained that there are several community-based organisations and Kebetkache Women Development and Resource Centre that expressed their profound dismay at the attitude and the announcement by Shell Petroleum Development Company to sell off their on-shore assets to investors without necessary consultations with the communities that have suffered years of neglect and pollution from environmental pollution and degradation arising from the activities of the oil companies.



Fubara

Meju maintained that in an ideal society Shell PLC can not have a plan to sell off their assets to a consortium of investors such as Renaissance Africa Energy, noting that OML

34 had already been divested to ND Western, OML 17 and OML 29 have been divested without due process and proper guidelines.

Explaining further, Meju

who is also a journalist and publisher, stated that Nigerian Agip Oil Company, Exxon Mobil Nigeria Limited, and Total Energy Nigeria Ltd were poised to divest all their on-

shore assets without engaging host communities and correcting their mistakes by way of clean up all the damage done to the communities and the well-being of the people.

"We the affected women in the region are deeply concerned about this sudden divestment plans as both government and the oil firms have not provided any guidelines; there is no women development funds to support our long time suffering from oil pollution," she said.

The statement among other things stressed the need for a total clean up of the ecosystem destroyed by the oil companies over the years, noting that the women play critical role in providing income through agriculture, farm produce and trading but the ecological degradation caused by oil extraction has over the years forced women to lose their livelihood thereby, leading to increase poverty.

They lamented that the new companies that will take over are strange to them.

"Rivers State governor should stop the divestment plans especially those in the state, gas flares still exist in communities in the state," she pointed out.

In an interview shortly

after the event, Efrebo Henry, one of the leaders told journalists that the purpose of the event was to sensitise the general public and register their protest against the inhumane plan against their existence as both farm lands, swamps, rivers and creeks are badly affected while the health of those leaving in the Niger Delta have been devastated.

"This divestment is not in the interest of the community people, and we condemned it in totality," Henry said.

"We call on the President of Nigeria, Bola Tinubu to ensure no divestment without ecosystem restoration," he further said, while urging both Federal and State governments to mandate oil companies divesting to first clean up polluted sites to restore their livelihood.

Other organisations that signed the documents are Alauchi Women Development Initiative, Ibeno; Mba Okase Women, Eleme; Abua Women Association, Coalition of Ogoni Women Development Initiative, Otagbagi Women, Pius Dukor Foundation for Community Development and Advancement, Kallop Environmental Centre, Relief International and OLEGH.

CSO urges Ahmed Ododo to review sanitation policy in Kogi

VICTORIA. NNAKAIK

Conscience for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution (CHRCR) a non-governmental Organisation has said now that Kogi state's new government under the leadership of Ahmed Usman Ododo is settling down, there ought to be need to review the sanitation. Policy in the state, to reflect the current challenges Kogi State witness not less than ten thousand vehicles crossing the state on daily bases that poses environment challenges because of human attitude due to negligence of basic hygiene.

According to a press statement signed and issued by Idris Miliki, the Executive Director of Conscience for Human Rights

and Conflict Resolution and made available to Journalists in Lokoja, saying the state headquarters host various market and motor parks, but the environment situation in those places is worrisome, as they are unkept. "We are also worried; it seems there is no demarcation between the Sanitation Board and the company expected to clean Lokoja Town. As in many occasions, the government vehicles are been used by private company engaged to clean the city.

"Worst of it all, is the unavailability of portable water in Kogi State, particularly in Lokoja that host both river Niger and Benue.

It is condemnable that a state capital like Lokoja, will stay without water. Open defecation [remainder of message body omitted; too large]

Explainer

Explainer: Implications of Niger flight ban for Nigeria

IFEOMA OKEKE
-KORIEOCHA
& KELVIN OKOJIE

The government of the Republic of Niger few weeks ago placed a ban on all commercial and international flights coming from or going to Nigeria.

In a similar move, the Republic of Niger announced the opening of its airspace to all national and international commercial flights, effective immediately.

The new directive specifies that commercial flights passing over Nigerian airspace without landing will not be affected by these restrictions. Nevertheless, it is mandatory for all flights operating within Niger's airspace to have their ADS-B and/or radar transponders operational throughout the duration of the flight.

Stakeholders and aviation experts have said the implication of the ban for Nigeria

would be longer flight time and even increase in air fares.

Olumide Ohunayo industry analyst and Director, Research, Zenith Travels, said the flight ban was a retaliatory move from Niger, adding that Nigeria has more to lose compared to Niger because Niger has a closed economy.

"We are going to lose revenue from overflight. Some flights going over that airspace will have to divert, making the flights operate for longer hours. There might be additional costs for such flights to cover for the extra cost of fuel.

"Airlines will be forced to go to other countries to fly from. Also, charges to Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) on overflight will be lost. NAMA will be the biggest hit. There should be room for emergency aircraft if there is a need for an emergency landing. It is not supposed to be a total shutdown as required the civil aviation rule.

Travel will be more ex-

pensive. This is what the extra routing means," Ohunayo added.

John Ojikutu, industry expert and the CEO of Centurion Aviation Security and Safety Consult, Nigeria said the implication of the ban are more on the Safety of the Europe and North African airlines flights inbound and outbound Nigeria and the passengers tickets fares.

Ojikutu said these travelers would have to fly more westward to avoid the Niger Republic Airspace and that means, flying longer distances and hours either way and the passenger paying more than the normal fares.

"The alternative would be for the foreign airlines from Europe stopping in Accra and interlining with our domestic airlines to shuttle Europe/Nigerian passengers to and from Lagos for them. That could shorten the distance for the airlines but not so on the Passengers tickets fares," he added.

In the press statement shared on X, formerly known as Twitter, the government of Niger had said that,

"The airspace of the Republic of Niger is open to all national and international commercial flights from ground to unlimited, except for Nigerian flights to or from Nigeria. "These restrictions do not affect commercial flights that fly over Nigerian airspace without landing there.

"However, it is recalled that ads-b and/or radar transponders must remain on for any flight taking place in the Niger Republic."

It added that the country's airspace continues to remain closed for all military, operational, and special flights. These types of flights will only be permitted with prior authorization from the competent authorities.

It said that the circular specifically concerns Niger and Nigeria and does not revoke any existing Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) in force.

Recognition



Why Olu of Warri won SUN's 'most impactful royal father' award

MERCY ENOCH, Asaba

It was an array of the crème de la crème at the 2023 Sun Man of the Year Award as prominent Nigerians who have distinguished themselves and made im-

pacts carted away awards in different categories.

The event was to celebrate iconic individuals, business giants, traditional rulers, impact makers, industrialists, entrepreneurs and other categories.

His Royal Majesty,

Ogiame Atuwatse III, won the Most Impactful Royal Father of 2023 and was presented by the Governor of Enugu State, His Excellency, Peter Mbah.

According to the organisers, Olu of Warri's sterling quality among others earned him the Most Impactful

Royal Father of the Year 2023 award.

"Olu Atuwatse has modernised the institution of Olu of Warri by ensuring peace, unity and prosperity of the Kingdom. His experience as a serial entrepreneur propelled him to host the Iwere Economic Summit,

the first of its kind, where stakeholders came together to plan the future of Itsekiri nation.

"His cardinal programme of reaching out to neighbouring Kingdom and traditional rulers has ensured the building of bridges for peaceful co-existence

among communities," the organisers said.

Olu of Warri was represented at the event by Chief Gilbert Temisan Grant, aka Agubusinbiro, the Agura Otiri of Warri Kingdom, Teresa ikimi the Ejumotan of Warri Kingdom and other prominent chiefs.

13th brands excellence awards to hold February 28

SEYI JOHN SALAU

The Institute of Brands Management of Nigeria (IBMN) has announced Wednesday February 28, 2024 for the 13th edition of the West African Brands Excellence Awards.

The Institute in a statement made available recently in Lagos, disclosed that the event will feature a conference, mini exhibition, brand presentation and awards.

The organisers also disclosed that this year's edition will also showcase West Africa brands exhibition 2024, which is aimed at promoting West Africa brands in the marketplace.

"It is a platform meant to showcase Brands and Products of companies in West Africa to increase Brand visibility and to reinforce Brands strategic relationship with their consumer,"

the IBMN stated.

Also, the statement pointed out that, the West Africa Brands Excellence 2024 aims to identify, recognize and reward companies that apply branding culture and branding management policies designed to achieve corporate objectives in both profit and non-profit organizations.

Accordingly, the brand's presentation will give the brand

the platform to demonstrate their brand's commitments to consumers/prospects in attendance at the event.

In addition, awards will be conferred on few West African companies, brands and individuals who made impacts on lives of West African consumers through their innovative ideas.

At the conference, brands experts such as Victor Ademola Dairo, Akpo Gordons and Chika Nwosu, the chief executive officer, Palmpay, will speak on the theme: Celebrating Great Brands Making Impacts in the West African sub-region.

The IBMN as an institute is a professional membership organization for brand management and brand experts.

IBMN serves professionals in all aspects of brand management and is open to individuals, agencies and corporations with interest in brand management.



2024 African Heritage Awards moved from South Africa to Lagos

GODSGIFT ONYEDINEFU

The African Heritage Awards (AHA) 2024 earlier slated to hold in Johannesburg, South Africa, has been shifted to Lagos, Nigeria.

A statement issued by the organisers - Heritage Times (HT), informed that the decision to change the event's location is "due to unavoidable bottlenecks encountered."

They added that the choice of Lagos State for the AHA 2024 is strategic, being that Lagos is the entertainment hub of Africa, and the vibrant city known for its high appetite for global events, has the pedigree to give the prestigious event a pan-African footprint, in line with the objectives of the organizers.

The event is now slated to hold at the Lagos Marriott Hotel, Ikeja, Lagos on April 13, 2024, the organisers said.

Earlier, the organisers had disclosed that those nominated

included African-American billionaire Philanthropist, Robert. F. Smith, Chairman/CEO of Vista Equity Partners, Texas, United States; George Weah, former President of Liberia; John Dramani Mahama, former President of Ghana; and HE, Mama Rachael Ruto, First Lady of the Republic of Kenya & Founder of Mama Doing Good Organisation; Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Others nominated for honours are: Mr & Mrs Strive Masiyiwa, Founder & Executive Chairman of International Technology Groups, Econet Global and Cassava Technologies; Adebayo Ogunlesi, Chairman/Managing Partner, Global Infrastructure Partners; Thulisile Nomkhosi Madonsela, Founder of the Thuli Madonsela Foundation; Victoire Tomegah Dogbe, Prime Minister of Togo; Mrs Folorunsho Alakija, Managing

Director of the Rose of Sharon Group and Executive Vice Chairman of Famfa Oil Limited; Othman Benjelloun, Co-chair of BMCE Bank Foundation and Madam Graca Machel, Founder of Graca Machel Trust.

The pan-African event which is a sequel to the inaugural edition held on April 1, 2023 in Kigali, Rwanda, is a gathering strategically organized to celebrate and recognize outstanding global accomplishments of Africans within the continent and in the Diaspora, in areas of Business, Politics, Philanthropy, Entertainment & Arts, Culture, Science & Technology, and Social Innovation.

This year's AHA will be chaired by Seretse Khama Ian Khama, former President of Botswana, and will be attended by former Heads of State and Captains of Industries across the African continent.

The organisers say the recognition and awards have become

Health and Living

Health unions urge FG to urgently implement sector salary structure, CONHESS

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU) has called on the Federal Government to urgently implement the adjusted Consolidated Health Sector Salary Structure (CONHESS) so as to avert resumption of the suspended strike action by the unions.

The call was made in a communique issued by JOHESU at the end of its national leadership meeting held in Abuja.

In the communiqué jointly signed by the National Chairman of JOHESU, Kabiru Minjibir and National Secretary, Martin Eganubi, the unions recalled that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on June 7, 2023 promised to resolve the demand of JOHESU on adjustment of CONHESS which according to them has been a subject of trade dispute in the health sector for over a decade.

The communiqué further explained that it was the promise by President Tinubu that



led to the immediate suspension of an ongoing nationwide industrial action by JOHESU that same day.

While commending the Federal Government for capturing the approved review of the Consolidated Health Sector Salary Structure in the Appropriation Act, JOHESU encouraged FG to commence the immediate payment with

arrears in the month of February 2024.

However, the national leadership of the unions also appealed to all members to remain calm as the leadership intensifies its effort to ensure that all outstanding demands are met by the Federal Government.

Meanwhile, JOHESU and Assembly of Healthcare Pro-

fessional Associations, had in an open letter commended the Federal Government for restoring funding to the Health Sector Professional Regulatory Councils that regulate and control the practices of its members.

Also, in a letter cosigned by Minjibir and Eganubi, JOHESU urged President Tinubu to pay special attention to the

health of Nigerians as any life lost cannot be recovered.

They appealed to the President to urgently reconstitute the Boards/Governing Councils of all FHIs, Professional Regulatory Councils and other agencies in the health sector.

The letter reads: "In recent months, we have been critically appraising output of the various FHIs, Agencies and Professional Regulatory Bodies in Nigeria's health sector and have come to the conclusion that there are gaps in the effective management of these health institutions.

"There is observable culture of impunity and lack of adherence to due process by chief executive officers of these FHIs in the absence of Boards of Management.

"Some of the far-reaching effects of the non-constitution of these Federal Health Institutions and other health sector statutory bodies include stalling the promotion of senior staff and some of those who should be in management committees of the hospitals

which needs the approval of the board

"There is disruptions and poor oversight responsibilities of key structures in the hospital system including entire procurement process of drugs, dressings, consumables, construction works, transport and vehicular logistics and other related endeavours in health-care management.

"This impedes other establishment procedures with regards to the training, research, and specialised care protocols of the FHIs. Vital decisions on specialised appointments which are incidental to care in the hospitals have been delayed and almost jeopardised in some instances.

"With respect to the earlier listed professional councils which ought to enjoy legal status of perpetual succession, are probably more hit because vital areas of their output are grounded in statutory provisions."

Oyo distributes veterinary drugs to 33 LGAs, plans reduction in zoonotic disease

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

The Oyo State Government has distributed drugs to veterinary hospitals/clinic in the state, for easy access by end users at subsidised rate.

The distribution done in collaboration with the federal government is part of efforts at

reducing zoonotic disease as about 68percent of human diseases were contracted from animals.

Olasunkanmi Olaleye, the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Develop-

ment at the distribution of the drugs in Ibadan, said the move was continued efforts at preventing animal-human diseases.

While saying that the gesture would enable livestock farmers in the state and pet (dog) owners to have access to veterinary drugs at subsidised rate added that this would enhance production of disease-free animals, boost food security in the state and Nigeria at large.

He revealed that it is the responsibility of government to put in place mechanism to ensure safe food for

human consumption.

He therefore, urged the general public, most especially livestock farmers to patronise veterinary hospitals/clinics in their local government areas or zones in administering their animals at subsidised rates.

Earlier in her welcome address, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Christianah Abioye enjoined the veterinary officers to be dutiful and ensure the drugs are available and accessible to the end users at the subsidised rate.



Devcom, TCI train journalists on Family Planning in A/Ibom

ANIEFIOK UDONQUAK, Uyo

Journalists drawn from various media organisations in Akwa Ibom State have been trained on the coverage of family planning services as well as on its advocacy and sexual and reproductive health.

Organised by Development Communication Network, a media development, capacity-building with support from The Challenge Initiative (TCI), the three-day workshop had resource persons from both the organisers and Family Planning officials from the state Ministry of Health.

Speaking while declaring the workshop open, Obasesam Edet said it was important for journalists who were drawn from the print, electronic and

social media to be well equipped on how to report Family Planning services, adding that his organisation was working with some state government in generating demand for family planning services.

According to him, uptake of family planning services is beneficial to the family in spacing child birth and as a boost for the Gross Domestic Product of a nation.

In her presentation, Enobong Eshiet, coordinator of Family Planning in Akwa Ibom State, disclosed that 4.6 percent of adolescent girls aged between 15-19 years of age and 13.2 percent of women between 20-24 years of age in Nigeria use modern contraceptives.

There were presentations on using social media as a strategic

approach to promoting family planning, cultural and religious contexts of family planning, family planning in Nigeria, trends, practices and barriers related to family planning and writing compelling human angle stories on family planning.

The right method is the one that suits you, according to the slogan while the methods include pills, injectable, implant, male and female condoms, vasectomy and tubal ligation among others.

In addition to journalists being exposed to issues of adolescent sexual health, they also undertook a field trip to a health facility in Oti, Okobo where clients were availing themselves of family planning services being provided at the facility.

Health and Living

Cholera outbreak kicks up deaths, dispute in Rivers

... NDDC Rep: There is cholera and we are saving lives

... Ministry of Health: There is no such epidemic

... Why we did not report to the state govt - Community leader

BY IGNATIUS CHUKWU

A cholera outbreak in Soku area, the deepest part of Rivers State, has not only provoked misery and deaths but it has kicked up dispute that may touch on politics.

Now, whereas the Rivers State representative of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Tony Okocha, who doubles as the caretaker chairman of the state's chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC), has raised alarm and team to intervene, the state Ministry of Health led by Adaye Oreh, has denounced such medical intervention as a hoax. Independent sources have however corroborated the existence of the outbreak, saying they did not bother to inform the state government because of past experiences of neglect.

Intervention:

The Rivers Rep said his office received strident calls for help and thus mobilized to save lives. By that time, about five persons had been reported dead, he stated.

He explained how the board of the NDDC was alerted and they deliberated on the matter and approved the live of intervention which followed.

Reports available to the Commission indicated that the outbreak started by last quarter of 2023 and allegedly got worse with recorded fatalities by December last year and January 2024.

The briefing said the Rivers State Rep received series of 'Save Our Soul' messages and requests from Soku Communities and tendered same before the last NDDC Governing Board meeting, and got a nod for swift response which led to the swift response.

The NDDC through the Rivers State Office dispatched a 'Rapid Response Medical Team' made up of medical doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals to Soku town for what it termed



aggressive intervention to save the lives of the citizens of Soku Community.

This was said to be in relation to the focus of the Rivers State office under Okocha to make human capital development and welfare of citizens its top priority.

The Rapid Response Medical Team was said to have taken off from the Abonema/Bonny Jetty last week and arrived Soku Community later same day to commence medical interventions immediately in the community, according to a staff member attached to the NDDC Rivers State office in Port Harcourt.

We did not find cholera – Ministry of Health

The Rivers State government is managed by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) under which it was elected but most of the lawmakers have defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC) with the leader of the party and godfather to most people, Nyesom Wike, now a

minister in the APC-led federal government and is seen as fully in the federal ruling party.

Now, the APC in the state is seen as influential while the PDP with a sitting governor looks like an orphan.

Now, this situation seems to affect the approach to the case in Soku, far into the whims of the Atlantic Ocean. The state Ministry of Health thus dismissed the Soku saga.

Oreh, while reacting, said public health teams sent to investigate the outbreak and alleged cases of deaths confirmed that there was neither an outbreak nor deaths as a result of cholera in Soku community.

The Commissioner noted that all health outreaches must be conducted with approval of and in collaboration with the State Ministry of Health. She said no entity should be conducting outreaches outside the coordination of the ministry.

"Outreaches have always

been a way of getting accessible health care services to underserved and vulnerable populations.

"And as such, no entity should be conducting health outreaches outside the coordination of the ministry."

Doctor Oreh further called on the general public to disregard the rumors of the outbreak of cholera and the death of some persons in Soku community, noting that the information is unfounded and capable of causing panic amongst citizens and residents.

"All infectious diseases of this nature are to be reported, managed, and escalated by the Rivers State Ministry of Health.

"This statement should, therefore, serve as a strong warning to anyone planning or conducting health activities without due recourse to the Rivers State Ministry of Health.

"Any such activities found to be carried out without the

knowledge and clearance of the state Ministry of Health will be fully investigated and dealt with to ensure the protection of the lives of Rivers people.

"The general public is thus urged to remain calm and rest assured that the Rivers State Ministry of Health will continue to be a veritable source of all public health information in the state," she stated.

Okocha marches into Soku in carnival style

Apparently to debunk the position of the state ministry, the NDDC Rep led a team that visited Soku few days after to meet with the people again.

Reports said the entire members of Soku Community, comprising chiefs, CDC, women, youths, students, children, etc., trooped out en masse to welcome the man that God was said to have been used to rescue them from the ravaging Cholera epidemic that almost annihi-

lated the community.

Speaking during a courtesy call to the Royal Highness of Soku Community, the Chairman of Soku Council of Chiefs, Omubo Omoni Alasia, expressed shock that the Rivers State Commissioner of Health could give a contrary narrative to the outbreak of cholera in Soku Community.

He posited that himself and three of his children, the Royal Highness of the Community himself, and so many other persons he listed, were victims of the cholera outbreak just last week and were yet to fully recover from the disease. He wondered why the Commissioner would go on air to debunk the outbreak the fact, an action he said was capable of discouraging the NDDC from the highly applauded life-saving medical intervention in Soku Community. He demanded an unreserved apology from the Commissioner of Health to Soku Community.

Other members of the community who spoke on the issue condemned the action of the Commissioner towards the plight of Soku Community but thanked NDDC for their swift response in coming to the rescue of Soku Community, an interventionist action.

Addressing the highly excited and elated mammoth crowd of the people of Soku at the Soku Town Hall, the venue of the NDDC Rapid Response Medical Intervention, the Rivers State Rep, Okocha, emphasized that the NDDC was not a subsidiary of the Rivers State government and therefore does not need the permission of the Commissioner for Health before responding to save the lives of the people of Soku Community.

Okocha highlighted that the series of SOS messages he received from the indigenes of Soku Community forced him to escalate the situation to the NDDC Govern-

Continues on page

Health and Living

In five months, Hepatitis claims 28 lives in Nasarawa community

... As Assembly asks government to declare state of emergency

SOLOMON ATTAH, Lafia

Musa Ibrahim Abubakar, the member representing Doma South Constituency in the Nasarawa State House of Assembly, has said that no fewer than 28 persons have died of hepatitis in his Constituency from October, 2023 to date.

The lawmaker, who raised the alarm during the House plenary in Lafia, brought under matters of public importance, maintained that the epidemic keeps killing people in Ekye community, with no response from any quarters to eradicate the spread of hepatitis.

“Mr. Speaker and my colleagues, there is a serious health problem in my constituency, as 28 people died of hepatitis from October, 2023 to date.

“Hepatitis is killing my



people and something needed to be done to curtail it.

“I beg that government should tackle this problem. We should come up with strong committee to address this issue.

“If you go to rural areas, you will see our health facilities are really in bad shape to

attend to some of these health challenges,” he said.

In their contributions, Muhammad Oyanki, Daniel Ogazi, Ibrahim Peter Akwe, Solomon Akwashiki and Larry Ven Bawa, all said that government must give attention to eliminate hepatitis and other deadly diseases in the state.

They also said that special attention should be given to the treatment of hepatitis across the state.

The Speaker of the House, Danladi Jatau, has however, called on the Nasarawa State Government to declare state of emergency in the treatment of hepatitis and other deadly dis-

eases in the state

He said that declaring state of emergency would go a long way in curtailing the spread of the disease, thereby improving the health status of the people of the state.

He appreciated the lawmaker, Musa Ibrahim for bringing up the matter and other members for their contributions to rescue the situation.

The Speaker, then sympathized with the people of Doma South and the affected families, and prayed God to grant the deceased eternal rest.

“We have two resolutions to the effects that, His Excellency, Governor Abdullahi Sule is hereby directed to ask the Ministry of Health to move their experts to the affected communities to ascertain the situation and do the needful.

“Secondly, the state government should declare a state of emergency on hepatitis and other deadly diseases in the

state,” he said

The Speaker directed the Clerk of the House to communicate the House resolutions to the Governor for his further necessary action.

It would be recalled that, in December 2023, a team of medical experts from Egypt, Africa Liver Patients Association (ALPA), that specializes in the treatment of hepatitis B and C has embarked on a 10-day free screening and treatment of the epidemic in Lafia, the state capital.

During their visit, in partnership with the African Union Scientific Research and Innovation Council (AUSRIC), organised by the Nasarawa State Government, the team also embarked on sensitisation campaign, vaccination, linkages and referrals with the theme, “hepatitis free village,” led by a renowned Egyptian Hepatologist, Professor Ahmed Farahad.

Cholera outbreak kicks up deaths....

Continued from page

ing Board during the last NDDC Board meeting in Akwa Ibom State, to which the Board swiftly and graciously gave approval.

He thanked the Chairman of the NDDC Board, Chiedu Ebie, the MD/CEO, Samuel Ogbuku, and other members of the 7th Governing Board of the NDDC for making the welfare and well-being of the good people of the Niger Delta a top-most priority.

He assured the people of Soku Community that the Commission would do everything possible to ameliorate the plight of the community by ensuring the provision of solar-powered drinking water, modern toilet facilities, solar streetlights, food, and other relief materials, etc.

Why we did not report to the state govt - Community leader

A former Community Development Committee chairman of Soku community in Akuku-Toru Local Government Area of Rivers State, Young Arney, told newsmen that there was indeed, a cholera outbreak in



the community at the end of January and beginning of February 2024 which led to the deaths of five persons.

Arney, in a report to a newspaper, said cholera outbreak is a recurrent bacterial disease that affects the people of Soku because of a lack of access to potable water in the area.

The former CDC chair-

man said the community's first response was to reach out to NDDC, and not the state or local governments because of previous experiences of neglect from both levels of government.

Arney said: “Towards the end of January and early February, we recorded this outbreak and some few persons died, five or so.

“You know Soku is made up of the main town and satellite communities.

“It was in the satellite communities that it started. It later affected the main town. One person died in the main town, four died in the satellite communities.

“We reported the matter to NDDC. It was NDDC that just sent medical teams

to the community yesterday and today.

“Previous experiences, when such a thing happens, when we call on local and state governments, they don't easily respond.”

Arney further said Soku community has had no functional health facility for over 10 years.

“We have one cottage

hospital, but it has been down for the past 15 years. It has not been functioning. There is no health facility here.

“Sometimes they bring nurses around to come and examine the people, give them some treatment and they go.

“After this period, we will report this matter to the LGA and the state, to facilitate the project that is already ongoing.

“Already, Shell SPDC has renovated the cottage hospital, it's left for them to commission. The cottage hospital was built in 1991 and commissioned in 1995,” he said.

Conclusion:

While the controversy rages, the community people seem to enjoy the attention coming to them from the NDDC at the moment.

All parties would however have to thread with caution because the international community especially the World Health Organisation (WHO) is highly sensitive to such developments and would go to any length to verify and document it with their numerous independent sources.

Artist In Focus: George Edozie

OBINNA EMELIKE

George Edozie, a multidisciplinary artist, was born in 1972 in Enugu State. His artistic talents emerged during his early childhood in Nsukka where he was creating paintings, sketches and other crafts. He enrolled at the University of Benin where he graduated with a Bachelors Honors degree in Fine and Applied Arts in 1996. After his graduation, Edozie ventured into full time art.

Edozie's impressionist paintings feature angular characters and a rich array of textures, which are integral to his works. His art delves into themes that address social-cultural, political, and economic biases in society, evoking strong emotions such as love, belonging, strife, and joy.

As an experimentalist, Edozie explores various media, including fabric and found materials, to create installation pieces. In his solo exhibition titled 'Shifting the Paradigm', showcased in 2014 at the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, Florida, he challenged the narratives and biases of cultural art in relation to the artist's life. The

installation featured paintings and life-size pieces crafted from fabric, paint, feathers, and found materials, some of which bore a striking resemblance to the Igbo mmanwu, referencing Onitsha cultural background, knowledge, spirituality, and traditional art. The exhibition celebrated Edozie's culture and identity as an Igbo person and was listed among the top four best exhibitions during Art Basel Miami that year.

Edozie is also an art curator and art restoration expert. He has facilitated the conservation and restoration of artworks in various media for important collections and galleries, including; SMO Contemporary Art, Hour Glass Gallery, Alexis Gallery, Arthouse Contemporary, AFA Framers, Thought Pyramid Gallery, the Alfred Nnaemeka Achebe Collection for the Chimedie Museum, the Mike Oduah Collection, the Frederick Udaka Collection, and many others. His restoration work on canvas includes valuable paintings by renowned artists such as Ben Enwonwu, Uche Okeke, Nelson Cole, Oseloka Osadebe, Ablade Glover, Twin 77, Gani Odutokun, Ben Osaghae, and Abiodun Olaku.

He has conserved and restored works in a range of media, and in 2020, restored



over a hundred works including fibreglass sculptures, wood carvings, ceramics, metal foils and paintings for a private

collection in Lagos. Edozie has also worked extensively, overseeing commissions and restorations of artworks in

stained glass, mosaic, brass and bronze for the Catholic Church in Nigeria, in churches across the country.

Edozie is also an internationally recognized artist, who has exhibited extensively in both solo and group exhibitions in Nigeria, United States of America and in France. Some of his exhibitions include; 'New Nigerian Conjunctions: The Art of George Edozie', National Museum Lagos, Nigeria, (2018); 'Back to Black Art Africa', Art Basel Miami (2017); 'Afro Love', Alexis Gallery, Lagos (2015); African Way of Art, La Galerie Vendome. His works have found homes in both public and private collections and spaces like the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, the Indianapolis Museum, and the Studio Museum Harlem in New York, The Pan Atlantic University Museum, Lagos and the Chimedie Museum, each piece, serving as a unique educational resource for visitors.

A writer, Edozie co-authored the book; 101 Contemporary Artists, A Celebration of Modern Nigerian Art and Nigerian Contemporary Art which was published in 2010.

Edozie is the president of the Guild of Fine Artists GFA and a member of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA).

Otoki uses art for environmental, cultural advocacy

...as Mydrim Gallery hosts artist's second solo exhibition

OBINNA EMELIKE

Having held successful exhibitions, both solo and group, in his over three decades career as a visual artist, Oluwafemi Otoki, a renowned painter, has come of age.

No doubt, the Ekiti State indigene and Yaba College of Technology trained painter has enthralled the art world and collectors in particular with his creative ingenuity with many exciting works to his credit.

Yet, he often goes out of his way to use his craft as a means of advocacy on topical issues in the society, especially on the need for the preservation of the environment and cultural heritage across the country.

This time, the painter is furthering his advocacy for the preservation of the environment with an exhibition he titled 'Landscapes of My Fatherland'.

The exhibition, which is his second solo, after his first at Signature Gallery, about two years ago, runs for two weeks, from March 16-30, 2024, Mydrim Gallery, Norman Williams Street, Ikoyi, Lagos.

On display will be 19 works covering a period of four years,

but all crafted to support a good environment and preserve something for the future.

Speaking on the rationale behind the exhibition, he noted that it is about time somebody documents all the beautiful landscapes in the country before fast-paced urban development erodes them.

"I want to document the landscapes for future generations to see what their town used to be before development and for posterity too," he said.

"We need to document our environment because overtime we

have seen that when development comes, the landscape changes as skyscrapers or housing estates impact our environment".

The artist, who derives inspiration for his painting by traveling, noted that "anytime I travel, I see beautiful landscapes that adore the eyes and tell stories about us and I try to document them".

However, among the 19 works on display, he loves those that portray 'nature untouched'; hence landscapes that are the way God created them appeal to him the most.



O'DA Art presents 'Monuments of the soul', Reuben Ugbine's posthumous exhibition

O'DA Art, a Lagos-based contemporary art gallery, has opened a posthumous exhibition in honour of Reuben Ugbine, a sculptor and visual artist.

Titled 'Monuments of the soul', the exhibition opened on February 24, 2024 and will run until March 16, 2024 at the Victoria Island, Lagos-based contemporary gallery.

On display at the exhibition are 25 works that span over two decades of Ugbine's art career, as the exhibition further captures the evolution of his intricate wood carvings and sculpting technique from 1998 to the present day.

According to the gallery, which specializes in the works of contemporary art and design from across the African continent and its diaspora, Ugbine was a leading post-war and contemporary sculptor who lived and worked in Benin. Throughout the duration of his studio practice, Ugbine mastered the art of carving and sculpting using materials such as wood, terracotta, and metal railings.

With identity at the center of his sculptural work, he was able to explore and demonstrate the possibilities of the human body as a means to demonstrate the nature of our being.

Born in 1956 to Nigerian parents in Anponya, Ghana,



Reuben Ugbine, who died in 2021, attended Auchi Polytechnic in 1976, where he received an Ordinary National Diploma and the Principal's prize for the overall best student. He later received a HND in sculpture from Yaba College of Technology in 1979 and became an instructor and lecturer at Auchi Polytechnic, an appointment he held from 1980-1987 before retiring to a full-time studio practice.

Throughout his career, Ugbine designed and executed several carvings using ebony and iroko wood, terracotta, metal railings and other materials for crafting his sculptures. He

has participated in several solo and group shows across Africa and internationally including; The 2013 Aabru Art London Group show, 'Transcending Boundaries', the 2018 ArtHouse Contemporary Auction Evening and the 2019 'Material Times' group exhibition at Rele Gallery, Lagos. Ugbine work was also acquired by the British Museum, UK in 2018.

Ugbine was a member of society of Nigeria (SNA) and the Guild of professional fine artists of Nigeria (GFA). He is survived by his wife Perpetual, his three sons and a daughter; Ogaga, Karo, Kome and Jessica.

The Worshipper

Centre for Righteous Living urges govt to address rising cost-of-living crisis

Stories by
SEYI JOHN SALAU

Centre for Righteous Living (CRIL), a Lagos-based not-for-profit Christian organisation, has urged the Federal Government to urgently address the rising cost-of-living crisis before it results into anarchy.

"The nation, Nigeria, is in a state of chaos due to insecurity and food scarcity occasioned by the new administration's new policy that skyrocketed the price of fuel. However, many saw the need for the policy but criticised the execution.

"If the government fails to sort out ways of freedom and arrest the situation; what will follow may be difficult to control. Anarchy may result," Solomon Aderibigbe Adegbolagun, president, CRIL, said in a statement tagged, 'Deliverance for Nigeria' made available to BusinessDay.

To deliver the nation from the impending chaos, the Centre listed some actions that Nigerians must implement to prevent the free fall of the Naira and other socio-economic challenges currently facing the



Solomon Adegbolagun, president, Centre for Righteous Living (CRIL)

country.

According to CRIL, religious leaders must stop their blame game and adopt a strategy that can help in saving the country from sinking.

"The religious leaders must with their followers cry up to God to deliver Nigeria as the disciples did. Jesus in response stilled the storm," he said.

According to the Centre, religious leaders must leverage Ramadan and Lent, as a season of reverence, fasting, and somberness, in seeking divine solu-

tions to Nigeria's challenges.

"During the process, God will reveal the ways out if we pray in faith with clean hands and pure hearts," he said.

The Centre also urged traditional rulers to stop spreading negative information about the government.

Accordingly, it stated that while traditional rulers speak truth to power and suggest ways out through the instrumentality of their office, they must be positive about the government.

"You cannot afford to bring down the nation by your unguided words. Today's problem is a long time problem not created by this government. But we voted for them because they promised they can fix the problem. Therefore, let's give the government a reasonable time to perform. After all, the president said that it will be difficult initially. But the latter will be glorious," CRIL stated.

Speaking further on ways the government can win the people over, the Centre stated that the government should be honest and truthful with Nigerians. It also urged the government to organise regular meetings with the people to explain both the successes and failures of the administration.

The Centre also urged the government to look beyond politics to engage the services of all Nigerian experts across all political parties and creeds.

"Government must be seen to be actively sorting out the people's immediate problems. Government must be seen running the state with frugality. All expenses must relate to the current financial situation. The size of government should be reduced to reflect current realities," CRIL advised.

The Centre also called for collaboration on the part of all Nigerians to rescue the country from the imminent collapse occasioned by the free fall of the Naira and the rising cost-of-living pushing more Nigerians into multidimensional poverty.

"Those are the things to do, while waiting carefully with elastic endurance for the next election when we would use our voting rights to replace them and bring in our dream leaders. Failure to do this will only elongate our sufferings and increase our suffering. Working together, we shall deliver our nation from food and personal insecurities.

"I strongly appeal to all Nigerians that we should be

patriotic and willing to sacrifice for our nation this time around. Let's cooperate with the current administration, knowing full well that it's all

of us pulling in the same direction that can take us out of this period of food and personal insecurity," Adegbolagun said.



L-R: Chidi Anthony, president, Pentecostal Ministers' Forum (PFM); Angela Anthony, wife, and Adegoke Fayoadé, Lagos commissioner of Police, during the recent courtesy visit of the PFM to the Lagos police command.

Beyond being knowledgeable, you need to walk in God's path to be successful – Denloye

Enitán Denloye, the Regional Director of Meta (Facebook) Africa, has challenged individuals seeking personal and career success to consider a personal walk with God as a critical factor in a successful career path.

According to him, walking in God's path as a believer will lead the individual on the way to go. "You always need to understand that He's just the source. It's about walking in line with God's purpose. It's important to give God all the glory back – that is the blueprint for me," Denloye said.

Denloye was the guest on The Real Men; CEO Series, a virtual interview show powered by Powerhouse Ministries International, and co-hosted by Dipo Denloye, Regilio Kabelefodi, and Douglas Moore live on Facebook and YouTube every fortnight. The second edition of the CEO Series with Enitan Denloye was held on Tuesday February 20.

Denloye, who is from a Christian family in the city of Ibadan, was raised by a single mother. According to him, her personal life experiences propelled him to always want to achieve more through life.

"I saw hard work in her;

she always had two jobs and learnt early in life that hard work pays."

He also disclosed that he learnt the act of giving, helping and inspiring others from his mother, and that he is always in a constant mode of thanksgiving.

He said further that his Christian background made him to recognise that faith is important in personal and career trajectory, and that he is a strong believer in the God factor, which he considers to be very important.

"Never be afraid of failure – we can learn through it."

Speaking to his career challenge, he said, "There are times God will take you through an unconventional role to get to His purpose for your life."

While giving interview tips for the participants, Denloye said that interviewees must learn to say no, whenever they consider the offer below their standard.

"You have to know what's in it for you. Play to your strength and it takes faith. Understand your value proposition and pick the job. Pray for God to guide you and also do research on your interviewers," he said.

Speaking to his personal life

and the connection between personality and professional trajectory, Denloye said: "I can be very intent and very intentional. Overtime, I have been able to channel the intentionality and have understood the importance of channeling it. I always tell people I would not be 10 percent as successful as I am today if God didn't give me the wife He gave me."

At 47, Denloye disclosed that he is preparing for a life of giving back, while his immediate plan for the future is to bring more people closer to God. "Am super convinced 50 is the year of giving back. The legacy is to get clarity in the next three years. Prayerfully, I am asking God for clarity," he said. Speaking to his trajectory and the impact of faith and the God factor on his career in general, Denloye disclosed that, "the happiest and most fulfilling part of my life is the period when I was in the prayer department in the City of David, because it was God's plan."

Dipo Denloye, the host of the Real Men, CEO Series, in reaction to Enitan's career trajectory and belief, said, "It is not knowing that brings success, but doing. If it needs to be God; God will make a way – God can do it."

God First Ministry celebrates Isaac Idahosa at 59

The New Down center of God First Ministry was recently filled to capacity as friends and members of the Church gathered to celebrate the birthday of Isaac Idahosa, the archbishop designate of the ministry on his 59th birth anniversary.

The occasion was also used to celebrate the recent victory of Abba Kabir Yusuf, governor of Kano state and his New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) at the Supreme Court. Representatives from the Kano state government were present to rejoice with Idahosa via the victory of

Abba Yusuf.

"We are thrilled by this election victory, and I am personally elated to celebrate my 59th birthday. Life is a gift and I thank God not only for my birthday but also for my brother Kabir's vindication and the restoration of his mandate," Idahosa stated.

The clergyman also urged Nigerians to exercise patience with the president over the current cost-of-living crisis on the back of his diligent efforts to deliver renewed hope to Nigerians. He also emphasized the necessity of wisdom to revive

the nation's economy and transform it into a strong, developed entity.

"We have prayed for this success, and we are grateful that God answered our prayers. We also celebrate Archbishop Idahosa's 59th birthday, thanking God for using him as a vessel to impact both the congregation and society at large," Mojisola Okonkwo, stated, expressing joy over the victory.

According to her, God First Ministry is actively involved in a building project that involved the construction of a five-thousand-capacity hall to enhance worship experiences in the church. She stated that the ministry also contributes to community welfare through scholarships and support for orphanages, which embodies a commitment to charitable service. John Osa-Oni, general overseer, Vineyard Christian Ministries and national vice president, South-West, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) presided over the cake-cutting ceremony, and NNPP Edo State Governorship aspirant, Peter Oghegbuele, praised Idahosa as a mentor and diligent gentleman.

While Joseph Ojo, the presiding Archbishop of Calvary kingdom Church (CKC), prayed for Idahosa's continued well-being, recognising his pivotal role as a leader in the body of Christ.



Joseph Ojo, the presiding Archbishop of Calvary kingdom Church (CKC); Isaac Idahosa, celebrant and Archbishop designate God First Ministry; John Osa-Oni, General Overseer, Vineyard Christian Ministries and national vice president, South-West, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) during the recent 59th birthday celebration of Idahosa in Lagos.

Interview

Our people, land facing extinction due to oil exploration - Ogoni group leader

United States-based organisations, including the National Union of Ogoni Students International (NUOS INT'L USA), the Center for Democracy, Human Rights, and Anti-Corruption International (CDHRAC INTL USA), and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), have persistently raised concerns about the environmental degradation of Ogoniland, Rivers State, Nigeria, attributing it to activities of oil companies. In this interview, Pius Barikpoa Nwinee, president of NOUS INT'L, USA, shared his perspectives on addressing the pressing issues in Ogoniland. INIOBONG IWOK brings excerpts:

Can you provide an overview of the current environmental situation in Ogoniland and the specific challenges faced by its residents?

A short overview of Ogoniland situation is chaos, disaster, slow walking genocide and extinction of our land and people by the Royal Dutch Shell corporate greed, negligence and reckless degradation violence. That is why we have consistently and repeatedly asked the Nigerian government to declare a state of climate and health emergency in Ogoniland so that the ongoing outbreak of radioactive of benzene in our water, air, food could be controlled.

A call that is in alignment with the Nigerian government's primary duty to protect Ogoni lives and properties from internal and external aggressions. That has long been ignored or foreclosed by the silence and inaction of the government.

What are the major environmental and social consequences resulting from oil exploration and exploitation in Ogoniland over the years?

The major environmental and social consequences of oil exploration in Ogoniland and her enclaves is that our people and land are facing extinction, premature mortality rate and destruction of our history and historical heritage.

Our people, land are facing extinction, premature mortality rate due to oil exploration

How has the proposed sale of Shell's onshore activities in Ogoniland impacted the local communities, and what concerns does the community have regarding this transaction?

Shell's attempt to sell our oil is nothing but betrayal, slowly pushing Ogoniland into extinction, genocide, slavery without help to cope with a problem the people did not create.

The people has no choice but to fight back, because no one sells such property, in this case oil. Ogoni oil is Nigerian oil and Nigerian oil is Ogoni oil.

This is why we are respectfully confident that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Nigerian government will not approve that Shell should sell our oil and pass the bulk to other Shell's pseudo because the President does not have the power to put Shell purported oil sale ahead or over the Ogoni and Niger Delta.

Also, the President has no power to immune or shield Shell from either civil and criminal cases going on in Nigerian courts.

So what Shell is asking President Tinubu to do is for him to violate the Nigerian constitution so that Shell can run away, but I'm confident that the President would not do this. Shell is not immune from prosecution or would not be shielded from her wrongdoing.

Can you elaborate on the



Pius Barikpoa Nwinee

efforts made by Ogoni-American organisations, such as the National Union of Ogoni Students (NUOS) Int'l USA, in addressing the environmental crisis and advocating for the rights of the Ogoni people?

What NUOS INT'L USA, CDHRAC INT'L USA and others are doing is to shine light on the environmental chaos, disaster, degradation and violence in Ogoniland so as to draw the attention of the international community to the Royal Dutch Shell daylight robbery and deception of Shell because the company preaches what she does not practice.

Shell is the greatest hypocrite corporation in the world that is why money from the Nigerian oil under Shell operation and control finds its way into foreign banks all over the world.

Shell cannot run away and leave Ogoni in the mess we found ourselves, this is on one hand. And on the other hand, NUOS INT'L USA has done so much for Ogoni and we shall not stop now.

The study on Ogoniland by UNEP is the brainchild of NUOS INT'L USA before we dragged Shell to the highest court in the US, where Shell had no choice, but used her parents' government to get justice. So, in the next few days, weeks, months or years, Shell will have to change its

ship to the Ogoni people by hiring an international professionals with experience and technical know-how.

They should get a firm that has the capacity for complex knowledge, best practices in deforestation and coastal erosion to handle the destruction of the soil and using of dangerous chemical in washing the soil through which HYPREP has been cutting conner and declare a state of climate and health emergency in Ogoniland.

The government can approach a risk-based insurance and company and key into Africa disaster risk programs.

If our environment is not properly cleaned to international standards, though we do not oppose oil resumption in Ogoniland, there will be no any oil resumption in the area. Oil production can only take place in a safe environment.

In your view, what specific measures should be taken to ensure that the Ogoni people receive fair compensation for the devastation caused by oil companies in the region?

The specific measures Ogoni people expect is first of all, Shell must change its self-serving mentality that we want to share profit with them.

They should pay rent, royalty and lease that due to us and genuinely clean the mess in the land, exonerate Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni activists, stop listening to those second grade Ogoni politicians and back off from its behind-closed-door plan to sell our oil.

Could you shed more light on the collaboration with the United Nations and the call for a state of climate and health emergency in Ogoniland? What outcomes do you hope to achieve through these initiatives?

When we say that the Federal Government should collaborate with the United Nations to declare a state of climate and health emergency in Ogoniland, we know what we are talking about.

The Federal Government stands a chance to gain more than Ogoni people because there are a lot of international remediation firms or risk-based financing insurance or Africa risk disaster programs that could send relief aids to Ogoni.

But Nigeria is poor, not because she's poor, but we are poorly managed. We certainly hope that President Tinubu will rise to the occasion because the Ogoni people have suffered much.

How can international firms with expertise contribute to containing the environmental crisis in Ogoniland, and what role do you see for them in mitigating the radioactive outbreak?

International firms with professional experience and technical know-how can treat the degradation, violence and the radioactive outbreak of benzene or hydrocarbons in our water, food, air and

more importantly treat human being who are now walking corpses that are suffering from breathing poisonous and contaminated air.

They have the tools, technology and the technical capacity. Take a look at the Gulf of Mexico, and by the way, who told Shell that it can sell onshore oil and control offshore? Shell will destroy our offshore the same way she destroyed our residential homes.

Considering the economic challenges faced by Nigeria, how do you propose balancing environmental conservation and economic development, particularly in regions like Ogoniland?

The economic challenges faced by Nigeria and the environmental conversation are interrelated and interdependent or inseparable because the hard economic challenges Nigeria faced are byproduct of poor environmental conversation.

Farming and fishing are more or less not providing enough for the people, sometimes they get little or nothing in return because our environmental challenges on our area.

Regrettably, there is nothing to balance in Ogoniland now. Ogoniland is an ecological war zone and the people are slowly going into extinct, yet, Shell claims it has oil to sell and run away.

What lessons can other nations and environmental advocacy groups learn from the experiences of Ogoniland to prevent similar environmental degradation in their regions?

The possible lessons other nations and environmental advocate groups need to learn from Ogoni and degradation violence is that globalisation has several meanings.

While corporations are talking about global initiative and global commitment, they should ensure that they open the discussion of global local integration and best practices so as not to turn their homes to backyard of pollution.

What message would you like to convey to the international community, especially concerning the need for support and collaboration in addressing the environmental crisis in Ogoniland?

Our message to the international community is simple. We believe in the global initiative and global international commitment to tackling climate change squarely by President Joe Biden of the United States of America. We also strongly believe in global integration of host communities or local population.

By that I mean the international community must ensure that risk-based insurance financing are set aside to prevent future disaster and cushion the immediate danger on ground

Finally, Ogoni oil is not for sale or transfer and we respectfully ask President Tinubu to reject Shell's closed doors deal and not to violate the Nigerian constitution.

Fashion Talk

Celebrating Mo're Signatures at OZA Woman Fashion Show

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

THE OZA Woman Fashion Show which held over the weekend in place in Minna, Niger State, Nigeria served as a vibrant tapestry of modern fashion trends and cultural expressions.

The fashion show tagged "Rising Threads" was put in place to showcase Innovative Designers and celebrate emerging Fashion Brands.

Among the array of brands showcased, one stood out for its innovative take on African fashion landscape.

Taking center stage at the runway event was Mo're Signatures, a dynamic label that captured the essence of contemporary style with flair and finesse.

Under the visionary leadership of Mary Oluwaseun Akinbiodun, Creative Director and Founder Mo're Signatures showcased her "OWAMBE" Collections.

The Collection was inspired by the importance and richness of Africa parties especially the Western Part of Ni-

geria, The Yorubas.

The grace and carriage that Africa wears symbolizes during parties giving the Rich Aunties vibes.

Mo're Signatures Owambe collection embodies the spirit of individuality and self-expression that defines the current fashion scene.

Each garment is a testament to the brand's commitment to pushing boundaries and chal-

lenging conventional norms, catering to a diverse range of tastes and preferences.

With a focus on sustainability and ethical production practices, Mo're Signatures demonstrates a dedication to responsible fashion that resonates with today's socially conscious consumer.

"I look forward to exploring and making Corporate Wears with Africa Prints in a way that showcases where Tradition Meets Innovation. I want to continue infusing Africa Prints into Contemporary styles, making simple and Chic ready to wear for the family," Akinbiodun gushed.

In conclusion, the Owambe Collection by Mo're Signatures transcends the realm of fashion; it is a celebration of culture, a testament to craftsmanship, and a bridge between tradition and contemporary style. Owambe isn't just a collection; it's a sartorial celebration that echoes the heartbeat of a nation.

“
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Food & Beverage

Food & Beverages With Ayo Oyoze Bajé



In Nigeria's bold bid to diversify its economic base from crude oil to agriculture, one economically viable plant to consider is *Cocos nucifera*. That is the coconut palm of the family *Arecaceae*. It is cultivated extensively, mostly in tropical areas for its edible fruit, the coconut. The term "coconut" can refer to the whole coconut palm, the seed, or the fruit, which botanically is a drupe, not a nut.

On the immense nutritional benefits, its oil encourages fat burning, works as a quick source of energy, equipped with antimicrobial effects and helps to reduce hunger. Others include helping to reduce seizures, boosting skin health, protecting your hair and improving oral health. That is according to Ariane

Maximizing the economic potentials of coconut

Lang, a world renowned nutritionist. When it comes to coconutwater, it is a good source of several nutrients with antioxidant properties, helping to lower blood sugar for people living with diabetes and prevents kidneystones. Also significant is that it supports heart health, and it is recommended for athletes as a beneficial drink after prolonged exercise as it is a delicious source of hydration. One can therefore, understand the increasing demand for coconut products, including the popular coconut bread in Lagos.

According to Wikipedia: "In the modern consumer market the outer shell of coconut fruit or coconut husk is used to produce a number of important products. It is used to make coco huskchips, cocopeat, coirfiber, and cococrush. It is the best natural organic growing medium in the world. Coir, also called coconut fibre, is a natural fibre extracted from the outer husk of coconut and used in products such as floor mats, doormats, brushes and mattresses. Coir is the fibrous material found between the hard, internal shell and the outer coat of a coconut".

We are aware of the huge benefits, countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines lead the world production with 17.13 and 14.77 million metric tons. India with 2.47

In Nigeria, coconut is produced in about 22 states with Lagos leading, where about 70 percent of national output comes from. Other states include Akwa Ibom, Delta, Edo, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Rivers and Taraba. In fact, Nigeria stands to earn over N20 million by early from coconut, derivatives where a 10 hectare farm land of hybrid coconut can earn revenue of between N16 million-

N20 million annually for the next 30-60 years. That is depending on the variety of the coconut planted.

Currently in Nigeria, coconut business has become profitable which could be through reselling or packaging. And it is readily available. It is therefore, noteworthy that the pragmatic Governor Sanwo-Olu-led Lagos State government in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO, has begun the habilitation of its coconut belt. The aim is to ensure the sustainable production of coconut seedlings for the cultivation of at least N10 million coconut trees by 2024 with transaction worth of over N240 billion annually.

According to Mr Dapo Olakulehin, the General Manager, Lagos State Coconut Development Authority (LASCODA), the coconut value chain has recorded over 500 percent increase in processing rate in 2021. The increase has influenced the huge demand for importation of coconut seedlings from other neighboring countries in West Africa. He said that the coconut production had been on increase since 2014 by about 2.5 percent. Indeed, about 300 products can be derived from coconut and each can be a stand-alone industry with the value chain becoming a fast growing industry.

Good enough, Lagos has more than 2,000 processors. They demand for coconut on daily basis but the farmers cannot meet up with the processing needs for coconut oil, art and craft, coconut bread and other products, as produced by the cottage industries. Unfortunately, Nigeria is spending a lot of money on coconut importation. According to Olakulehin: "In 2016, Nigeria produced 283,774 metric

tons of coconut and this increased to 288,615 metric tons in 2018. By the nature of coconut, it has a long gestation period, about four to five years. A coconut tree will start production massively in its fifth year. So, what is the way forward?

It has become patently obvious that there has to be a well-articulated plan by the states producing coconut to increase cultivation and value addition to for agro-economic and social development. Interestingly, this is the position of the Director-General of the Raw Material Research and Development Council (RMRDC), Prof. Hussaini Doko Ibrahim. He noted that the global coconut by-product market size is expected to reach \$95.64 billion by 2025, according to a new report by Grand View Research, Inc. It is anticipated to expand data CAGR of 17.8% during the forecast period.

In 2019, Indonesia was the largest exporter of coconuts in the world, followed by Thailand and Vietnam. The three countries held about 23 percent share of total exports, while Cote d'Ivoire, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Mexico, Guyana and India, altogether, made up 17 percent of the total exports.

Another entrepreneur and coconut production investor, Mr John-Bede Antonio, said several thousands of youths could be profitably employed if each state could devote at least 100,000 hectares of land for cultivation, apart from income and export benefits.

According to the MD, LASCODA the Lagos State government was investing massively in reviving its coconut plantations as well as supporting coconut growers with hybrid seedlings with short gestation period. Said he: "The Lagos state government is doing a lot in the

coconut value chain, in 2019, Gov. Babajide Sanwo-Olu directed the release of more than 140,000 seedlings to coconut growers across the state which we did.

"In 2020, the governmental so directed the sale of coconut seedlings at highly subsidized price to farmer and we sold close to 500,000 seedlings at highly subsidized price.

"Coconut seedling costs about N2,500 but we were selling it at N500 to our farmers in 2020, it was highly subsidized. The Lagos State government is doing a lot with the recent \$200,000 Unilateral Trust Fund Agreement (UTF) for development of coconut value chain between the state government and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO-UN).

In all of these laudable policies and programs, what has become imperative is for Nigerian farmers to focus on the cultivation of modern, early-maturing, disease resistant and bumper harvest yielding hybrid seedlings. The private sector should invest heavily in providing top-notch machineries to facilitate the processes required to boost the value chain. On the part of the government, the CBN Anchor Program should come in handy with the needed funds in this regard. This should be in addition to the provision of stable power supply, good access roads, safer farming environment and the training and retraining of young Nigerians for sustainable capacity building in this emerging economic boom.

Ayo Oyoze Bajé is Nigeria's first food technologist to practice as a journalist. ayobaje@yahoo.co.uk; 07068638066

SundayBusiness

How blockchain is transforming Africa's financial landscape, saving costs for businesses

JOSEPHINE OKOJIE

In today's rapidly evolving global economy, businesses across Africa are constantly seeking ways to streamline operations and cut costs.

Foreign exchange volatility, inefficient traditional systems, and the need for transparency and security have posed challenges for businesses in the past in carrying out cost-effective transactions.

However, with the emergence of blockchain technology, a new era of cost-effective and efficient financial transactions has been birthed.

Achigonye Paul, the CEO of Coinazer, Africa's first blockchain payment gateway, sheds light on how blockchain technology is transforming the landscape of financial transactions and helping businesses in Africa save costs.

"Different countries' policies on foreign exchange and business transactions have a significant impact on the cost of doing business," he said.

"Fluctuating exchange rates, high transaction fees, and the complexity of cross-border transactions can all contribute to increased costs for businesses. Additionally, traditional banking

systems often come with lengthy processing times and high fees, adding to the financial burden of businesses," he further said.

"Blockchain technology is playing a transformative role in revolutionizing financial transactions, particularly in terms of efficiency and cost-effectiveness," he stated.

According to him, by utilizing decentralized digital ledgers, blockchain technology eliminates intermediaries, reduces processing times, and minimizes transaction fees.

He noted that this not only streamlines the entire process but also significantly reduces costs for businesses.

"Blockchain technology functions as a decentralized ledger system, meaning that transaction data is stored across a network of computers rather than in a central system.

"This decentralized nature provides greater security, transparency, and immutability, as it becomes nearly impossible to alter transaction records without the consensus of the entire network," he explained.

According to him, businesses have compelling reasons to consider utilizing blockchain technology to save costs on transactions.

He added that not only does it offer increased efficiency and reduced

fees, but it also enhances security and transparency, mitigating the risk of fraud and errors.

Moreover, he said blockchain technology facilitates real-time transactions, eliminating the need for lengthy processing times associated with traditional systems.

"In terms of security and transparency, blockchain technology surpasses conventional methods by utilizing cryptographic algorithms, consensus mechanisms, and transparent, immutable records. By leveraging these features, businesses can instill trust



Achigonye Paul

and accountability in their financial transactions, safeguarding their assets and operations."

"Several case studies and examples illustrate how businesses have successfully implemented blockchain to reduce transaction costs.

For instance, supply chain management platforms have utilized blockchain to track and verify product authenticity, thereby reducing the risk of counterfeit goods and streamlining transactions across the supply chain."

While the benefits of blockchain technology are significant, Paul stated that businesses may face challenges and drawbacks when adopting it for financial transactions.

He identified the drawbacks to include regulatory uncertainty, interoperability issues, and the need for skilled personnel.

It's essential for businesses to navigate these challenges effectively and develop robust strategies for successful implementation, he noted.

"Regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in the adoption and implementation of blockchain technology in the financial sector.

"Businesses must actively engage with regulatory authorities to ensure compliance and navigate the evolving regulatory landscape, which will

ultimately facilitate the effective integration of blockchain technology into their operations," he added.

To effectively integrate blockchain technology into their operations, he hinted that businesses can take several steps to mitigate risks and maximize benefits.

He said these include conducting thorough risk assessments, investing in employee training, collaborating with industry experts, and staying abreast of regulatory developments.

He said by adopting a strategic and proactive approach, businesses can harness the full potential of blockchain while minimizing potential drawbacks.

He added that Coinazer is empowering businesses across Africa to save costs on transactions by revolutionizing the way financial transactions are conducted.

"With its efficiency, security, and transparency, Coinazer with its blockchain and wallet services offers a compelling solution to the challenges and costs associated with traditional financial systems, driving a new era of innovation and cost-effectiveness."

As businesses continue to embrace blockchain technology, the financial landscape in Africa is poised for remarkable transformation," he stated.

Cover

Hunger: Two urgent steps Tinubu must take to avert anarchy - Agbakoba

ZEBULON AGOMUO



Agbakoba

Olisa Agbakoba, a former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), has outlined two steps President Bola Ahmed Tinubu must take urgently to avert anarchy in Nigeria.

Agbakoba, who noted that the frustration and anger in the country were palpable as a result of the worsening cost-of-living crisis, accused the government of not communicating hope to Nigerians.

He made the call in an exclusive interview with BusinessDay.

"It is clear that things are no longer at ease and there is a growing discontent in the country. We have had many challenges in Nigeria but the present discontent is remarkable as it concerns the growing inability of millions of Nigerians to cope with the completely unaffordable cost of living in the country. As the saying goes - a hungry man is an angry man," he said.

The Maritime lawyer urged the Tinubu administration to make two quick interventions and solutions that may address what has the possibility to descend into an unrest.

"First, the government, as a matter of urgency, must stand on the bridge and communicate empathy and understanding, immediately. "Second, government across Nigeria must devise emergency measures to address the hunger and lack being experienced by millions. Institutional sup-

port is of utmost importance," he said.

Explaining the form the interventions should take, Agbakoba said: "Absolutely, free access for kids in school is vital. This must be followed by completely free health care and public transportation, massive cash transfers to the most needy is overdue. These are only stop gap measures."

According to him, "Policy decisions that enable manufacturers produce and give value to the Naira is of utmost importance. Staccato of circulars coming out of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), is largely unhelpful. Massive devolution of powers to the 36 states and 774 local governments is paramount and an emergency. The Federal Government cannot resolve the sufferings of 200 million Nigerians, by itself. People need to feel that the governments in Nigeria give empathy."

He noted that "Lagos State has set an example, but more is needed. At the end of the day, measures that begin to resolve the tough choices in removal of petrol subsidy and floating the naira against the dollar is imperative. It is unclear how government proposes to support the new policy environment with strong action.

"Last but not the least is that government must not accept the prescriptions of multilateral institutions - especially the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, that subsidies are not a viable and workable policy. It is indeed, a good policy. The United States (US) spends half of its budget on subsidies and benefits which we call palliatives.

"The United Kingdom (UK) subsidises health care by spending billions. Public schools are free in the UK. France has announced a major electricity subsidy. The president has to lead the process to engage

Nigerians and give them renewed hope that, at the turn of the corner inroad lay opportunities."

Agbakoba, who expressed fears about the future of Nigeria, noted that there was a rapidly growing revolt across the country owing to the high cost of living and called on the government to take action to address the discontent being expressed by the people.

"I agree with those saying the Presidency is not leading by example by moderating their lifestyles and cutting down on the cost of governance. It is very clear. The empathy of the government is not apparent.

"There is something that former US President, Franklin Roosevelt said in the Great Depression years of America in the 1930s.

Agbakoba, who expressed fears about the future of Nigeria, noted that there was a rapidly growing revolt across the country owing to the high cost of living and called on the government to take action to address the discontent being expressed by the people

The thing to do about making people happy is not to give them a job, you first give them hope. So, the government ought to be communicating hope. They ought to be saying 'we are going through this difficult period but there is light at the end of the tunnel.' This government is not communicating that at all, which I think is a big error."

He pointed out that the failure of government to give the citizens reassuring words was worsening the situation in the country.

"Failing to communicate hope makes Nigerians depressed. It is not that Nigerians cannot live with high food prices. They will always find ways to manage difficult situations. Even IBB (Babangida) said he doesn't know why Nigeria has not collapsed," he said.

"The problem we have is that the government is not communicating hope. If you communicate hope and say to a person who has malaria that 'don't worry, in two weeks' time you will be well, that will lift the person's spirits because he has that hope.

"But right now, the government is not telling us that in two or three months, we are likely to be in a better state. That is the biggest problem that the government is not communicating properly.

"The second one is that the government is not even telling us how we can come out of this problem. That is why as we are beginning to see, there is a slow revolt around the country, pointing to a protest of costs of living. It is everywhere."

ernment cannot keep sharing food items or money as the source will soon dry and hunger will still be biting.

"We hear of rented crowd, if that is true, how long will you keep renting them to support your policies because the hunger in the land seems to be here for a long stay and so also the protests," he said.

Furthering on the reason the government should not politicise the situation, the lawyer noted that "a hungry man is an angry man" and that hunger does not know tribe or religion, but food.

In the immediate, he suggested that the government can introduce price control, offer manufacturers tax incentives to enable them to reduce price of their products, check arbitrary increase in fuel pump price as such will automatically increase prices of commodities and also allow importation of food items to augment the shortfall in supply.

"I don't think Nigeria has reached that level of sufficiency in food production. There is shortfall in supply and that is part of the reasons prices of food items are high.

"In Economics, you are allowed to import to meet growing demand and supply shortfall, that will not bankrupt rice farmers, but will improve supply and beat down price.

"Again, where are the rice pyramids they keep showing us under Buhari?"

"We need them now to feed the people or else open the borders for rice to come in, let people eat and survive first because this becoming an emergency situation," he declared.

Meanwhile, the handlers of the presidency and the APC are confident that the Tinubu-led administration will lead Nigeria out of the economic hardship, having proven his credibility as governor of Lagos State.

They are also confident that the situation will not degenerate into anarchy, while pleading for more time and support for Mr. President.

But a hungry man, as they say, is an angry man.

The masses are hungry and are impatient, hence, the government needs to do everything possible to save the bad situation.

A Tribute to Prof. Benjamin Obiefuna Nwabueze

Continues from Page 1



author of many books, an adviser to governments across the African continent, and a drafter of democratic constitutions.

The encomiums showered on Nwabueze from all sides are well deserved—and so are some of the criticisms. Nwabueze was not a god with feet of clay. He was thoroughly human, with his full share of the positives and negatives to which all flesh is heir. And when it is all added up, when his achievements are weighed against his failings, he would be found to be an exceptional person, a rare specimen of the human family.

Nwabueze's most ambitious project was the drafting of the Nigerian Constitution of 1979. Led by Chief Rotimi Williams, the nation's then-leading name in the legal profession, Prof. Nwabueze and the other eminences of the 1978-79 Constitution Drafting Committee constructed what turned out to be an ill-conceived, ill-fitting American-style outfit which was draped over Nigeria as it attempted to return to civilian rule after 13 years of military dictatorship and civil war.

The goal was admirable, but the method and the result were dismal. All that the 1979 Constitution did was to canonize the military dictatorship then in practice, with all the decentralised and reserved powers of the four Regions of the First Republic taken away and handed to a central, plenipotentiary civilian federal government.

The 1979 Constitution was a boomerang. When its obvious defects were observed during the civilian government of Shehu Shagari, October 1, 1979 to December 31, 1983, discussions to amend it had hardly begun when another military coup blew everything to pieces. Then was to follow 16 more years of military dictatorship. Nigeria whirled further and faster downhill till it hit bottom with six years of General Sani Abacha, the worst of them all.

Abacha's sudden death in 1998 brought no relief. On the contrary, his henchman and successor dregged up the flawed 1979 Constitution, transmogrified it a dozen-fold, and foisted it on the incoming civilian government as the 1999 Constitution.

One might ask: Where was Prof. Nwabueze in all this drama? It takes intelligence to perceive one's mistakes; humility to accept them when pointed out by others; godliness to confess your mistakes publicly and accept responsibility for them; and saintliness to openly and seriously engage to correct your mistakes and undo the damage.

Prof. Nwabueze was one of the first to see the flaws of the 1979 Constitution. Here are his own words in a newspaper interview: "Quite frankly, there are many flaws and many errors in the content of the constitution. So many errors, and I as a person was partly responsible because I was a member of the constitution drafting committee set up by the military government in 1978. I was not only a member but chairman of one of the sub-commit-

tees that produced Chapter 2, the fundamental objectives and [principles of state policy]; and one of the cardinal flaws in the constitution is the concentration of powers in the centre.

"That is why I accept that I am partly responsible for that because at the time, late Chief Rotimi Williams, a close friend of mine, and nearly everybody in the Constitution Drafting Committee, were so overwhelmed with this feeling, this patriotic feeling that we needed unity and the most effective way to achieve unity of the country is by having a very strong central government.

"Most of us in the committee shared that idea at the time. Chief Williams shared it because of the patriotism in us and we wanted a united Nigeria, we feel we can achieve unity by having a strong central government. Then, what did we do to achieve our mis-guided objective? We took away 50 percent of the items on the concurrent list and gave it to the centre.

"We feel by doing this, we are establishing unity. We did not stop at that. We looked at the residual matters, these are matters exclusive to the states, we took a large part of it, more than 30 percent and close to 50 percent; we took it away from states and gave to the centre. And the result is the almighty Federal Government, but what we discover was that instead of producing unity, we produced disunity because of the intensity of the struggle to control the centre.

"The intensity is so much and it is not just in the political power that was concentrated at the centre, much of the money also went to the centre, and so by action we destroyed what is called fiscal federalism. Too much money at the centre increased the struggle for the control of the centre and the control of the money itself, and that has remained the feature of the Constitution up till today.

"So when people struggle and agitate for true federalism, for fiscal federalism, they know what they

are talking about and they are right, that must be changed; and until it is changed, we might not achieve true federalism because the basis on which we did it has proved to be misguided, the unity we thought we will achieve was not achieved and what we achieved was more disunity than unity because of the struggle...

"So not only restructuring in political power, not only restructuring in financial power, you have to restructure the territorial basis of zones..."

And so, the 1979 Constitution was Nwabueze's greatest project but also a cataclysmic failure, and his deepest regret. His efforts to correct that mistake and make amends to the nation came to naught. In his own voice, and in the voice of The Patriots, the activist organisation which he co-founded, Nwabueze repeatedly called for a Conference of the Nigerian Nationalities to write a new Constitution and restructure the territory in a way that reflects the will of the People. When eventually President Goodluck Jonathan organised such a Conference in 2014, his successor in 2015 paid no heed whatsoever to its recommendations. Nigerians can judge for themselves in what direction the nation travelled in his successor's eight years in office.

The struggle for restructuring and a new Constitution continues.

For Nwabueze, it's lights out. Good night, Sir. And may the Good Lord who made us all and sees every heart, forgive you your sins, look kindly on your efforts to make amends for your mistakes, and grant you rest in His Heavenly Kingdom.

Prof. Jemie was a co-founder of The Guardian Newspaper, and its pioneer Editorial Page Editor. He was also Editor-in-Chief of BusinessDay Newspaper.

Nigeria crumbling into anarchy

...As hunger pangs bite harder

...Vehicles being attacked, food items carted away

OBINNA EMELIKE

Since the Monday protests in Kano and Minna over the high cost of living in the country, there have been more protests, and counter protests.

While many are lamenting over the economic hardship, some are saying the present government should be given more time.

The latter was what scores of pro-democracy activists did on Friday, staging a solidarity march from the Unity Fountain to the National Assembly complex in Abuja to demand that the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) suspend its planned two-day protest and return to the negotiation table with the Federal Government.

In his view, Sunday Attah, convener of Nigerian Civil Society Forum, who spoke at the solidarity march, said that the planned protest was uncalled for. "We are not going to allow the NLC to plunge Nigeria into anarchy.

Calling for protest against an eight-month-old government is uncalled for. The President is doing his best. He is not a magician. All that Nigerians need at the moment is to be patient with the president," he urged.

As Nigerians try to be patient with the President, some people are of the opinion that the economic reforms require adjustments by the masses and will definitely yield the expected economic stability.

But the question for many is how long will the masses continue to wait as the economic hardship bites harder every day or how long will it take the reforms to start impacting positively?

While they wait for answers, the impatient ones see protests as a means to communicate their feelings.

Away from the protests, the concerns are that the realities are obvious and are fueling the protests as many families go hungry due to the high cost of food items in the market, high cost of transportation and other commodities.

Apart from the lamenting families,

businesses are struggling to stay afloat over the high energy cost, high inflation, unstable foreign exchange rate and insecurity.

"You don't need protests to know that hunger pangs are biting harder. In recent times, goods-bearing trucks have been attacked and food items carted away by hungry masses.

"Now, grocery stores and other potential targets are beefing up security in preparation for imminent attacks," Mathieu Iyala, an economist and university lecturer, said.

According to him, no matter how good one wants to paint the picture, the situation on ground is not favouring anybody.

"Those who don't have are crying and if you think you have money, inflation has reduced your millions to mere paper. In this situation, some rich are becoming poor and we are going to experience Babangida's structural adjustment programme once again," he noted.

Bem Hembafan, a retired security officer, who runs private security

for estates in Abuja and in Nasarawa State, fears the escalation of the situation as the steady depreciation of the Naira leaves many with little to fend for themselves.

"With the low purchasing power, many who don't have may resort to violence and looting of food items just to survive. This is a bigger security risk because it is from within and from people we know," Hembafan lamented.

His major worry is that with the insecurity situation in most agrarian communities, especially the persisting farmers-herders clash, there will be more hunger in the land this year.

"Those who are looting truckloads of food items today may see no truck to loot next year if farmers are not allowed to farm this year because the president has said no to importation of food. Which farmer will brace the odds to enter the farm when death is lurking in the corner?" The security expert asked.

He also fears anarchy as the people impacted by the hardship will defi-

nately outnumber those who are safe, probably the politicians and those paid to pretend that all is well, according to him.

Sequel to the hunger in the land, the increasing default in the renewal of house rent in the estates his firm manages, especially in Abuja, is worrisome.

"As an estate security firm, we are always notified when quit notice is served to a tenant and the rate is increasing now. People need to eat first before paying house rent, which landlords are increasing like the American dollar.

"Without food and shelter, the situation will be catastrophic. The Police or Army people you will send to quell protests are also hungry, they have families and dependents, they pay house rent and school fees. It will be tough if nothing is done now because all of us are experiencing same thing," he warned.

Considering the huge youth population, many of whom are idle, Chijioke Umelahi, an Abuja-based lawyer and onetime lawmaker, is urging the government not to play with the situation at hand.

For him, there should be a lasting solution to food insecurity and the measures should be both short and long terms because the gov-

Cover

Price hike threatens access to safe drinking water

...As sachet water goes out of reach

...Resorting to other sources puts Nigerians at risk of water-related diseases

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

No respite in sight for the citizens of Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, who are being pummeled on all sides of life with the accelerating inflation resulting in soaring prices of every commodity in the market. With headline inflation settling at 29.9 percent in January 2024, sachet water, Nigeria's most common and cheapest source of sanitised drinking water, is becoming a luxury, going out of the reach of the masses.

The economic headwinds have resulted in a sharp rise in prices in recent times with retailers selling a bag for between N300 and N400 depending on the location and temperature of the water bag.

This development, experts say, could trigger a serious health crisis if the poor Nigerians whose source of drinking is the popular sachet water begin to depend on boreholes and other unsafe sources of water to meet their drinking water needs.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6 declares the importance of achieving 'clean water and sanitation for all'. It promotes universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.

Universal access to safe drinking water is a fundamental need and human right because securing access for all would go a long way in reducing illness and death, especially among children.

Though access to clean water is a basic human right, it has remained a challenge for millions globally as about 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water services as of 2020.

In Nigeria, about 26.5 million Nigerian children lack access to safe water as of 2021, according to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

This means that 29 percent of children in Nigeria experience high or extremely high-water vulnerability. This, experts say, is life-threatening as lack of safe water affects people's health, well-being, and economic productivity.

It can lead to waterborne diseases including cholera, diarrhoea, and typhoid fever, which cause millions of deaths yearly, especially among children under five.

Already, UNICEF said about 100,000 Nigerian children are said to die annually of water-related diseases.

Owing to the inability of governments at both Federal and State levels to provide safe pipe running water to citizens, many Nigerians rely



on self-dug boreholes to meet their cooking water needs.

Today, these boreholes have also become a source of drinking water

I stopped buying sachet water in 2021 when a bag was sold for N200. We are a family of seven persons, my wife and I with five children. This means that we need at least two bags of sachet water per day, which was becoming too expensive for me when I had other bills to pay with the limited money at my disposal

for many, especially the poor masses who could not afford to buy either sachet or table water.

"Tablewater producers now supply a bag of sachet water to retailers at a price between N250 and N300 per bag while the retailers sell for



N400 per bag. I bought five bags of sachet water on Friday, February 23, 2024, for N1,250 from the factory and this amounts to N250 per bag," said Efiog Ntak, a Lagos-based accountant.

He said he used to buy the same

number of bags of sachet water for N1,000 in 2022.

According to Ntak, the soaring prices of commodities including sachet water are becoming a source of concern for families who are faced with diverse financial burdens, especially at this time.

Sachet water is cheaper to produce than plastic bottles and easier to transport. In Nigeria, it is popularly known as "pure water", and it has become an increasingly important part of drinking water access for many.

BusinessDay Sunday checks revealed that the price of sachet water started rising in 2015 when a bag of sachet water, initially sold for between N70 and N100 per bag as well as a sachet sold for N5, was hiked to between N140 and N150 while a sachet was sold for N10.

Then, the Association for Table Water Producers of Nigeria cited the rise in the cost of production especially the price of the waterproof

used in packaging the product as a reason for hiking the price.

After the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in 2021, table water producers increased the price of a bag of sachet water to N200 per bag and N20 per sachet due to a further increase in production cost resulting from soaring inflation and naira devaluation.

The situation worsened in 2022 after the pure water producers announced a nationwide price increase from N200 to N300 per bag and N20 per sachet, according to Clementina Atiye, its national president.

Today, with the naira trading for N1,488.89/\$ on the Central Bank's official foreign exchange window as of Friday, February



expensive for me when I had other bills to pay with the limited money at my disposal," said Timothy Adebayo, an artisan.

He said his family depends on the borehole water for cooking and drinking, and it has been the practice for close to three years now.

Adebayo said he did not buy sachet water when it was N200 per bag and he is not planning to do so now that it is N400 per bag and there is no money anywhere now to even eat food not to talk of buying water.

"Whenever I'm tasty, I go to the nearby borehole to fetch drinking water and that has been the practice," he added.

But he confirmed that three of his children have always been typhoid patients, which could be attributed to drinking unsafe water.

Alkpan Okon, a vehicle mechanic, told our correspondent said he does not border himself with buying bags of sachet as he takes drinking water from a nearby borehole.

Okon said buying drinking water at home for his family is the least of his worries.

Meanwhile, Ifeanyi Onyebuchi, a tricycle rider, told BusinessDay Sunday that five bags of sachet water in his part of Lagos sells for N1,500 from the company which amounts to N300 per bag.

According to him, his family has decided to start boiling borehole water to serve as drinking water for the whole family rather than depend on buying bags of water because the current pricing would not be the end of a hike in price.

Sunday Special

Landlord-tenant friction worsens on escalating cost-of-living crisis

...Landlords jittery over tenants' inability to pay ...Tenants furious over landlords' arbitrary rent increase

CHUKA UROKO

On incremental basis, cost-of-living crisis in Nigeria is escalating and, in more ways than one, it is impacting on health, finances and access to basic needs of individuals, organisations and families.

It is also brewing ill-feeling among friends, family members, landlords and their tenants, among others. More than ever before, expectations and obligations are no longer being met.

One major development that has come with this crisis is that everybody, especially families, are now prioritising their needs and this action favours feeding and getting well which means that family budgets now lean more towards food and health.

It follows that housing which is ranked second, after food, in the hierarchy of man's basic needs, is now being treated as a luxury item, meaning that those who live in rented accommodation, and they are quite many, are unable to meet their rent obligations to their landlords.

On account of growing poverty among citizens, job losses and shrinking income arising from bad economy, many tenants find it difficult to pay their rents which breeds friction between them and their landlords.

BusinessDaySunday findings show that this friction is getting worse by the day with the escalating cost of living crisis, making the landlords jittery because tenants are unable to pay their rents while the tenants are furious with the landlords for their arbitrary rent increase on the other hand.

A report on The State of Real Estate Market in Nigeria compiled by Pison Housing Company gives a sense and dimension of this friction. The report says Nigeria is one of the most active rental markets globally with about 80 percent of its estimated 200 million population living in rented accommodation and spending over 50 percent of their income on house rent.

"Frequently, landlords and tenants quarrel over sundry issues including inability to pay rents on the part of the tenants and/or landlords' high-handedness and near-impossible demands. Some of these quarrels often lead both parties to court cases which, rather than

improve their relationship, worsens it and leads to quitting the tenant from the house," Henry Ezike, an estate agent and consultant, confirmed to our reporter on Thursday last week.

Dominic Ulu is a Lagos resident living in Olodi Apapa area of Lagos. His relationship with his landlord, Alahaji Ajibade, is no better than that of a cat and dog. They are always quarrelling over delayed, unpaid or increased house rent which Ulu considers too exploitative on the part of the landlord.

"My landlord is insensitive; at a time like this in Nigeria when everybody is struggling to eat, he is increasing my rent. What manner of man is that? Is he blind or deaf? Let him do his worst; I don't have a dime to pay him," Ulu told our reporter who learnt from other tenants that the landlord has taken his case to a customary court.

Similarly, Ebenezer Okonjo, who lives in Ejigbo area of Lagos, is digging it out with his landlord over arbitrary and frequent rent increases.

"I rented this house from the father of my present landlord. He was living in London then. Now he has come back after his father's death and the first thing he did was to increase our rent," Okonjo told our reporter.

Continuing, he said, "When I told him I won't be able to pay a second rent increase, he told me to relocate to my village; that Lagos is not meant for everybody. I felt insulted and told him to his face that he was a wicked man. He quickly gave me a

One thing that got me irritated was the landlord's habit of reminding me that my rent would soon be due as if I didn't know my responsibility. In my third year, he increased my rent by 30 percent. I couldn't cope because my salary could not carry it



quit notice which I refused to collect from him. Since then, it has been an uneasy calm between us."

Beyond rent increases, attitudes especially in the case of landlords with exploitative tendencies, could also breed friction in a landlord-tenant relationship as reflected in our findings which show that, generally, the plight of tenants range from unjustifiable rent increases, outrageous service charge particularly on power supply, and disturbance from the landlords.

A teacher in a Lagos private school, who did not want to be named, told our reporter that he and his family rented an apartment in the Ifako-Ijaye area of the state, but his three-year stay in that apartment was a tug of war with his landlord.

"I secured a 2-bedroom flat in that area so that I can spend less on transport fare as the house is close to my place of work. The landlord collected a year rent along with agreement and commission. My experience there was not rosy. The landlord made us pay for almost every damage/renovation of the house," he revealed.

"One thing that got me irritated

was the landlord's habit of reminding me that my rent would soon be due as if I didn't know my responsibility. In my third year, he increased my rent by 30 percent. I couldn't cope because my salary could not carry it. I left the place," he added.

Akunne Benedict, who resides in Ojokoro area of the state, poured out her frustration with her landlord's exploitative tendencies, explaining that the man was fond of hiding power bill from tenants in order to make them pay for what they did not consume.

"The landlord lives with us. We are five in number. We hardly see power bill, yet we would be asked to pay as high as N50,000, which is shared among five of us. We have complained to him on several occasions, but he is adamant; he often tells us to leave his house if we are not pleased with the rules," he lamented.

Ezike advised that there should be a chicken and egg relationship between landlords and tenants because they are or should be mutually beneficial to each other. But most times, especially in the cities where demand for housing far outstrips supply, there seems to be a master-servant relationship with the

landlord assuming the position of a master.

"With the difficult economic situation Nigerians find themselves, cases of rent default are on the increase and so is the friction between the landlords and their tenants," he stressed, pointing out that while the tenants are complaining of rising food prices, energy and transportation costs, the landlords are adding to their burden with rent increase.

"But if you look at the case critically, you find that it is difficult to apportion blame, because the landlords, especially those who live on rent from their houses, are also affected by the high cost of living in the country. They too buy from the same market and have to maintain or renovate their houses at a time when building material prices, especially cement, have hit the roof-top," he said.

Titus Ijalade, an estate broker, agrees, noting that most of the landlords are retirees and elderly individuals, who rely wholly on rent for their livelihood. "If you take a survey on the employment status of landlords in Nigeria, you will realize that about 60 percent are retirees or out of job, who rely on their property to survive. So, their behaviour is not intentional," Ijalade said.

Though the friction between landlords and tenants is more pronounced in low-income settlements where most tenants

are

struggling with meagre income, the middle and high-income areas also have their own version of the friction, usually arising more from default in paying service charge than rent.

Serviced estates have also been hit-hard by rising costs, especially energy, which has seen managers of these estates mark-up power tariff and also reduce hours of power supply down to 12-14

hours. The price of diesel has jumped to N1,300 per litre due to oil subsidy removal which has affected prices of consumer products coupled with the naira devaluation and the high inflationary trend.

Managers at serviced estates are, expectedly, pushing the increase in the diesel price to the residents who are also battling with rising food prices, children's school fees, increased transport costs and other service charges.

An estate manager, who did not want to be mentioned, told the residents that it was getting pretty difficult providing power to the estate because proceeds generated from the purchase of electric token could not cover the cost of their monthly power expenses.

He, therefore, served the residents notice of tariff increase

from N195.00/kilowatt to N250.00/kilowatt, citing a market survey showing a few estates that supply 24-hour power where tariff is now N350.00/kilowatt, which is about 79 percent increase from N195.00 per kilowatt.

MKO Balogun, Group CEO, Global Properties and Facilities International (PFI), confirmed to our reporter that, "yes, power cost has gone up as well as other costs, including employees, materials and consumables. All these are impacted by the current inflationary trends as well as changes in the cost of living."

Olalekan Akinwumi, president, Nigerian Facility Managers Association, also affirmed that the situation was challenging such that every fabric of services has really gone up. "The diesel cost and general mains supply are not encouraging service apartments and the occupants are not happy with their managers," he said.

In all these circumstances, mediation and conflict resolution experts advise that landlords and tenants should conduct themselves maturely by not going to court to settle a dispute or disagreement over house rent or poor attitude of one towards the other as has been the case over the years.

They say parties to such disagreement or dispute should settle it within themselves, noting that some landlords normally take their tenants to court to recover their property and/or outstanding rent while some tenants visit the court to seek protection from unjust treatment from landlords.

"As much as practicable, landlords should not take their tenants to court and vice versa; there are more viable options for settling any dispute or disagreement between these parties. Landlords and tenants should always see their relationship as those of husbands and wives and therefore, should not take one another to court," a property lawyer, who pleaded anonymity, advised.

According to the lawyer "the landlord may need more money which the tenant does not have or the landlord may not be looking for more money but the attitude of the tenant is horrible; maybe he is bringing in bad friends into the compound or is not paying rents regularly. In either case, peace should be allowed to reign, especially now that everybody is struggling."

South-East governors working for regional integration - Otti

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State has said that the South East Governors were working together to achieve regional integration, despite party leanings.

Otti stated this while receiving in audience a delegation of Joint Body of South East Council of Traditional Rulers and representatives of Igbo Archbishops and Bishops, led by the Obi of Onitsha, Igwe Nnaemeka Achebe.

He said that issues of general concern such as security remained paramount to the governors as there could not be any meaningful

be commissioned Monday would provide uninterrupted power supply to Aba and its environs, covering about nine LGAs.

He used the forum to invite the delegation to witness the event.

Otti further revealed that his government was in discussion on how to provide the same 24-hour power supply to all parts of the state.

"That is why we are dealing with Aba and Umuahia. We have come to fix this place and we must do that. When we have fixed this place, I'm sure it will also encourage others when the results start trickling in," the Governor said.

Earlier, the leader of the delegation, Igwe Nnaemeka Achebe said that the main aim of the body



Otti

development in an atmosphere of insecurity.

The Abia State governor said that for the South East governors, governance had taken the front seat as they had continued to meet and discuss issues affecting the region.

"I can assure you that we are working together irrespective of our different political parties. We have made everybody to understand that after political party election and litigations, governance takes the front seat. So, we have continued to meet. We will be meeting regularly to talk about regional issues and all.

"Anyhow you look at it, we must deal with security as a region if not as a country. What feeds insecurity, to a large extent, is unemployment and poverty. It also feeds banditry and we need to do everything possible to ensure that our people have something to do," he said.

Otti, who stated that he had a clear plan of what to do in governance, disclosed that one of the plans was to develop Aba.

He noted that if Aba was developed, it could develop the whole of the South East region.

He disclosed that power supply was the major enabler required to spur development in Aba and the entire South East region and revealed that the 141 Megawatt Geometric Power Plant in Aba which would

which came into existence three years ago was for peace building and reconciliation in South East, noting that without peace there would be no development.

Igwe Achebe, who stated that the visit to Governor Otti was the first physical meeting the body was holding, disclosed that the group had engaged with some Governors in the zone virtually. He said that they were committed to projecting peace, mutual respect, love and wellbeing of Ndi Igbo and commended the Governor for his achievements and the manner with which he was managing the scarce resources of the State, describing him as a standard for Igbo leaders. He called on the South East Governors to come together to bring about integration of South East region and stressed the need for Ndi Igbo to build a nation within a nation for economic prosperity.

Other members of Joint Body who were present at the visit were: Chairman, South East Traditional Rulers Council; Igwe Lawrence Agubuzu; Chairman, Center for Values & Leadership cum Founding Faculty - Lagos Business School, Pat Utomi; Arch Bishop of Methodist Church of Nigeria, Ralpheal Opoko, Arch Bishop David Onuoha of Anglican, Owerri, Uju Agomoh and Pauline Iyke-Ogbo.

Surviving The Hard Times

6 ways large families can survive harsh economy, inflation

KENNETH ATHEKAME

Omosi has nine people to feed apart from herself. After losing her son, his wife remarried and left five of their kids with Omosi to cater for but she occasionally sends money to help out;

"I shoulder most of the responsibility and it is not easy at all," Omosi told our correspondent in an interview.

Her elder sister's three kids are also with her after she passed away in 2022.

She also has a child whom she adopted in 2011, who is only 12 years old as well living with her and also under her cover for food, shelter and other basic amenities.

"Dinner time in my house is like a mini-party. There is food and plates everywhere. Legs are coming and leaving the kitchen, and shouting is happening over whose meat is bigger and whose food has no meat. It is not easy," Omosi said.

The retired teacher, who is based in Edo State, also said she had to cut costs because of the rising inflation, adding that she had a meeting with all her family members to inform them that they would only be eating once a day on weekdays and twice on weekends.

"When I told them that I would only feed them once, they did not believe it but that is the only way we will survive this inflation together," she stated flatly.

Official data from the World Bank states that the poverty size rose to 104 million from 89.8 million at the beginning of 2023.

Several large families have lamented that it has become increasingly difficult for them to cater to the needs of members without resorting to borrowing.

A father of five, Bamidele Owotutu said that he had to borrow from different sources last year following the removal of



fuel subsidy.

"When the subsidy was removed, goods and services became expensive, and I had to borrow to survive. My five children do not understand why they cannot eat thrice anymore and why I cannot always give them pocket money like before, but I am cutting costs," he said.

The NBS in its Consumer Price Index for February Consumer Price Index. In February 2023, the headline inflation rate rose to 21.91 percent compared to January 2023 headline inflation rate which was 21.82 percent.

This shows that the country is facing its worst cost of living crisis in about 20 years following the surge.

The CPI also stated that the cost of living was worse in cities where urban inflation had risen to 29.29 percent and a bit milder in rural areas where the rural inflation rate was 25.58 percent (below the national average).

Here are six ways large families can survive the harsh economic situation:

Bulk purchase

A Developmental Economist, Adegoroye told BusinessDay that "Buying foodstuffs and other household items in cartons and bags can save the family a lot of cash. When put together, they can be used to buy other things the family needs," she stated.

Cut costs

"If your family eats five times in a day, this is the time to make it two," said Obawale adewunmi while speaking on how cutting costs could save the family a lot of money.

He also noted that there were a lot of things that families do not need that they end up buying during shopping, adding that large families must begin to learn to trim their budgets.

Always budget

Budgeting is one way experts have identified families can always stay in check when shopping. Obawale added that when one shops without a budget, one tends to either over-buy or buy what is not necessary while leaving out the most important.

"When budgeting, write a list of things you need and those you don't but may need much later and arrange them in order of preference and see how budgeting can help you achieve all you need with the cash at hand," he said.

Multiple streams of income

There is a popular saying that two heads are better than one. In this case, two streams of income are way better than one.

A life coach in an interview with BusinessDay, noted that it was almost impossible for families to survive with just one stream of income in a harsh economy like Nigeria's.

"Sell something online, social media, etc, offer a service, learn a new skill, change your job but make sure that you don't depend only on your salary to survive. One day, you may wake up and notice that you have only been living from hand to mouth," she said.

Cut energy usage

If there is anything that saps the resources of families, it is the cost of energy. From gas to electricity, large families may have to spend almost triple on their energy needs.

Turning off the lights and opting to bathe in cold water instead of using the water heater were simple ways to keep energy costs down.

With the price of gas hitting almost N1300 per kg, large families may need to begin to be wise with the way they use their energy. Instead of boiling rice and egg separately, why not boil them together and take out the egg when the rice is almost ready?" he queried.

Go for cheaper protein

Instead of chicken, turkey and beef, which have become pretty expensive, large families go for eggs and fish.

The main point is getting the required nutrients and these other cheaper sources of protein will do the same thing.

Dry season farming targets 1m tonnes of rice, 525,000 tonnes of cassava - FG

TONY AILEMEN, Abuja

The Federal Government has said that it was ramping up food production by boosting dry season farming under the National Agricultural Growth Scheme Agro-Pocket (NAGS-AP) Project with expected yield of 1 million tonnes of rice and 525,000 tonnes of cassava

Bayo Onanuga, Special Adviser to the President on Communications and Strategy, in a statement on Friday, said the first Phase of the dry season farming which was launched in November, 2023, focused on the cultivation of wheat across 15 wheat-producing states, covering 118,657 hectares and involving 107,429 farmers.

In the statement which dwelt on President Bola Tinubu's efforts to strengthen food security, Onanuga said: "The fields are green now and harvest will commence in a matter of weeks" quoting Abubakar Kyari, the Minister

of Agriculture.

He added: "There are fantastic reports of growth of wheat from Jigawa State, which is now targeting harvest from about 50,000 hectares, 10,000 hectares more than initially allotted under the programme."

Onanuga also disclosed that the second phase of the dry season farming would commence soon, across all 36 states of Nigeria and the FCT.

According to him, this "will cover rice, maize, and cassava.

"For rice, the target is 250,000 hectares involving 500,000 farmers with the expected output of 1 million metric tons of paddy rice.

"For maize, we are cultivating 55,000 hectares with 110,000 farmers thereby adding 165,000 metric tons to national maize production while for cassava, we are doing 35,000 hectares with 70,000 farmers to produce 525,000 metric tons of cassava.

"The NAGS-AP Project offers a 50%



Bagging of grains in Yola Silo Complex

subsidy. However, the Federal Government is providing additional support for Phase 2, which will bring aggregate subsidy to about 93 percent to farmers cultivating the crops.

"Also various governors are showing strong support, to further enhance the subsidy."

Additionally, solar-powered water pumps

for irrigation, provided by the Federal Government, are being deployed to aid the upcoming phase of the programme.

The government said already grains being released in seven locations of strategic reserve, are now being bagged for onward delivery to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

"The need to bag the grains, caused the delay as the bags were freshly ordered by government.

He assured that "Nigerians will not need to pay for the grain bags, as they are free.

"This will be complemented by the 60,000 metric tonnes of milled rice to be purchased by the Federal Government from the Mega Rice Millers.

"Already, with the announcement of the impending releases of food commodities from the Strategic Reserve, there is a noticeable reduction in commodity prices across major grains markets in the country."

The enthralling sacred groove in Osogbo

OBINNA EMELIKE

While Osogbo, the capital city of Osun State, may be a sleeping town for those who have not visited, yet the city offers many attractions to culture enthusiasts and tourists who dare visit.

In the outskirts of the ancient town lies one of the last remnants of primary forest in south-west Nigeria. The forest is so dense, rich in biodiversity, as well as, host of the Osun Sacred Grove, the second World Heritage Site in Nigeria.

The sacred groove is regarded as the abode of Osun, the goddess of fertility and one of the pantheons of the Yoruba gods. The landscape of the groove is dotted with a meandering river, sanctuaries and shrines, sculptures and art works in honour of Osun and other deities. The sacred groove, which is now seen as a symbol of identity for all Yoruba people, is probably the last in Yoruba culture. It

testifies to the once widespread practice of establishing sacred groves outside all settlements.

Set within the forest sanctuary are forty shrines, sculptures and art works

erected in honour of Osun and other Yoruba deities, many created in the past 40

years, two palaces, five sacred places and nine worship points strung along the river bank with designated priests and priestesses.

The new art installed in the groove has also differentiated it from other groves. Osogbo is now unique in having a large component of 20th century sculpture created to reinforce the links between the people and the Yoruba pantheon, and the way in which Yoruba towns linked their establishment and growth to the spirits of the forest.

The restoration of the groove by artists has given the groove a new importance: it has become a sacred place for the whole of Yorubaland and a symbol of identity for the wider Yoruba Diaspora.

The groove is an active religious site where daily, weekly and monthly worships take place. In addition, an annual processional festival to re-establish the mystic bonds between the goddess and the people of the town occurs every

year over twelve days in July and August and thus sustains the living cultural traditions of the Yoruba people.

The groove is also a natural herbal pharmacy containing over 400 species of plants, some endemic, of which more than 200 species are known for their medicinal uses.

Most importantly, the groove hosts thousands of guests including indigenes, other Nigerians, African diasporas, especially from Brazil, Haiti and the United States of America to the one month long Osun Osogbo festival every August.

However, the town offers many other art and cultural attractions. It is home to many visual artists, especially wood carvers, while quality local textile art and weaving are abundant.

Timeless artifacts and local fabric designs are among souvenirs that remind of your visit to the art and culture hub.

The groove awaits your visit this year.



Cape Verde's new tourism brand is targeted at transforming each island into a destination – PM

The Prime Minister, Ulisses Correia e Silva, has disclosed that the recently launched Cape Verde's new tourist brand, matched the country's ambition to transform each island into a genuine, differentiating and an authentic tourist destination.

"The genuine, differentiating and an authentic tourist destination make Cabo Verde unique for its people, its nature, its culture, and its history.

"Therefore, I would like to congratulate you on the work done. Until it reaches this point", said Ulisses se Correia e Silva, Prime Minister of Cabo Verde.

The Prime Minister made the statement while presiding over the launch of Cape Verde's new tourist brand, a ceremony, which was held at the Fortaleza Real de S. Filipe, in Cidade Velha, a location chosen for the symbolism it represents.

The new tourist brand, represented by a heart with bright colors depicting the 10 islands of Cape Verde and whose ambassador is the artist Dino d'Santiago, is the identity that captures the diversity of the islands and promotes the country as a tourist destination, symbolizing the morabeza, origin, history, culture and authenticity of the Cape Verdean people.

"It seems like they are mere drawings, but the important

thing is the meaning, strength, message and the narrative it carries", explained the Prime Minister. He recalled the difficult periods from 2020 to 2022, caused by the covid-19 pandemic, and also the opportunities and a different perspective the crisis provoked.

Ulisses Correia e Silva highlighted that Cape Verde has an identity forged through a history of more than 500 years, a Creole identity, and a vast diaspora, open to the world, which appears to be its greatest

distinguishing factor.

The focus now must be on endogenous resources and the quality that requires continuous investment and diversification of the destination, so that it is not just sun and beaches.

"We have sun and beach tourism that still has room to develop with quality. We will continue to invest in sun and beach tourism, but we have other tourism to discover in terms of nature, culture, and various events. Each island presents itself in a different and diverse way," he noted.



Zimbabwe to host inaugural UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy for Africa

Barbara Rwodzi, Minister of Tourism and Hospitality of Zimbabwe, has confirmed the hosting of the first UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa. The event is scheduled to take place from July 26-28, 2024 in Victoria Falls.

The development follows an important meeting between Zurab Pololikashvili, secretary general, UN Tourism and Minister Rwodzi, during which the planning for the Africa Gastronomy Conference was finalized. In addition to highlighting the possible impacts on Zimbabwe's tourism industry, Minister Rwodzi emphasized her excitement at being able to host such an important event.

She said, "The most significant highlight of the day was our meeting with the UN Tourism Secretary General this morning, during which we received confirmation for hosting the Africa Gastronomy Conference. We are thrilled to have secured this opportunity and eagerly anticipate hosting it in Victoria Falls. Additionally, fruitful discussions were held regarding the establishment of a Tourism Academy in Victoria Falls."

African Gastronomy tourism has garnered significant attention in recent times. The inaugural UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa aims to accentuate the new image of Africa. The conference will highlight



the unique local cuisine and culinary customs across the continent while fostering cultural exchange, economic growth, and sustainable travel practices. It seeks to present Africa's diverse culinary scene to encourage participation and collaboration throughout the continent.

During last year's UN Tourism World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in San Sebastián, Spain, Zurab Pololikashvili, secretary general of UN Tourism, recognized the efforts of Auxillia Mnangagwa, the First Lady of Zimbabwe,

for championing gastronomy tourism in the country and region.

It would be recalled that last year, under the auspices of the Zimbabwe's the First Lady, who held the SADC traditional meal cookout competition in Masvingo, which was colourful and a resounding success, attracting ministers from the SADC region who expressed eagerness to do the same in their home countries to ensure citizens benefit from the food's high nutritional value and medicinal properties.

Sunday Magazine

We do not pray for people to die, our prayer always is 'give us our daily bread' - Funeral service providers

SEYI JOHN SALAU AND BRIGHT IMOHO

OFTEN, people wonder what manner of prayer some categories of individuals pray whenever they wake up in the morning to go to their work places. They say, for instance, what would be the prayer point of coffin makers, grace diggers, mortuary attendants, ambulance drivers that evacuate corpses from hospitals to morgues or from morgues to burial places, among others?

The belief in some quarters is that any prayer that tends to ask for

business to come in that direction was a dangerous prayer.

Analysing the issue further, those who probe what must be the content of prayers of those who are engaged in such trades, reasoned that a prayer for more jobs amounted to an indirect way of wishing that there should be more deaths.

Often also, vans, the type used in evacuating corpses, are seen parked at the gate of government hospitals. Their presence always raises the question as to whether the drivers who position the vehicles in those

places pray for people to die so that they could have some jobs to do.

Following the controversy arising from the insinuations, our correspondents went to town to speak with some ambulance drivers who park their vans at the gates of general hospitals and other government-owned hospitals.

Some of them acknowledged that it was inhuman to pray for one's death and that such was not their line of prayer every morning.

According to them, "Our prayer is that God should give us our daily bread. However, it happens, is the perfect will of God."

They also said that "Give us this day our daily bread" is a petition in

the Lord's Prayer that teaches people to come to God in a spirit of humble dependence in seeking provision for the day.

However, this is not about the usual petition of the everyday man on the street. Rather, it is about the divide between morality and sustenance.

Morality because in seeking for daily bread some families had to weep while others smile to the bank. On the other hand, it is about the sustenance of the human race and doesn't matter if a family is bereaved or not; the living must feed to stay alive.

Some persons have observed that every morning, some ambulance drivers will move their vehicles close to the gates of General Hospitals and Teaching Hospitals and other healthcare centres in anticipation of being hired to evacuate a corpse to some parts of the country.

Sulaimon, one of the ambulance drivers at the General Hospital in Igando, Lagos told BusinessDay that like every other profession or service - they are out to render their service daily to help ease and bridge the transportation needs of the people that demand their service.

"Nobody prays for anybody's downfall; we are only a service provider. And, I think people need to understand us from that standpoint of rendering service in a special way," Sulaimon said.

According to him, ambulance service is not just for the dead alone; people who are sick or accident victims also require ambulance service from one point to another.

"If anybody dies, our own job is to show understanding with the bereaved family because we also know that it's not easy to hear stories about somebody spending millions in the hospital and still have to die or that somebody was not sick; and it just happens to die like that.

"While the family is mourning their dead, we will go there and identify with them. Some people even find it hard to control their pain whenever they come around to buy a casket for their dead, and we have to show sympathy to them," Sulaimon said.

However, Paul, a funeral service provider on Lagos Island told BusinessDay that ambulance service providers do not have to pray for anybody's downfall just to enjoy a windfall.

"In this line of business, we cannot say we don't pray and we cannot say we are praying for people to die, but when we get to the shop in the morning - we all say our prayers 'Give us our daily bread'.

"It is from that daily bread that we will take care of our children's school fees, feed our family, pay rent and take care of many other things. It is also from this daily bread that we have to attend to family issues that are growing bigger and bigger these days," he said.

Paul also disclosed that some people have lost their lives in the cause of seeking for daily bread, and that it is always advisable that people prioritise their mental health in all they do.

"Yes, feeding is essential for living but we also need to understand that some people lose their lives in the cost of seeking their

daily bread to feed their families.

"While some people are busy hustling to feed, pay rent and school fees - some persons take up jobs that are below their standard just so they can meet their daily needs; yet die in that process. And, once an individual dies the only thing left is burial.

According to him, death is inevitable and cannot be wished for anybody no matter the level of hate existing between them.

"This life, once they are welcoming the birth of a new baby; it is at the same time you will hear someone say - ah, somebody has died."

According to Paul, "there is no human being that is born of a woman that will not die."

He further said that in their line of business, it is a known fact that death comes to everybody both big and small.

"In this line of business, if we say we are praying for anybody to die just for the sake of the business, we are also going to die one day," he said.

He said that while selling caskets is the business that helps put food

on the table to feed their families; however, they do not feel happy to sell caskets to bereaved families.

According to him, the bereaved family too cannot just abandon their dead or just place him/her body on the floor.

"The family still has to give a befitting burial to their departed loved one. It is their final home - after the burial, and they cannot bury their dead twice," Paul said.

According to him, funeral service providers usually inquire about the age of the deceased so that they can know how to relate with the family members.

"Of course, if a man dies at 92, it calls for a big celebration, but we cannot compare that with a family that lost, say a 50 or 60-year-old man.

"Somebody can come here and say I lost my dad or I lost my mum. Maybe, the dad or mum is just above 50 or in his or her 60's. A man once came here to inquire about the price of a casket; while we were discussing it, we asked him - who died. He told us his wife had died and when we asked about her age;

he was older than the wife.

"Because of the painful nature, the price I intended to sell the casket was not what I eventually gave him because of his courage. His wife's family had insisted he must be the one to buy the casket - I had to give him a N50, 000 discount, and he thanked me," Paul disclosed.

He also disclosed some of the things that some family members go through in burying their loved ones in either public or private cemetery. According to him, the public cemetery is twofold, and bereaved family members can either pay for a permanent or temporary tomb space.

"The permanent is that when you buy a tomb, you will be issued a C-of-O and that even if you come back after 20 years; the tomb will still be there. However, the temporary tomb is that after burying the dead; you might not find the tomb whenever you come back," Paul said.

Mr. Kazeem, who operates from the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Idi-Araba, Lagos, told our reporter that there are some

reasons why there are ambulances usually parked around the teaching hospital. According to him, those reasons are basically centered on the purpose of emergency.

He said that there are patients who are brought to the hospital that cannot be attended to probably because of the lack of adequate facilities or unavailability of medical personnel. The ambulances are there to convey those patients on the orders of a doctor in that hospital to other hospitals where adequate treatment can be administered.

He also said that there are situations where patients become corpses in the hospital in which case there arises the need for evacuation.

"The purpose of the ambulances there is to convey those corpses to the mortuary at those instances," he said.

He further said that there are patients who call and request to be brought to the hospital. These ambulances are there to respond to those calls with the permission of the hospital management when the hospital's ambulances are unavailable.



Luth



A van waiting in the wings

NewsXtra

Shippers Council, Ministry committed to actualising Obollo-Afor VTA project, others - Akutah

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Pius Ukeyima Akutah, executive secretary/ chief executive officer of the Nigerian Shippers Council (NSC), the country's port economic regulator, has said that the Council and the Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy were committed to creating an enabling environment for the actualisation and optimal functioning of all Vehicle Transit Area projects across the country.

A vehicle transit area is a public rest area, located off the highway, designed to provide temporary rest location for truck drivers.

It promotes safety and security of cargoes and haulage vehicles, while on transit, reduce pilferages and theft of cargoes.

Akutah in a keynote address at one-day enlightenment seminar on 'Vehicle Transit Area (VTA) and Trade facilitation in the South-East corridor,' held Thursday in Enugu, said that the NSC remain steadfast in its dedication to fastening growth, trade and prosperity across the country.

Represented at the forum, by Ify Okolue, director, Inland Transport Services of NSC, observed that the proposed Obollo-Afor VTA, in Enugu State, is strategically located, not just as a hub for commercial and industrial activities within its vicinity, but also as a catalyst for supporting neighbouring States of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo, as well as to complement Rivers State, thus enhancing the overall maritime infrastructure in the region.

It is primarily intended for short term break and also long-



Akutah

term parking service, where truck drivers can get fuel, restroom, shower and basic supplies, like oil and haulage vehicle.

The VTA will have a gas station, hotel and motel, restaurant, mechanic workshop, fire station. Police post and an automated cargo tracking system, Margret Ogbonna, director, South-East Zone of NSC, told BusinessDay in an interview. She said that the seminar created the required awareness and enlightenment on the project, as well as highlighted its social-economic benefits to stakeholders.

According to her, "The NSC used the clinic to enlighten and educate stakeholders on the concept of the project, highlight to stakeholders, the socio-economic benefits of the project, correct the misconcep-

tion stakeholders had on the economic viability and functionality of a VTA and spotlighted the compelling need for establishing VTA, following the danger posed, by heavy duty trucks, oil tankers and container haulage vehicles on the highways.

The clinic with theme, 'Vehicle Transit Area (VTA) and its socio-economic importance to stakeholders' was attended by stakeholders in the shipping/maritime industry, representatives of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), Enugu Chamber of Commerce Industry, Mines and Agriculture (ECCIMA), transport unions and Government agencies, including officials from the Nigerian Export Promotion Council, Standards Organisation of Nigeria and Road Safety Corps.

Otti solicits US co-operation in trade, investment to grow Abia economy

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State has solicited for support of the United States in promoting trade, investment and other areas of interest in the state.

Otti sought for the support when he received in audience, the Political and Economic Section Chief of the US Consulate, Lagos, Mike Ervin who was in the Abia on a working visit with his team.

He highlighted a number of challenges confronting the state, especially the business sector to include access to finance, power and logistics support in the area of digital economy, among others.

Otti however, stated that the issue of power supply in Aba would soon be over following the forthcoming commissioning of the Geometric Power Plant which would be performed by the Presidency on Monday, 26th February 2024.

The Abia governor also said that state prides itself as a major trading and industrial hub in Nigeria, noting that Aba has over 50,000 shoe manufacturers and also very strong in fabrics and garment productions.

He regretted that the State had suffered setbacks in the past due to infrastructural decay, noting that many businesses that hitherto relocated from Aba to other states were gradually returning back to Aba as his administration had in the last 8 months fixed many roads in the state, especially in Aba, the commercial hub of the state.

"In the past, we have suffered quite some set back because of infrastructural decay, you really cannot do much when infrastructure is not there, that is why when we



Otti

came, we started pursuing the rejuvenation and rehabilitation of infrastructure in particular, roads, drainages, not forgetting security and in the last eight months we have been able to fix many roads in Aba which is also the industrial and trading hub of Abia State.

"You can come in as United States to assist us, if we solve the power problem, then there's another problem which is access to finance and these days of expensive dollars people are running away from foreign currency funding, but I believe we can sit down and think out process whereby, even if it is for government to provide a guarantee and help against fluctuations in the foreign currency price so that our people can be sure of support that they can pay back," Otti assured.

Mike Ervin, the Lagos US Consulate Political and Economic Section Chief, who explained that the Consulate covers the 17 Southern States of Nigeria, said their mission was to seek ways to expand bilateral trade and investment and ensure prosperity between the United States and Nigeria.

"As you know in the US Consulate in Lagos we cover

the 17 southern states and our top job more than any other, is to seek ways to expand bilateral trade and investment and expand shared prosperity between our people.

"Our people share a long history of partnership and that was highlighted by the visit of our Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken in Nigeria a couple of weeks ago where he spoke very eloquently and strongly on the significance and importance of US-Nigeria bilateral relationship and our desire is to seek ways of expanding that relationship to build prosperity for our people," he said.

He thanked Governor Otti for opening the doors of Abia State to them to talk about ways they could find opportunities to build shared prosperity for their people, adding, "this is one message Secretary Blinken has been taking around the world."

The Commissioner for Trade, Commerce and Industry, Chimezie Ukaegbu; Senior Special Assistant to the Governor on Digital Economy, Chibuzor Elizabeth Chijioke and the Technical Assistant to the Governor, Charles Egeonu were present during the visit.

Bloomfield LP celebrates 17th anniversary with Sailing Race at The Lagos Yacht Club

IFEOMA OKEKE
-KORIEOCHA

Bloomfield LP, a leading legal powerhouse, marked its 17th anniversary with a sailing race hosted at the prestigious Lagos Yacht Club.

The event brought together legal professionals, esteemed clients, and sailing enthusiasts for camaraderie and celebration.

The law firm, known for its commitment to excellence and community engagement, organised the sailing race as a unique way to commemorate its successful 17-year journey in the legal landscape. The event showcased the firm's

dedication to legal prowess and its passion for fostering connections beyond the work.

The event featured a series of exhilarating races, with

skilled sailors navigating the picturesque Lagos waters.

Attendees were treated to breath-taking views and enjoyed a festive atmosphere of

valuable networking, trivia challenges, award presentations, and interactive games that perfectly captured the spirit of the firm's anniversary

celebration.

The top three winners of each category, Mixed Monohull, Lightning and Hobiecat, were given exciting prizes.

Partner Adedoyin Afun expressed gratitude for the overwhelming support received over the years, stating, "We are honoured to reach this milestone, and organising a sailing race at the Lagos Yacht Club allowed us to celebrate with our valued clients, colleagues, and friends in a truly memorable way. It reflects our commitment to building lasting relationships inside and outside the legal arena."

The event was well attended by notable dignitaries such as Bunmi Akinyemi – Head

Corporate Finance, Conpux Limited, Omo Omorodion – General Counsel, ND Western Limited, Sandra Williams – Head, Customer Relations, InfoWARE Limited, Femi Akande, Former Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Osun State – amongst others.

The event was proudly supported by Josien Holdings Limited, providing guests with unlimited premium drinks.

The anniversary sailing race at the Lagos Yacht Club was a resounding success, marking another milestone in Bloomfield's legacy. The firm looks forward to continuing its legal excellence and community engagement journey for years to come.



NewsXtra

Enugu, Edves unveil groundbreaking digital infrastructure initiative

ABUBAKAR IBRAHIM

Enugu State has launched a pioneering digital infrastructure initiative for education across the state, in partnership with Edves, one of the foremost providers of educational technology solutions in Nigeria.

According to the state government, this transformative partnership signifies a significant leap forward in revolutionising the educational landscape and ensuring equitable access to quality education across the state.

In a statement seen by BusinessDay, the Smart & Green Schools Initiative is at the forefront of this collaboration, a flagship program aimed at modernising educational facilities and enhancing learning outcomes.

The statement read: “Through this initiative, Edves has spearheaded the integration of experiential curriculum and pedagogy frameworks, leveraging innovative models such as PEARL and CASE.

“The strategic deployment



Peter Ndubuisi Mbah

of an Artificial Intelligence Model further augments the national curriculum and assessments, enriching the learning experience for students.

“Peter Ndubuisi Mbah, Governor of the state, and Ndubueze Leonard Mbah, commissioner, are praised for their visionary leadership in driving this transformative agenda. Under their stewardship, 260 Smart and Green

Schools are being constructed, and distributed across every ward in the state.”

This development, according to the statement, aims to address critical educational challenges identified by UNESCO, focusing on narrowing the digital divide and fostering inclusive access to quality education.

“Central to the success of this initiative is the historic allocation of over 30 percent

of the state budget to education, a bold commitment that emphasises the government’s unwavering dedication to advancing the educational sector.

“This significant investment directly tackles pressing issues such as the Funding Gap, Digital Divide, and Learning Crisis, positioning Enugu State as a trailblazer in educational reform. By prioritising education and embracing cutting-edge technologies, Enugu State sets a precedent for transformative change in the Nigerian educational landscape.”

Meanwhile, Edves reaffirms its commitment to catalysing educational advancement through innovative tools and solutions that empower students, educators, and stakeholders alike.

“Through this collaborative partnership with the Enugu State Ministry of Education, we continue to make strides in shaping the future of education in Enugu State, marking a historic milestone in the journey towards a brighter and more prosperous future for all,” the company said.

TNP unveils GC Powerlist legal 500 Nigeria

SEYI JOHN SALAU

The New Practice (TNP), has unveiled the General Council (GC) Powerlist Nigeria 2024 tagged, ‘The Legal 500’ to celebrate top lawyers in Nigeria’s corporate space.

TNP is a law firm known for providing innovative solutions in the corporate, commercial and merger and acquisition space, as well as dispute resolution and other aspects of corporate law.

Baba Alokolaro, managing partner, TNP, said that the maiden edition of ‘The Legal 500’ is aimed at celebrating champions of industries, who have distinguished themselves as titans of the legal landscape for their wins in the corporate world. According to him, many of the people in the GC Powerlist are not usually celebrated as they should be, because others take the credit for deals that are done. He said further that TNP is honoured to celebrate the Powerlist 500 for their wins.

He said further that ‘The Legal 500’ has been instrumental in recognising and highlighting influential general counsel and heads of legal teams in business globally since 2013. “TNP is honoured to be in this room with you with the celebration of every good thing that you have done and that you do.

“Nigeria sits here; the entirety of Nigeria’s industry is here because without you saying that a deal should go ahead or the fight should be fought, or that the matter should be

settled – nothing will happen,” Alokolaro said.

Speaking further on the essence of the Powerlist, Alokolaro said that it brings some level of social, emotional and psychological benefits to the recognised individuals on the basis of their wins and the quality of job done over the years as general counsel.

“Some people, local and global decided that I have to be celebrated for the wins I have recorded in the industry – I have been recognised for the quality of the work that I have done; so I can do better, I can do more,” he said.

According to him, the GC Powerlist Nigeria is a deep dive into the activities of talented senior in-house counsel who continuously make successful efforts to drive their companies forward, while responding to crises, managing regulatory challenges, and navigating significant changes to the industries in which they operate – in an environment made volatile by accelerated technological advancements.

The maiden edition of the GC Powerlist consist of Robert Imowo, Access Bank; Joseph Jibunoh, Africa Prudential; Rita Abengowe, Afrinvest West Africa; Donald Kanu, AIICO Insurance; Paulyne Ikem, Air Peace; Hauwa Garba-Sartomi, BUA Cement; Yemisi Diya-Salawu, IHS Towers; Edward Imoedemhe, Dangote Cement; Michael Osilama Otu, Zenith Bank; Johnson Lebile, Wema Bank; Temitope Oluwatosin, PZ Cussons Nigeria; Edith Onwuchekwa, Seplat Energy; Tolulope Fadipe, Sahara Group, among others.

My country is open to prospective Nigerian students, says Australia High Commissioner

ADEOLA AJAKAIYE, Kano

Leilani Bin-Juda, High Commissioner of Australia to Nigeria, has said that her country was interested in deepening the existing bilateral relations

with Nigeria, in a way that would mutually benefit the peoples of the two countries.

Bin-Juda said that her country was particularly interested in scaling up the level of economic co-operation between the two countries, as well as, ensuring that more prospec-

tive Nigerian students leverage the excellent education infrastructure in Australia.

The High Commissioner, who stated this during a ‘Study Australia Networking Reception, organised by the High Commission in Abuja, said that her country was the

best place in the world for Nigerians to study.

The high commissioner expressed delight that her country has continued to maintain excellent relationship with the government and people of Nigeria, promising to work towards ensuring that new window of partnership is open between the two countries.

“Australia delivers a well-targeted development programme in Africa to help build food security and resilience, strengthen government capacity in key sectors, empower vulnerable communities, and share knowledge on climate adaptation and renewable energy.

“Our development cooperation programmes utilise Australian skills and technical expertise in education, agriculture, health, mining, and science and technology wherever possible. We ensure a strong focus on gender equality and disability inclusion across all of our activities and partnerships.

“Australia Awards Masters Scholarships and courses on climate adaptation and mitigation, and renewable energy, and Humanitarian funding to address food security,

including in the Horn of Africa

“Deployments of Australian expertise through Australia Assists and the United Nations Junior Professional Officer Programme, and Funding to ACIAR to expand agricultural and climate change related projects in Africa, and Digital Earth Africa, a tool mapping impacts of climate change across the continent.

“Australia’s engagement with Africa, particularly with Nigeria, reflects the diverse challenges and opportunities across the African continent. We are providing immediate, lifesaving humanitarian support for those impacted by devastating drought and conflict in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere, through our UN and Australian NGO partnerships.

“Through high quality education and training programmes, and deployments of technical experts, we are helping African nations to build capabilities, including in climate change adaptation, climate-resilient agriculture and water security.

“We are also reaching communities in Africa, Nigeria, in particular, with assistance that

helps them recover from the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, and creates safe and supportive environments for women and youth,” Leilani further disclosed.

Also, speaking at the reception, Ambassador Anderson N. Madubike, the immediate past Nigeria’s ambassador to Australia, urged prospective Nigerian students to explore the friendly study environment existing in Australia.

Madubike, who served in the country for two years, said that one of the advantages which Australia offers was that people who studied in the country could easily become citizens, a situation that is impossible in other countries.

Some of the notable persons, who attended the reception include, Scott Moriss, the Australian Trade Commissioner for Africa, and Rislan Abdulazeez Kanya, Deputy Vice Chancellor, IT, Research, and Innovation, Baze University, Abuja.

The reception was also attended by several Nigerians that had passed through Australian educational institutions, and friends of the High Commission.



I-r Chairman ,Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria (APWEN) Lagos Chapter, Engr Dr. Atinuke Owolabi; presenting a plaque to Specification Manager at Sika Manufacturing Nigeria Limited Mr. Nitesh Tank, during the APWEN , industrial visit to Sika Manufacturing Nigeria Limited at ilupeju in Lagos

NewsXra

Gebeya set to transform how African talents connect with global opportunities

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

Gebeya Inc., a Pan African tech leadership company, said it was committed to transforming how African talents connect with global opportunities through the launch of a new talent cloud solution.

Known as Gebeya Talent Cloud Solution, it is an AI-powered Talent Cloud solution that offers Public, Private, Strategic, and Sourcing Talent Clouds that allow people to source, vet, qualify, skill, build communities, and offer opportunities to qualified networks of individuals and professionals.

Speaking about the new solution, Amadou Daffe, co-founder/CEO of Gebeya, said the new strategic solution is a product of the momentum built over the past seven years.

According to him, the firm's growth trajectory has been marked by the empowerment of thousands of talented individuals and the facilitation of countless partnerships with industry giants such as Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, Mastercard Foundation, Safaricom, and more.

"Our team has always been

proactive about continuously innovating and thinking outside the box to provide employment or entrepreneurship opportunities to as many African talents on the continent as possible," Daffe said.

He said that from the beginning, Gebeya's heart has always been in opportunity creation, all powered by technology, adding that it is one component that will always stay constant for the company.

"We are looking forward to helping our partners launch thousands of Talent Clouds in the coming years," he said.

Daffe further said the firm started as an EdTech startup in 2017, looking to train as many talents on the continent as possible, adding that it then evolved into a trusted multi-sided marketplace to connect tech talent with open roles. "Finally, it turned that marketplace into a Software As A Service (SaaS) that companies, organisations, or entrepreneurs could utilise for their own needs in several iterations in a short time.

"We have consolidated all of our strengths into Gebeya 3.0 to launch the talent cloud: entering a new era with its scalable Gebeya Talent Cloud (G-TC) technology an AI-powered and configurable SaaS platform with the ability to ad-



Amadou Daffe

dress any organisation's needs specifically," he said.

He said with the company's platform talents across the continent can access and join the talent cloud that fits their profession, skills, or interests.

"As a software developer, you can now join not just one talent cloud but also the talent clouds of our established customers and valued partners like Microsoft that provide access to skilling, jobs, business opportunities, membership benefits, and networking in multiple professional ecosystems," he said.

Looking to the future, Daffe said Gebeya aims to skyrocket Africa's potential and global competitiveness with its revolutionary Gebeya Talent Cloud technology.

To him, the firm is not only connecting Africans with global opportunities but also revolutionising how the world views and leverages African expertise in the first place.

On the company's strategic realignment, he said Microsoft has signed a ground-breaking partnership with Gebeya to launch a 300,000-strong African Talent Cloud: Microsoft.gebeya.com, emphasising Microsoft Azure and AI skills.

"The Microsoft Talent Cloud creates a central platform where Microsoft distributors, partners, and customers can find the businesses and professionals they need to further their digital transformation ambitions.

Talent looking to secure opportunities within the Microsoft ecosystem will now have a single platform to update on the latest Microsoft skills, find Microsoft-related jobs and gigs, access Microsoft-related business opportunities, and stay connected to a community of Microsoft professionals like themselves.

"On top of that, last year Gebeya signed a \$48 million partnership with the Mastercard Foundation focused on accelerating Ethiopia's Gig economy and entrepreneurial growth.

Businesses must promote culture of love to foster employees' productivity - Odunaiya

AMAKA ANAGOR-EWUZIE

The growing economic uncertainties and their toil on citizens have necessitated the need for companies in Nigeria to embrace a culture of love in the workplace to foster employees' productivity, Cynthia Odunaiya, head of human resources of Greensprings School, has said.

Speaking about the 14 Days Acts of Kindness, an initiative introduced by Greensprings School in celebration of Valentine's season, Odunaiya said companies need to maintain an open-door policy for all staff and ensure a fair hearing for everyone because it enables the companies to get feedback directly from employees.

The seasoned HR professional said that initiatives, like the one organised by the school for Valentine's season, are needed in the workplace to ensure that employees experience love and happiness, as this will motivate them to put in their best and ultimately increase productivity.

According to her, three things matter in every organisation, the people (staff), the product and the profit, adding that in all these, people are at the centre; hence, the work environment must be warm and comfortable for them to thrive.

Odunaiya said the initiative was aimed at reinforcing the love and kindness shared in the school community.

She said the staff members were encouraged to engage in deliberate acts of kindness towards their colleagues and loved ones from the 1st to the 14th of February.

She said there is a need to come up with exciting initiatives that will make them happy and promote bonding among colleagues.

"At Greensprings, we have several initiatives and staff engagement to ensure that our employees feel heard, loved and respected. Some of them include regular wellness talks and health checkups through our HMO



Odunaiya

partners; long service recognition awards; most valuable employees of the month; birthday shout-outs and surprise milestone celebrations.

"Generally, we maintain an open-door policy for all staff and ensure fair hearing for everyone, because this enables us to get feedback directly from employees. There was a time when we noticed a gap in workflow, and we organised a session with employee representations from different generations comprising Generation X, Millennials and Gen-Z. After meaningful deliberations about the ways of work, we modified our policy to be more suitable for the diverse generational needs within the organisation," she explained.

Odunaiya further said that the human-centric HR initiatives of the school are in line with the school's motto while tasking other companies to promote a culture of love in the workplace.

"We do all these because we want everyone in our organisation to feel heard and valued. This helps us to sustain our service culture, thus aligning perfectly with our motto, which is 'In Love Serve One Another'. Organisations can take a cue from this to ensure that they have a culture of love as this will greatly improve employee productivity," she added.

Cynthia Odunaiya is an associate member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management and a member of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Greensprings School is a leading British international school with three campuses in Lagos.

Governor Mutfwang advocates digital economy growth to empower Nigerian youths

NATHANIEL GBAORON, Jos

Plateau State Governor, Caleb Mutfwang has urged participants of the Senior Executive Course (SEC) 46 of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) Kuru, to come up with practical recommendations that will foster and maintain a digital economy in Nigeria.

Hosting the participants of the SEC 46 at the Government house in Jos on Friday, Governor Mutfwang said that digital innovation would create employment opportunities for Nigerian youths who have the necessary digital skills.

He noted with pleasure that many Nigerian youths are already contributing to the digital economy in other parts of the

world.

Speaking through Samuel Jatau, the Secretary to the Government of the State, Governor Mutfwang commended the theme of the SEC 46, "Digital Economy, Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Job Creation in Nigeria: The Issues, Challenges and Opportunities" as relevant and timely, and said that it would unleash the potential of Nigerian youths to improve the economic situation in Plateau and Nigeria.

He said that Plateau has a temperate climate, suitable for digital economy and research, as well as a hospitable population, and encouraged the participants to leverage the peaceful atmosphere of the people and conduct research that would enhance the nation's economy.

Knowledge Exchange Centre bridges tech skills gap with free digital training

...trains 100 youths

IFEOMA OKEKE
-KORIEOCHA

Oluwatosin Ogunsanya, executive secretary, Knowledge Exchange Centre (KEC), has expressed the commitment of the organisation to bridge technology skills gap with the free digital skill training of youths.

Speaking recently in Lagos at the Orientation Ceremony for the GAP Digital Skill programme, Ogunsanya said for the digital skill programme, they are admitting 100 young graduates across the country to participate in their graduate advancement programme.

He explained that they started the programme in 2015, to help graduates bridge the skills between what employers want and the skills that employees lack, adding that they are focusing on digital skills, "and we have been in it for the past three years. The skills we are focusing on is on social media management."

He remarked that the 100 persons that were admitted into the programme, would be mentored by 25 professionals

across the digital marketing industry in Nigeria, alongside one or two persons abroad.

According to him, "They are going to through three months programme in addition to their social media marketing programme, so they have an eight weeks social media marketing programme, six weeks on mentoring and three weeks of job readiness training. In addition, to the digital marketing training programme, we will teach them how to get a job and keep a job. We will equip them with problem solving and

critical thinking skills. So, this is the start of the three months journey that will end in May.

"A lot of employers are undertaking digital transformation of their business. Employers need digital savvy employees, and graduates need to understand that we are in a digital transformation age, so they need to get digital skills.

"Also, there is problem solving; no employer wants an employee that they will teach how to solve problems. They want a situation where they give you a job, and you are able to provide

the solution to the problem.

"So, what employers want is problem solving skills, digital savvy and critical thinking.

"Employers want people are very adaptable because the world is changing, new technologies are coming up, people are willing to learn, and able to handle technologies so we are not worried about re-training our staff every two years because of new technologies. So, the top skills are critical thinking, problem solving, digital savvy, curiosity and adaptability."



Book

Alabo Graham-Douglas books make way to Uniport as scholars urge leaders to put down their life struggles

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Three books released same time in 2023 by Alabo Tonye Graham-Douglas before his death have found their way into the University of Port Harcourt through its business school.

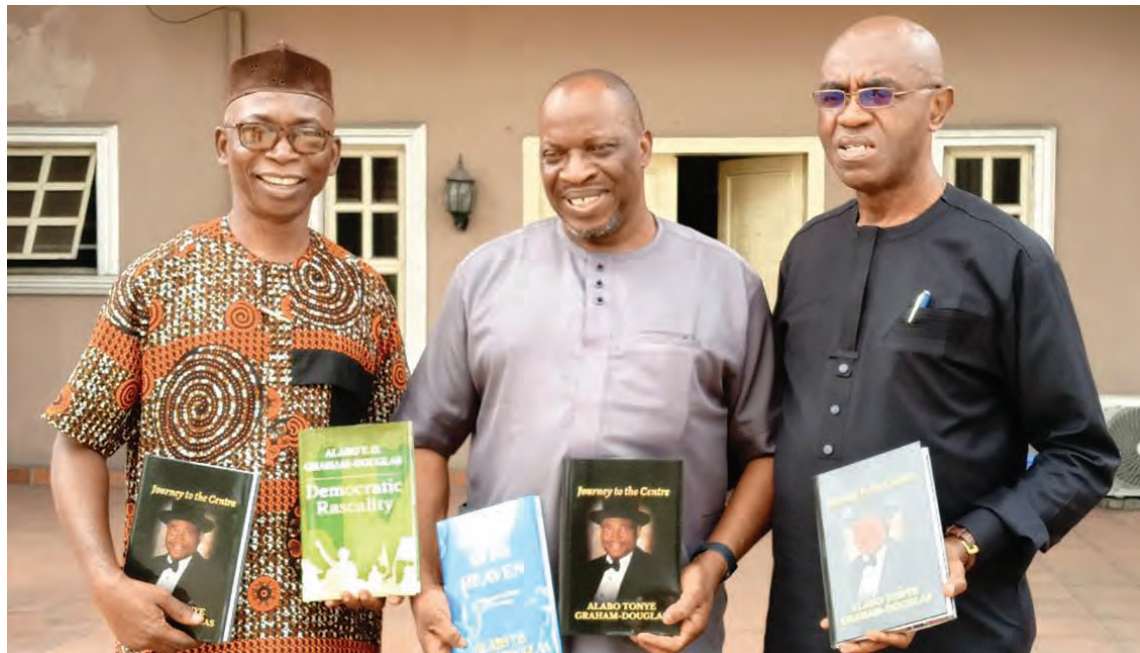
The books have already provoked excitement when the preambles were discussed by the team of writers and university scholars.

This has thus, forced scholars to urge political and business leaders to learn to put down their steps and struggles that may form the biggest legacy they may leave behind, beyond mansions, bank accounts and other achievements.

The books written include Journey to the Centre, Democratic Rascality, and A Peep into Heaven (a testimony of hope for the living).

Presenting the books to the University of Port Harcourt Business School (UPHBS), the head of the book project, Godwin Orovwiroro PhD, accompanied by his team of writers and experts including Ignatius Chukwu (veteran journalist), Chidinma Ubakanwa-Osain (librarian), Christian Samuel (media and ICT expert), and a Tonye Graham-Douglas family representative, Daye Opuende, said the effort was worth it.

Orovwiroro, a versatile writer, leadership expert and university lecturer, revealed the circumstances that led to the book project, saying: "The seed was sown when I sent a book to him for forward, and we got talking about the



L-R: Joseph Oshi (PhD) of the UPHBS, Godwin Orovwiroro (PhD, book team leader), Joseph Okereke (director, UPHBS)

need for legends and pioneer leaders of the nation especially the Niger Delta to leave legacies behind other than building and bank accounts. I convinced him that books leave thoughts and ideas behind especially as a four-time minister, probably the only one at that.

"He eventually agreed and I set up a team. It was a work of philanthropy to us because no fee was agreed. We interviewed him for over one year and did research and verifications for about one more year.

"He became highly excited in the middle of the interviews because it opened a well of bottled-up knowledge

and thoughts. He began to write some ideas down to submit to us.

"The huge information that gushed out led to three books and a movie that was in the making before he died after his 80th birthday."

Orovwiroro said the book drilled into Alabo's wealth of experience as a four-time minister, the intrigues of each appointment, the feats and failures of each term, the history of Kalabari, Rivers State, etc, and the insights as one of the early Commissioners in the young state, etc.

"He was a deep player in the things that happened at the centre, especially

military politics and the coups.

"He served many presidents (military and civilian) and harboured huge insights in almost every topic under the sun. Some were so sensitive that they were not in these editions."

To us, he stated, this is the deepest and biggest legacy he left behind. "Students and scholars who would fall back on these books would definitely mine important facts of history and lessons for democracy and administration."

In his response, the professor and onetime head of Finance/Banking in Uniport now the Director of the Business School, Emeka Okereke, said

the quality of the book writers and producers team alone was exciting and reassuring enough. He said any academic would be proud to participate in such a project, hoping future editions would find partnership with the university. "If you (Orovwiroro) are part of this kind of book, it must be of high quality. We are grateful to the family ad wife of the late Alabo for this huge gesture of presenting these books to the UPBS. We will send two copies each to the main campus. This library will go international.

"I appreciate these donations very much. We acknowledge the receipt of these books and we assure you the objective of these books will be met by their entry into this library. It's not about getting the books but reading them. Be rest assured. These efforts to get this kind of book into existence will not be wasted. We know how books are made. It is not easy."

On the importance of the University of Port Harcourt Business School, the professor said the centre is now a household name. "We are here to train leaders, not just to teach. We are grooming them with skills and when they get anywhere, they would know it. The quality of students tells the story of this place."

The formal presentation witnessed exciting revelations about the things said during interviews and the unheard of details about the making of Rivers and Bayelsa states, the war, the military coups, and many others including how the aviation industry was deregulated and how the first private airline license was won by the late MKO Abiola.

Power

Why FG must end dollarisation of domestic gas – Aiyela

SEYI JOHN SALAU

Afolabi Aiyela, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Welbeck Electricity, has urged the Federal Government to end the dollarisation of domestic gas. Aiyela said that gas needed to be available if more people are to have access to both Grid and Independent Power and that it must be priced in the local currency like every other product sold in Nigeria.

He also noted that there were two major impediments preventing improved power supply in the country.

Aiyela made the observation at a recent stakeholders' meeting on the Lagos Electricity Market, hosted by the Lagos State Commissioner for Energy, Biodun Ogunleye at Alausa, Ikeja.

"Investors, both foreign and local, are reluctant to make new investments in the Nigerian power sector due to the constraints that come with a market whose tariffs are still set by the government. Subsidised markets have never attracted high levels of investment, an example being the lack of investment in oil refining over the decades. It is a bitter pill to swallow,

but Nigerians must understand that subsidy removal is a prerequisite for private sector investment leading to better service.

"Current MYTO electricity tariffs averages around N85/kWh for high demand users. An average Nigerian spends approximately N200/kWh and N392/kWh to fuel their generators with petrol and diesel, respectively and this does not include the capital cost or maintenance costs.

"N200 to N392 per kilowatt hour



Afolabi Aiyela

is significantly higher than the tariff would be if there was no subsidy, meaning that if the government removes subsidy and as a result, supply of electricity improves, most Nigerians would eventually be spending less on power than they are now with their mix of public utility grid power and private generators. It may also interest you to know that in Lagos alone, over 20,000MW of diesel generators are used to power Lagosians during blackouts. This is over four times the total average grid generation," Aiyela said.

Echoing a recent observation of the Minister of Power, Adebayo Adedun that "proposing domestic gas payment in Naira is a key step toward stability, aligning with our economy's needs and promoting sustainable energy production," Aiyela said: "If the Minister along with his Petroleum counterpart are able to work with the legislature to make this change happen, it will see things stabilise in our sector. Independent power producers are the lifeblood of industry in some areas, while more and more estates are turning to independent power. The gas needs to be available if more people are to have access to independent power and it must be priced in



our local currency like every other product sold in Nigeria."

On his part, Biodun Ogunleye said: "Domestic gas must be priced responsibly and in local currency" in order to sustain the power industry and ensure affordability of electricity for end users.

With regards to the subsidy, Aiyela further said: "The government has to remove the subsidy if it is serious about attracting foreign investment. There is also a huge knock-on effect as power affects almost every aspect of our lives. In order to strengthen our

Naira, we need to produce more of the products we buy and consume at home and import less, which can only be achieved with steady power."

According to him, "if we as a country can get power right, we could become the manufacturing hub of Africa and begin to rival countries like even China. We can learn from some of the countries that make up the BRICS group, such as South Africa that produces 58,095MW or Brazil with their 181,532MW. These countries have fully deregulated electricity markets that encourage investment and innovation and no price regulations or subsidies. We have the skills, the manpower and the entrepreneurial spirit embedded in our culture, so with the right enabling environment, the possibilities are endless."

In his contribution, Welbeck Technical Director, Vesiri Ibru, said: "Welbeck along with other investors in the IPP industry are ready and able to significantly increase the power available to Nigerian consumers, but only if the market is truly demand-driven. We have had various discussions with potential foreign partners; however, they are hesitant to deploy investment assets to a market that is not free of government intervention."

Sports



Rivers United pushes for continental glory against Academica in Angola

Stories by SEYI JOHN SALAU

Rivers United, the only NPFL side left in continental club action will later today battle Academica do Lobito of Angola for the return fixture of their TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup tie.

The pride of Rivers will want to repeat 3-0 feat achieved during the first leg in Port Harcourt, in what appear to be a renewed battle of the just concluded AFCON 2023, where Nigeria secured a narrow victory over the Angola national team (1-0) in a quarter-final match.

With the dust barely settled from the recently concluded and

most successful AFCON, the TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup takes centre stage with a bumper-to-bumper line up of fixtures set to thrill on Sunday.

The Nigerian representative will fancy a full haul of points against bottom placed Academica do Lobito when they travel to Angola.

The hosts currently languish at the bottom of the group with zero points, but will be playing for pride in front of their supporters.

Rivers United are three points behind joint group leaders, Club Africain and Dreams FC who are both on 9 points ahead of their tie set to take place later today.

The CAF Confederation Cup action kicks off in Polokwane, South

Africa where SuperSport United will be in a must-win clash against Egyptian side, Modern Future FC who are in a fairly comfortable second place position in Group A.

In a later fixture also set to take place in Polokwane, tournament debutants, Sekhukhune FC play hosts to former champions and Moroccan side RS Berkane, who currently lead Group D, with a seven-point margin separating them from the South Africans.

In Algeria, Abu Salem SC welcomes former champions and Egyptian powerhouse, Zamalek FC in what should be a tightly contested Group B affair by the two sides.

In Mali, Stade Melians welcomes Congo's Diables Noirs who are looking for their first win of the

group stages following their three losses and a draw, which sees them at the bottom of Group D.

Reigning champions, USM Alger who have not been doing so well on the domestic front will be hoping to maintain their impressive form in the group stages. The Algerian powerhouse currently leads Group A with an impressive 10 points.

They travel to Libya to face a desperate Al Hilal Benghazi who will be looking at causing an upset against the champions.

TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup Fixtures - Sunday, 25 February:

13h00 GMT | SuperSport United – Modern Future FC

16h00 GMT | Academica do Lobito – Rivers United FC

16h00 GMT | Abu Salem – Zamalek

16h00 GMT | Stade Malien – Diables Noirs

16h00 GMT | Dreams FC – Club Africain

16h00 GMT | Al Hilal Benghazi – USM Alger

19h00 GMT | CO Coyah – Sagrada Esperanca

19h00 GMT | Sekhukhune United – RS Berkane

AFCON 2023: Why we sponsored the supporters club - SIFAX Group

SIFAX Group, one of the major sponsors of the Nigerian Football Supporters Club (NFSC) to the recently concluded TotalEnergies African Cup of Nations (AFCON) Cote d'Ivoire 2023, has disclosed that its desire to see Nigeria lift the continental trophy for the fourth time and forging unity across the country was the driving force behind its sponsorship of the supporters' club.

"As an indigenous conglomerate, our passion and loyalty lie in Nigeria succeeding in all endeavours. Football is a unifying factor for us as Nigerians, and SIFAX Group takes the issue of national unity and development seriously," Olumuyiwa Akande, group head, corporate communications, SIFAX Group stated.

According to him, the brand has always been a great supporter of Nigerian football and has established a great relationship with the Nigerian Football Supporters' Club (NFSC) over the years, resulting in sponsorship to some major football tournaments.

"All fault lines across religion, ethnicity, and politics disappear anytime the national football teams play. SIFAX Group wants to further engender that spirit of unity and togetherness through football. Clinching

the trophy for the fourth time was also a great attraction.

"The company found the platform of the supporters' club as a veritable one to achieve these objectives. The impact of the supporters' club on the success of our national teams cannot be overemphasized. Through thick and thin, the club is available at major tournaments and games to encourage the players and promote the interest of the nation. These patriotic and selfless Nigerians deserve to be supported," he said.

Rafiu Ladipo, president general, NFSC, said the club would have been

stranded and unable to support the team during the tournament if corporate organisations like SIFAX Group did not support them.

"I am grateful to Dr. Taiwo Afolabi and the SIFAX Group for their timely and consistent support for our activities. The travel costs for our members are very huge considering the one-month duration of the tournament. We pay for transport, feeding, and accommodation for all our members. I am grateful for this sponsorship, alongside other companies and individuals," Ladipo said.



Nigerian midfielder, Luqman Gilmore, aims to emulate Mikel, Busquets

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

Nigerian footballer, Luqman Gilmore, who plays for Armenian Premier League club, Urartu Yeravan FC, said he aims to be like John Obi Mikel and Sergio Busquets.

In an interview with journalists at his new club on Thursday, he expressed his desire to blend Mikel's exceptional ball-winning abilities with Busquets' composure and tactical awareness, aspiring to offer a dynamic and well-rounded presence in the midfield.

"I'm aiming to replicate the innate qualities of two well-known midfielders, John Mikel Obi and Sergio Busquets. By blending Obi's exceptional ball-winning abilities with Busquets' composure and tactical awareness on the pitch, I hope to offer a dynamic and well-rounded presence in the midfield," he said.

Gilmore, formerly with FC Liepaja, emphasised that with hard work, dedication, and perseverance, he aims



to achieve his goals and become a valuable asset to the team.

The Nigerian midfielder played for AACC FC Ikorodu in Lagos, where his excellent performance on the pitch earned him a move abroad.

The defensive midfielder had earlier said his ultimate goal is to represent the Super Eagles on the international stage.

Reflecting on the Armenian Premier League, where he currently plays for Urartu FC, Gilmore described the league as well-organised and highly competitive. He acknowledged the world-class facilities and continuous efforts by authorities to enhance the league each season.

"The league here is well-organised, with world class facilities. The authorities here are continually improving the league every season, to make it better," he said.

Sport

Carabao Cup: Liverpool battle Chelsea to keep quadruple hopes alive

...As Pochettino eyes first trophy in England

Stories by SEYI JOHN SALAU

Liverpool will battle Chelsea in Sunday's Carabao Cup final at Wembley Stadium, London by 3pm, as they aim to win the first of a potential four trophies this season.

Chelsea on the other hand is running to lift their first domestic trophy for six years, while coach Mauricio Pochettino is up for his first title glory in England.

The game is a rematch of both the Carabao and FA Cup finals of 2022, with Liverpool winning both on penalties.

The Reds currently lead the Premier League by four points and are into the Europa League last 16 and FA Cup fifth round.

"We'll go for it. It's a special game. Special games need special performances so we have to focus on the performance," said Liverpool's assistant manager Pep Lijnders.



With Lijnders and manager Jurgen Klopp set to leave Anfield this summer, Liverpool fans are eager to enjoy a triumphant send-off having already won six major honours since

Klopp took charge in 2015. "Our philosophy is to give joy and emotions to the fans. I'm really happy that we can give at least a final to start with," Lijnders said.



Chelsea's last domestic trophy was the 2018 FA Cup, although they won four international honours after that, the most recent being the Club World Cup in February 2022 -

two weeks before they lost to Liverpool in the 2022 Carabao Cup final.

Pochettino, who took charge at Stamford Bridge last summer, can win his first prize

in England after previous spells in charge of Southampton and Tottenham.

"It means a lot for us, the coaching staff, to get to the final and challenge a team like Liverpool," the Argentine said.

According to him, playing in the final at Wembley is a dream for the team. "We have the opportunity and we are going to fight."

"I think the team is ready and we're going to be very competitive," Pochettino said ahead of today's final.

Liverpool defender and captain Virgil van Dijk, said the team hope to make Sunday's final a special day and get to lift their first trophy of the season.

"The end of the season will probably be very emotional for a lot of people, including the manager, but we are not there yet. We shouldn't look too far ahead, we should look at what is in front of us," said van Dijk, who will captain the Reds in a Wembley final for the first.

Journey to 2024 Paris Olympics in crucial stage across Africa

...As Super Falcons host Cameroon in Abuja

The race towards securing the two spots reserved for Africa at the Paris 2024 Olympics enters its most crucial moment as the eight nations vying for the two spots reserved for the continent face-off for the second leg of the qualifiers.

In Abuja, it will be a great classic of African women's football as Nigeria welcome Cameroon to the MKO Abiola Stadium on Monday in the return fixtures of the Paris 2024 Olympics qualifiers.

Both teams played out a goalless draw in the first leg in Douala in Friday.

However, the Super Falcons carry the psychological advantage, with the last 10 fixtures between both sides only being won twice by Cameroon.

Also, since the FIFA Women's World Cup round of 16 exit, the Super Falcons has enjoyed a good form and will bring their experience into Monday's clash.

In Morocco, it will be rematch of the North African derby as Morocco host Tunisia.

Morocco who were runner's up at the TotalEnergies Women's African Cup of Nations will face another quarter-finalist at the last edition in an epic North African derby.

The two sides will not only be aiming at getting positive results to step closer to securing a place in the Olympics but will also play for pride.

In South Africa, Bayana Bayana will welcome Tanzania for the reverse fixture of the 2024 Paris Olympic qualifiers.

In what appear to be an

interesting tie between Bayana Bayana and the Tanzania ladies who are fast becoming a force in African women's football against the reigning African champions.

While on paper this may look a walk in the park for the reigning African champions who missed out on the last edition of the Olympics, they will have to be wary of the danger posed by the rising Tanzanian ladies.

In Ghana, the Black Queens will welcome the Copper Queens of Zambia in what appear to be a battle of the queens.

The Black Queens will be boosted by their home fans as they battle the Copper Queens, who are eyeing a second consecutive Olympics appearance.

Following their appearance at the last edition of the Olympics, Zambia know the exact feeling of being at the global showpiece and will want to secure another spot.

The Copper Queens will also get some motivation in honour of their teammate Norin Betani, who passed on recently.



Super Eagles duo of Iwobi, Bassey fly in Manchester

...As Fulham beats United 2-1 at Old Trafford

The duo of Nigerian export Alex Iwobi and Calvin Bassey fly pretty high in Manchester on Saturday as Fulham beats United 2-1 at Old Trafford.

Alex Iwobi struck late to hand Fulham their first Premier League win at Manchester United in 21 years.

The visitors played with intensity from the blast of the game to earn Fulham their first away win since Matchweek 1 and end Manchester

United's unbeaten start to 2024.

Iwobi scored deep in stoppage time as Fulham shocked sub-par United in the Premier League in the London side's first win at Old Trafford since 2003. United, who lost for the first time in six league matches, are sixth in the table on 44 points, eight behind fourth-placed Aston Villa.

Fulham are 12th on 32 points.

Fulham struck first when Calvin Bassey scored in the

65th minute, firing his own rebound into the roof of the net.

United defender Harry Maguire equalised in the 89th minute and the home team looked poised to salvage at least a point.

But Iwobi, who earlier squandered two good chances, swept a shot past Andre Onana into the bottom corner of the net in the 97th minute following a counter-attack to leave the home fans shell-shocked.

Sport



2024 Olympics: Super Falcons held by Indomitable Lionesses in Douala

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Heavyweights Nigeria and Cameroon fought to a 0-0 draw in their 2024 Women's Olympic Football Tournament third-round, first-leg encounter in Douala on Friday.

Super Falcons, nine-time African champions took the pitch with their usual dash and gloss and forced consecutive throw-ins. Yet, the game would become a ding-dong as time wore on, and in the 27th minute, mid-

fielder Toni Payne wasted a good opportunity to put Nigeria ahead.

Twelve minutes later, the Indomitable Lionesses caught sight of the goal, but goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie, one of the world's safest pair of hands at the moment, had things covered. In the second half, the Lionesses stepped up their game as they were urged on by the home crowd at the Stade de la Reunification Douala. Yet, it was Nigeria that had the ball in the net five minutes into the second half, only for Ugandan referee Shamirah Nabbada to rule Jennifer Echegini off-side.

In another match in the penultimate round of the African qualifying series, reigning continental champions South Africa trounced Tanzania's senior girls 3-0 in Dar es Salaam, with goals from Jermaine Seoposenwe, captain Thembi Kgatana and Hildah Magaia. The winner on aggregate of the Nigeria/Cameroon fixture will most likely have to duel with the African champions for a place in Paris.

Both the Super Falcons and the Indomitable Lionesses clash in the second leg at the MKO Abiola National Stadium, Abuja on Monday evening.

Boxing legend Nelson cautions Joshua ahead of Ngannou's fight

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Johnny Nelson, the former world cruiserweight champion, has cautioned Anthony Joshua, emphasizing the necessity for his proficiency as he prepares for his bout against Francis Ngannou on March 8 in Saudi Arabia.

Joshua has won three fights since back-to-back losses to Oleksandr Usyk. The Nigerian-born British former heavyweight champion won against Jermaine Franklin, Robert Helenius and Otto Wallin and will be up against former UFC champion Ngannou who has had just one fight as a professional boxer, when he dropped Tyson Fury but lost on points in October 2023.

"Where Ngannou is coming from [MMA], he's used to getting up close and personal," said Nelson of next month's contest. "Fighting on the inside, his best work is on the inside, where he's up close to somebody; making them feel uncomfortable; tying them up; wearing them down and getting the shots in up close."

"If you're boxing, you've got to box

long; you've got to use the jab; use the hook; set him [Ngannou] up with the shots. His job is to try and find a way, and once he's close, that's his safe spot - that's his world."

Nelson, who in retirement has worked as a pundit for Sky Sports, had 59 fights in a nearly 20-year career and has covered many of Joshua's fights as a broadcaster.

"Anthony Joshua knows he can punch, he knows he's got the knock-out ability to get rid of a man, so I would not be surprised at all if Anthony Joshua thinks, 'I'm going to stay in the pocket and knock you out,'" added Nelson. "Common sense would be, if you use your boxing ability, you box him to the best of your ability; it's day and night; it's a shutout; he's never going to outbox you."

"What happens is when you want

to get involved in a fight, you think, 'I want to be here; I want to do a better job than Tyson Fury did,' and that's where the problem might lie. Anthony Joshua needs to think 'I need to get through this fight; get through it well; get through it safe; and then look on for bigger fights in the future.'"

Nelson believes that Ngannou's performance against Fury last year has changed the perception of what Joshua-Ngannou is as a sporting contest, and it is one Nelson admits he is looking forward to.

"Ngannou has made everybody sit up and pay attention, and respect him for his performance against Tyson Fury," Nelson told Sky Sports. "Anthony Joshua has the gift of hindsight in regards to this so that art of surprise that he [Ngannou] did [have] with us all, as well as Tyson Fury - now we know what he's all about."

"Ngannou is probably the biggest fighter that Anthony Joshua has boxed. He's patient, confident and older than Joshua, but Joshua has all of the boxing ability in the world, he has been in boxing a lot longer than Ngannou, so as long as he stays smart, and patient, keeps on the ball and doesn't get involved in a tear-up, he should get the job done."



Ex-Everton player Li Tie gets life imprisonment for match-fixing

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Former Everton player Li Tie has reportedly been sentenced to life in prison in his native China for corruption and match-fixing after confessing to paying over £300,000 in bribes to get a national team post.

Li played 33 matches for Everton while on loan from Chinese club Liaoning during the 2002/03 season and played seven games the following season after signing permanently.

The defensive midfielder had a stint with Sheffield United but suffered injury problems after breaking his leg on international duty in February 2004.

Li, 46-year-old finished his career in China and served as manager of their national team between 2019 and 2021.

A year after Li left that post, he

quick results.

"To achieve good performance, I resorted to influencing referees, bribing opposing players and coaches, sometimes through clubs dealing with other clubs."

"This behaviour becomes a habit, and eventually, there is even a slight dependence on these practices."

Li was regarded as one of the most talented Chinese players of his generation when he signed for Everton in August 2002.

The loan deal for him - and compatriot Li Weifeng - was brokered by the now-defunct Chinese telecommunications company Kejian, who sponsored Everton at the time.

Li was a surprise hit at Goodison Park with manager David Moyes playing him regularly in the Premier League as Everton achieved a seventh-place finish.

That persuaded Everton to sign him permanently for £1.2million in August 2003, with two-thirds of the



Chinese public prosecutor released a bombshell statement saying he was 'suspected of accepting and offering bribes' amid a huge crackdown on corruption in football.

Li admitted he paid 3 million yuan (£330,000) in bribes to become coach of the national team in a televised confession on state broadcaster CCTV.

He also confessed to taking part in a match-fixing scandal to win promotions with his club teams.

China-based reporter and author Mark Dreyer said Li has been sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in the scandal.

"I'm very sorry. I should have kept my head to the ground and followed the right path. There were certain things that at the time were common practices in football," Li said.

Li admitted to successfully fixing matches when coach of Hebei China Fortune and Wuhan Zall. The latter won promotion from China League One as champions in 2018.

"By gaining 'success' through such improper means, it made me more and more impatient and eager for

deal paid for by sponsorships.

Having been sent off against Arsenal on the opening day of the season, Li broke his leg while playing for China in February 2004 and never managed to get back into the first team.

He was released by Everton in 2006 and joined Sheffield United, but he played only once for the Blades because of lingering injury issues.

Li, who played 92 times for China between 1995 and 2007, moved to Chengdu Blades, who were affiliated to Sheffield United in 2008 and later returned to hometown club Liaoning.

After coaching at club level, he acted as caretaker coach of the China national team after Marcello Lippi resigned in 2019 and was then appointed permanently.

In November 2022, it was initially announced Li had been placed under investigation for 'serious violation of laws' by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) and the anti-corruption agency the National Supervisory Commission.

Chelsea ready to trigger Osimhen €130m release clause

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Big-money spending Premier side Chelsea are preparing a move for their top target Victor Osimhen and could trigger the €130 million release clause in his contract.

Chelsea's name has been linked with Osimhen in the last few months, and the Napoli striker might end up moving to Stamford Bridge in the summer.

Reports in Italy suggest that the 25-year-old Nigeria international might want to emulate his idol Didier Drogba and switch to the Blues over other clubs.

According to Italian media outlet Calcio Mercato, Chelsea are ready to move for Osimhen and will have to trigger the release clause for the €130 million-rated striker.

Osimhen remains a signif-



Carabao Cup final: Will Pochettino win first English trophy against Liverpool?

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Wembley Stadium comes alive on Sunday as Chelsea and Liverpool battle it out in the final of the 2023/24 Carabao Cup as Blues manager Mauricio Pochettino will be aiming to win his first trophy in English football.

The 51-year-old Argentine tactician went close on numerous occasions during his time in charge of Tottenham Hotspur, falling short in two Premier League title chases, reaching a Champions League final, a League Cup final and losing two FA Cup semi-finals.

This could be a repeat of the 2021/22 Carabao Cup final as both teams fight for the

right to lift the first domestic honour of the 2023/24 season.

Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool men defeated Chelsea in a penalty shootout two years ago, Blues will be seeking revenge at Wembley.

While Liverpool have been fairly dominant in domestic competitions so far, Chelsea have plenty of work to do to redeem themselves this season.

Chelsea find themselves in 10th place in Premier League standings and are only beginning to find their feet under Mauricio Pochettino.

They managed to keep Manchester City to a 1-1 draw last week and will now need to get the better of another powerful opponent on Sunday.

After five trophyless years as Tottenham Hotspur's head coach, current Chelsea man-

ager Mauricio Pochettino will be aiming to win a major trophy in English football.

The Blues go into the final as big underdogs following last month's humbling at Anfield. However, Chelsea have turned their fortunes around since that night in Liverpool and a different side will face the Reds at Wembley.

Pochettino, who is looking to win his first major trophy in England, will be hoping his side can continue their bravery and free-flowing football on the pitch on Sunday. With that said, you can read the full transcript from the Argentine below.

"Yes, it is true because it is never the same approach when you play in the Premier League or the final," Pochettino said in his pre-match conference.

"Of course, it is going to be different. You of course learn from the games that you play, too many things."

"We arrive at this game with different circumstances and now the circumstances have changed and it is difficult to compare and to say that it is going to influence the game we played in the past."

"What you learn is that Liverpool is a very competitive team and how they can play well, so well, very good and not so good, but they are always going to be competitive. We need to be competitive, and ready to manage some moments during the games."

"It's like a click to change in the way to compete that we



icant target for Chelsea in the upcoming summer transfer window as the Nigerian striker looks set to depart Napoli at the end of the 2023/24 season.

Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis had earlier confirmed that Osimhen, the current African Player of the Year will leave the club at the end of the season, but will not accept offers less than his €130 million release clause.

"De Laurentiis did not hide himself by telling, in front of the cameras, the concrete possibility of Osimhen saying goodbye at the end of the season," as quoted by Calcio Mercato.

"The race is a two-way race with Chelsea and PSG. The condition remains only one and mandatory: the payment of the 130 million euro clause. A clause that Victor is proving to be worth with his goals."

Osimhen's late goal helped Napoli earn a 1-1 draw on

Wednesday night in a Champions League first-leg knockout tie.

Chelsea have been seeking a top No.9 since last summer and may have decided not to spend in January to splash the money on Osimhen in the summer.

Osimhen is expected to leave Napoli at the end of the season and La Gazzetta dello Sport claims that the Nigeria international could 'closely meet' Erling Haaland next season.

The Nigeria international recently signed a contract extension at the Stadio Maradona but is still expected to leave the Partenopei at the end of the season. His new deal, expiring in 2026, includes a release clause in the region of €130m.

Osimhen recently returned from AFCOM and has scored nine goals in 19 appearances across all competitions for Napoli this season.

Promising Arsenal goalkeeper Okonkwo dumps England for Nigeria

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Arthur Okonkwo, a 22-year-old Nigerian descent, Arsenal goalkeeper has been given the green light to play for Nigeria after FIFA approved his nationality switch to play for his ancestry land after playing for England at youth level.

Born on September 9,

marily featured for Arsenal's youth teams and has served as a backup goalkeeper for the first team.

Okonkwo is considered a promising talent said former Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech and Ex-Man United goalie David De Gea influenced his goalkeeping style.

"I tried playing outfield but it wasn't for me. I enjoyed the thrill of making saves - the



2001, in London, England. Okonkwo is of Nigerian descent. He joined the Arsenal youth academy at a young age and progressed through the ranks of the club's youth system. This means that Okonkwo, an Arsenal youth star who is currently on loan at Wrexham in the Wales league is now eligible to represent the Super Eagles of Nigeria.

Okonkwo made his senior debut for Arsenal's first team in May 2021, during a Premier League match against Crystal Palace. Although he has pri-

more spectacular the better".

He has made 26 appearances in all competitions for Wrexham and has 11 clean sheets. Okonkwo, whose younger brother Brian is also a goalkeeper at the Arsenal Academy, entered the Gunners youth system at the age of eight and progressed rapidly ahead of his age groups, making his debut for the U18 at the age of 15 and appearing for the U23 at

17-year-old. Okonkwo represented England at U16, U17 and U18 respectively.

Insight

African Artists' Foundation decries illegal possession of office by bank

...action forces relocation, Nigerian art community feels vacuum

OBINNA EMELIKE

For almost two decades, the African Artists' Foundation (AAF), a non-profit organisation and an art space based in Lagos, has been in the business of encouraging the highest standard of art in Africa.

It created some well-curated art events, engagements and creative challenges that have discovered talents, further nurture and connect them to global art platforms.

From hosting enthralling art exhibitions, artists talks, workshops, fellowships, collaborations among others, the AAF has remained a force to reckon with in the development of visual art in Nigeria, amid huge impacts on the art landscape, with influence beyond Nigeria and even Africa.

But top among AAF's initiative is the Lagos Photo Festival, an annual and the first international festival of photography in West Africa.

With 14 successful editions, the festival, which draws international photographers from across the world to Nigeria for creative rivalry, is one of the most impactful art initiatives in Africa.

Sadly, the Lagos Photo Festival has been disrupted



by the forceful takeover of the AAF office on # 3B Isiola Oyekan Close, Off Adeleke Adedoyin Street, Victoria Island, Lagos, by Keystone Bank from the Estate of late Dr. Ime Umanah, the landlord.

"The purpose of this conference is to answer the inquiries and concerns of everyone concerning the lack of activity of the Foundation," Azu Nwabuogu, founder and director, AAF, explained.

"You will recall that at the end of every year for the past 10 years, we have hosted various activities at our Victoria Island gallery in Lagos. You will also notice that in the last two

years we have not been able to do that due to a reason, a sole reason.

"Sometime in October 2020, we were evicted by Keystone Bank in the most embarrassing and humiliating manner. Claiming ownership through a court order. They claimed several properties belonging to the Umanah family, our landlords, claiming they were owed money by the late patriarch of the Umanah family."

The situation is a very sad one, as the bank has refused to allow AAF to enter the premises and to collect its valuable office equipment,

especially art works donated by many artists, collectors and art lovers.

On the alleged debt, Azu noted that, "The court learnt of an earlier suit on the same subject matter, where the court had determined after due and necessary determination of issues that the Umanah family not only didn't owe the bank, but were in excess credit with the bank. The court realized that the bank came to get what it couldn't from the earlier court through the back door.

"After careful consideration, the court dismissed the suit and sternly admonished the lawyers of Keystone bank for

abuse of the court process.

Based on this, we approached the bank for a refund of the purchase price of N600m, reminding them of the indemnity clause and letter signed by the bank management. The bank instead through its lawyer's blatantly refused to refund the purchase price. This situation further led to an extraordinary meeting of the board of trustees where it was

decided that the foundation which had done so well and placed Nigeria proudly on the world art scene was to be moved to another African country."

The seemingly helpless situation made the AAF executive to call a media parley where it intimidated the media, particularly art editors, on the development, the callousness of Keystone Bank and need to call the bank to order.

Offering more details on the issue, Nwabuogu, who is also the founder and director of Lagos Photo Festival, decried that the bank offered AAF the property on #3B Isiola Oyekan Close, Off Adeleke Adedoyin Street, Victoria Island, Lagos, after taking possession of it from the owner who it alleged defaulted in repaying bank debt.

According to him, AAF paid the N600 million, raised from a donor, to acquire the

property, but the bank has refused to take possession of the property or repay the N600 million it paid to purchase it.

As at the time of the media parley, which was held at Bogobiri House, Ikoyi, Lagos, on February 24, 2024, AAF has still not taken possession of the property, money paid not refunded and its equipment still locked in the sealed property.

The above are reasons Nwabuogu is rallying the media to use their various platforms to create awareness of the fraudulent and callous actions of Keystone Bank, with hope that the authorities will take interest in it and intervene, especially the regulatory agencies.

Present at the media were; Inyene Nta, daughter of late Dr. Ime Umanah and the administrator of the Estate of late Dr. Ime Umanah; Wuyi Ogunyinka, one of the counsels to the Estate of late Dr. Ime Umanah; Ibrahim Abubakar, legal officer, AAF and Olayinka Sangotedo, general manager, AAF.

According to Inyene Nta, daughter of the late Dr. Ime Umanah and the administrator of the Estate of the late Dr. Ime Umanah, her father, settled all the debts he owed the bank with a N1 billion he paid and that the bank is the one owing her father.

News Xtra

RMB Nigeria appoints Ajayi acting CEO

The board of directors of Rand Merchant Bank (RMB) Nigeria has announced the appointment of Bayo Ajayi as the acting CEO of RMB Nigeria. According to a statement made available to BusinessDay on Thursday February 21, 2024, the bank said that the new appointment has the approval of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

"On behalf of the Board of directors at RMB Nigeria, I welcome Bayo Ajayi as the acting CEO, and I am confident that under his leadership, we will continue to effectively partner our clients, grow the business and positively contribute to Nigeria's economy," Emrie Brown, RMB CEO and chairman of the RMB Nigeria Board, said.

Prior to his new role, Ajayi was an Executive Director on the RMB Nigeria Board and Chief Finance Officer at RMB Nigeria. He brings a wealth of experience to the role, having previously served in various

leadership positions in the banking sector in Nigeria and across Africa over the last 24 years.

He has a track record of delivering results and creating value for clients and stakeholders, and the Board looks forward to working with him to achieve the bank's strategic objectives.

"I'm humbled by the op-



Ajayi

portunity to take up this role at such a critical time for Nigeria. We will continue to partner with our clients as they navigate through the headwinds," Ajayi said in response to his appointment.

Ajayi obtained a B.Sc. Chemical Engineering from the Obafemi Awolowo University and has attended multiple senior management courses across the globe. He is a Fellow of both the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), UK.

According to the statement, the seamless leadership transition reflects the bank's robust talent and leadership depth and commitment to maintaining a sustainable and resilient organisation that delivers value to its clients and stakeholders.

"The bank remains deeply invested in providing innovative financial solutions that enable businesses to thrive."

Reps committee to initiate strategies to equip, empower youth

INIOMBONG IWOK

The Federal House of Representatives Committee on Youth Development, says it is time to equip Nigerian youths with the resources and opportunities necessary to thrive and contribute to nation-building.

The Chairman of the Committee, Martins Esin made this remark at the opening ceremony of a 2-day Inaugural Retreat for members of the committee in Lagos over the weekend.

The retreat was organised by Yiaga Africa, a non-profit organisation promoting participatory democracy, human rights and civic participation, and funded by the European Union.

Esin said the gathering was crucial to the collective dedication towards advancing the cause of youth development in the country.

He noted that the youths represent the future of Nigeria and should be equipped for nation



building.

According to him, "It is incumbent upon us, as leaders and policy makers, to ensure that they are equipped with the resources and opportunities necessary to thrive and contribute meaningfully to nation-building."

"The Yiaga Africa Centre for Legislative Engagement, through its unwavering dedication to promoting capacity building, responsive governance,

and youth inclusion, has proven itself a steadfast ally in the quest to address the multifaceted challenges facing the youth population.

Commending the centre for its efforts, Esin said that the retreat would afford the lawmaker a unique opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue, exchange ideas, and strategise on how best to harness the potential of the youth demographic.

Focus

Charting a visionary course for the National Broadcasting Commission under D-G, Charles Ebuebu

BASHIR IBRAHIM HASSAN

There has always been the criticism of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) that it's overbearing. It's also been accused of arbitrary imposition of sanctions on organizations for perceived infringement of its codes. These have led to litigations and heightened mistrust among stakeholders.

In a situation of very dire business challenges, NBC earned the odious reputation of a regulator, exacerbating the economic woes of stakeholders, who are grappling with economic uncertainties.

Well, with the appointment of Charles Ebuebu as Director-General of the Commission on 20 October 2023 by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, it seems that Daniel has come to judgment. And the prospects are bright, and the end to its loss of esteem among broadcast licensees in sight.

Indeed, Ebuebu's appointment has boosted the morale of the organization in many areas.

On assumption of office, Ebuebu hit the ground running, addressing the many contending issues. He inspired a comprehensive restructuring of the Board of Management through a strategic plan that is expected to realign and reposition the Commission as a leading 21st-century regulator.

He brought over two decades of expertise in Corporate and Commercial law and a career trajectory spanning global markets, respect for intellectual property, international business ethics and transactional legal skills. Notably, he has made significant contributions to Digital Switch Over Projects and deployed his extensive experience in channels/programs acquisition and management. His innovative approach and industry connections underscore his capacity to lead the NBC into a new phase of evolution.

Mr. Ebuebu has also shown remarkable commitment to fostering trust and collaboration between the regulator and licensees. This became evident as he embarked on a multifaceted approach to address industry concerns.

Ebuebu studied law at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, and then proceeded to the Nigeria Law School and was called to the Bar in 1996.

Before his appointment, he was Chief Executive Officer, Inview Technologies Nigeria Ltd. Previously, he was Group Head, Legal & Previous Head of Programmes & Channels.

His approach is innovative, a complete departure from the conventional mode. It consists of



Charles Ebuebu

constructing a roadmap aimed at altering the existing narrative about NBC as a bully and lacking in public trust. He got the Council to review pending cases, including recent Federal High Court judgments

Under him, NBC has prioritized staff welfare and capacity building, emphasizing the importance of motivated and well-trained staff to meet international standards. NBC has intervened in conflicts between operators, on rights issues, including those that could have averted screening in Nigeria of matches at the recent AFCON 2023

contesting the Commission's right to issue sanctions.

Acknowledging the need for an updated regulatory framework, Mr. Ebuebu committed to pursuing the amendment of the NBC Act and reviewing the White Paper on Digital Switch Over Implementation in Nigeria.

Under him, NBC has prioritized staff welfare and capacity building, emphasizing the importance of motivated and well-trained staff to meet international standards.

NBC has intervened in conflicts between operators, on rights issues, including those that could have averted screening in Nigeria of matches at the recent AFCON 2023.

He has actively engaged with stakeholders on a range of policy issues affecting the broadcasting industry. This collaborative approach aims to formulate holistic policies that foster a sustainable and vibrant broadcast industry. By understanding and addressing the challenges faced by stakeholders, Mr. Ebuebu seeks to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between the regulator and industry players, ensuring regulatory policies align with the industry's evolving needs.

Another area in which he broke new grounds is the development of clear guidelines for social media content monitoring and regulation. NBC hopes to ensure responsible broadcasting practices in the digital sphere.

In an effort to maintain a healthy and competitive broadcasting sector, NBC, under Mr. Ebuebu, is committed to implementing policies that foster fair competition. This proactive approach aims to prevent monopolies and create a level playing field for industry players. By championing policies that encourage diversity and competitiveness, Mr. Ebuebu ensures that the broadcasting sector remains dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of the audience.

Recognizing the pivotal role of technology in shaping the future of broadcasting, Mr. Ebuebu envisions the establishment of a Technology and Innovation Hub within the NBC. This hub will serve as a focal point for exploring cutting-edge technologies, incubating startups, and driving technological advancements in the broadcast sector. By fostering innovation and collaboration, Mr. Ebuebu aims to position the NBC at the forefront

Recognizing the pivotal role of technology in shaping the future of broadcasting, Mr. Ebuebu envisions the establishment of a Technology and Innovation Hub within the NBC. This hub will serve as a focal point for exploring cutting-edge technologies, incubating startups, and driving technological advancements in the broadcast sector

of technological advancements, ensuring that the broadcast industry remains adaptive and resilient in the face of rapid technological changes. The Technology and Innovation Hub aligns with the broader vision of embracing innovation as a catalyst for industry growth and sustainability.

In his address at the 13th Edition of Africast in October 2023, Mr. Ebuebu emphasized collaborative efforts to confront challenges and unlock the vast potentials of the broadcast industry. The DG, NBC, also collaborated with stakeholders to recover outstanding advertising revenue owed to broadcasters, aiming to prevent the financial strain on channel owners and restore confidence in the industry.

Though he admits that the challenges are enormous but surmountable with the right collaborations from all stakeholders, sincerity and unity of purpose as well as the political will garnered towards delivering the Digital Dividends to all Nigerians which the DSO project is set to achieve. "This is the mandate I and my team at the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) are set to accomplish in no record time with God on our side".

In his 100 days in office, Ebuebu has demonstrated a resolute commitment to navigating challenges, collaborating with stakeholders, and instigating transformative measures to elevate the Commission to new heights. As the broadcast industry anticipates a promising future under his leadership, the listener is assured of good times on airwaves.

Who will stop the attacks on journalists?

According to Toby Mendel, who headed Article 19 Law Program, 1999, and the drafting of the Principles of the Freedom of Information Legislation: "Information is the oxygen of democracy." It is its life-blood. It breathes, lives and thrives with it. With credible information the people get to know what is happening in society, including what their leaders do, such as their policies, programmes and projects that affect their lives, virtually on daily basis. That would also inform the roles they too have to play to oil the engine of democracy.

Interestingly, this was the focus of my lecture titled: "The role and challenges of a writer in a pseudo-democracy" as delivered to members of the Association of Nigerian Authors, ANA Lagos Chapter, at the Tafawa Balewa Square back in September, 2006. That was some seven years after the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999. The slight change of the title, with the addition of words such as "challenges" and "pseudo -democracy" by yours truly was within the context of the prevailing political anomalies, absurdities and arbitrariness which characterised our experience, as led by the leaders with a military mindset.

Sad to note however, that 18 years later we are still bogged down by a crop of leaders who are driven by the personalisation of political power, bolstered of course, by an anti-people administrative and payment structure, overtly skewed in favour of the political elite, against the wellbeing of the long-suffering masses. Much like anthill king-slave architecture, with the worker termites toiling all day to satiate the high tastes of the king and queen termites sequestered in their royal chamber, their moving mantra is to serve the self at the expense of the state.

In such an absurd situation, purveyors of truth through information gathering, analysis and sharing have their lives under threat. There comes in the critical role of the Nigerian journalist. But who is he, what challenges does he face and what should be done to protect his rights and safety? Those are the critical questions.

Basically, journalists are social engineers. They perform the triple functions of informing, educating and entertaining the public; be they the

“ Truth, crushed to earth shall rise again. The eternal years of God are hers; But error, wounded, writhes with pain And dies amongst his worshippers

- William Cullen Bryant

readers or listeners to the stories or analysis provided. These duties they can do at the same time. But beyond that they delve into developmental journalism, by setting agenda for the leaders in the vast spectrum of politics, economy, education, healthcare delivery, religion and other fields of human endeavour, as the acclaimed voices of the led majority of people.

Acting as the link between those leaders and the masses the role the journalist plays is so important that the constitution recognizes the media as the Fourth Estate of the Realm, according to Sections 22 and 36(1) of the 1999 constitution. Precisely, Section 22 aptly states that: "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media, to at all time, be free to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people". Kindly read that again.

That explains the reason behind the popular statement that, "a society is as good as its press". But such an obligation brings about the important questions needing credible answers.

For instance, are the leaders willing and ready to be guided by the truth, as provided by the press? Are members of the public, on whose behalf they write and speak, truly interested in the truth, with regards to the dictates of the constitution in the national interest, or are they subsumed with ethno-religious and political sentiments? Answers to these questions have one way or the other shaped the relationship which exists between the media practitioners and the leaders.

The bitter truth is that given the dark background of the dysfunctional political structures arranged in favour of the leaders against the people, the journalist comes under various attacks; in terms of verbal and physical intimidation, financial inducement as well as well orchestrated blackmail.

That brings to the fore the recent order given by Justice Inyang Ekwo of the Federal High Court, Abuja that the Federal Government should investigate and prosecute killers of Dele Giwa, founder of 'Newswatch Magazine' and other journalists killed between 1986 and 2003. That was in response to the action taken by the Incorporated Trustees of Media Rights Agenda (MRA) that sued the Attorney-General of the federation seeking several reliefs, including that of the killing of journalists, which constitutes a gross and despicable violation of their right to life and safety. This of course, is guaranteed by Sections 33 and 39 of the 1999 constitution, as amended, and Articles 4 and 9 of the African Charter on Human Rights.

The urgency this clarion call by the MRA entails is the allegation that some journalists are still being hounded and harassed by security agencies as we speak, yet the Attorney-General of the Federation is doing nothing about it. Before we take such allegations with a pinch of salt, let us consider some data as made available by the Centre for Journalism, Innovation and Development (CJID) which tracks assaults on journalists, including cyber-attacks.

According to the piece of vital information by the MRA, in November, 2022, some 19 journalists have been sent to their early graves since 1999, under the current democratic dispensation. They were brutally attacked or shot dead. For instance, Pelumi Onifade who was 20 years old and had just started practising journalism with Gboa TV had his life cut short during the unforgettable #ENDSARS protest held at the Toll Gate in Lagos state in October 2020.

Some other media practitioners who have also lost their precious lives in questionable circumstances, over the years include Fidelis Ikuebe, a freelance journalist with the Guardian Newspaper in Anambra State; Enenche Akogwa



AYO OYOZE BAJE

Baje is Nigerian first food technologist in the media and author of 'Drumbeats of Democracy'

then working as a reporter with Channels Television in Kano, and Sam Nimfa-Jan, an NTA reporter who was brutally killed in Jos, Plateau State. Not left out were Maxwell Nashal of the Federal Radio Corporation (FRCN) Adamawa State; Precious Owolabi, then with Channels Television, Abuja; Titus Badejo of Naija FM, in Oyo State and Tordue Salem of Vanguard Newspaper in Abuja, the FCT.

The list goes on and on but the grave import of their sudden deaths has to do with practising one's profession in a country where the journalist has become endangered species. But what is the way forward?

Firstly, it is important for the public to know that the journalist is strictly guided by the code of conduct, more like the bible of his profession. He is taught on listening to both sides of every story he works on and avoids issues of libel and sedition, as mentored by the editors. All the same, no one has the right to force him to make disclosure of his source of information. Much of what he does is for public interest, as he acts as a strong vehicle on the path to good governance.

While one will keep canvassing for his employer to step up efforts on his insurance cover, to protect him against the hazards of his job, the federal government is under statutory obligation to protect him from harm's way.

Furthermore, the security operatives should identify, prosecute and penalise the killers of journalists in the country, as Justice Ekwo has rightly advocated. That will certainly serve as a strong deterrent to others who want their lives terminated for self-serving reasons.



IKEDDY ISIGUZO

Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues

Policing: Is it state police or police state?

police cure these frequent breaches of our rights? Who would state police serve? What problems would state police solve? What new challenges would state police create? Can every state afford a police force?

There is more to policing if it is to manage insecurity better. Which processes will produce the new policeman and women?

Our politicians interrogate the effectiveness of the police while they ignore the unchanging character of the police which is rooted in the circumstances of their beginnings in 1861 in Lagos as a 30-man consular guard to serve the colonial administration. Niger Coast Constabulary, 1894, and Lagos Police Force, 1896, were formed to push the colonial agenda of conquest.

They participated in the military expeditions on Arochuku, and Benin. Those wars ingrained a hatred for the police. Generations learn about them from folklores. There are no counter-narratives on the police not being for the people.

Amalgamation of the various police formations as the Nigeria Police Force in 1930, regional police with the native authority police at independence, and national police through the years, have built police that have a mutually distrustful relationship with the public, poorly managed, and boldly treated as if they are of no importance.

The essential character of the police is an organisation for the conquest of people for the benefit of the government. The police believe they are kept solely for this purpose. We have a police that work for governments, the powerful, and whoever else can fund policing.

A complainant is treated as a suspect. The suspect can decide the direction of an investigation by funding it. For a police perpetually out of funds to maintain their facilities, it is not a surprise that complainants pay for everything, including visit to crime scenes, crime-fighting equipment, arrest of suspects, though sometimes the police could maximise opportunities by

harvesting from all sides in the matter.

Section 4 of the Police Act lists the duties of the police as:

- The prevention and detection of crime.
- The apprehension of offenders.
- The preservation of law and order.
- The protection of life and property.
- The due enforcement of laws and regulations with which they are directly charged.

The performance of such military duties within and outside Nigeria as may be required of them by or under the authority of the police Act or any other Act.

In our enthusiasm to see the central police go, we must think profoundly about what would replace them. Are we handing brutality from the centre to the corners in our local settings where they would not easily be noticed?

A lot of re-training is needed to create a new police that would serve Nigeria and make it a nation where no man, woman, or child is oppressed. Justice, law and order, technology-led operations, and the welfare of the rank and file should be priorities of the police. The character of the police should count, and be counted.

If we do not think through the purpose of state police, we would have created official thugs for Governors, most of whose idea of justice is at most warped.

We should avoid voting for state police and end up with police state.

Finally...

UNCOMMON Senate President, His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Dr. Godswill Akpabio is so unoccupied that he dabbles into the prosecution of former Central Bank Governor Godwin Emefiele. According to Akpabio, who spoke in a church, "The former Governor of the Central Bank, we don't even know what to charge him with. Whether to charge him for illegal possession of firearms, or to charge him for printing notes without income. I don't know what

we're going to charge him with". One had thought that the same EFCC, before which a N100 billion petition against Akpabio lies, was prosecuting the matter. We are better informed.

NOT exhausted from acting the Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of the Federation, Dr. Akpabio becomes Minister of Finance during the Senate's plenary. "I must say that unverified report has it that each of the state governments in the last few months has received additional N30 billion from Federal Inland Revenue Service outside their normal allocations from the Federation Account to assist them in ameliorating the food situation," he said. Does FIRS allocate funds to States? Who approved the N1.08 trillion that Akpabio's low quality rumour entails? Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State has said there was no such payment. Perhaps, Akpabio who depends on "unverified report" misquoted himself.

HONOURABLE Victor Ogene, Labour Party Member, House of Representatives, on the arrest of the party's national chairman Julius Abure, "Indeed, what was the rationale for arresting a man of Abure's standing in society in such a Gestapo manner, drag him on the streets like a common felon, only to release him in the dead of the night?" Police spokesman for Zone 5, Edo State, Mr. Tijani Momoh, said Abure was arrested in a case of alleged "attempted murder and conspiracy to commit dangerous harm". He was not clear on if the treatment meted Abure was standard rule for a suspect.

MUHAMMADU Buhari, "I'm glad Tinubu increased the price of fuel, because it reduced the number of people who visit me at home." It is always about him for himself.

CONGRATULATIONS to Geometric Power on the commissioning of its \$800m, 188MW power plant at Osisioma. Abia State on Monday. It is a bigger project than we can imagine and the exciting possibilities it holds are available to leverage for development.