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2027 presidential running mates: What Shettima, Kwankwaso, Amaechi bring to the table

SAAWUA TERZUNGWE

The emergence of Vice President Kashim Shettima as President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's running mate has shifted attention to a critical but often underestimated aspect of Nigeria's presidential elections; the influence of vice presidential candidates.

While presidential candi-

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FREED AT LAST: How intelligence, multi-agency pressure forced release of abducted Oyo pupils, teachers 56 days after

- No ransom paid - Tinubu
- Government arrested terrorists' family members to force victims release - Ex-DSS operative
- Obi reacts, presidency knocks Atiku for late response
- Sanwo-Olu, Oyo NUT, UBEC hail rescue operation
- Rescue operation spotlights what is possible in fight against insecurity

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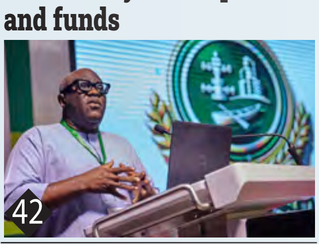
Rivers N1.85trn 2026 budget leaves more questions than answers

New framework emerges in oil region manage host community development and funds



Sahel crisis: What Nigeria must do to avert impending danger

Nigerian Govt still undecided on South Africa as stranded citizens' fate hangs in balance

- FG urged to emulate Ghana on 'tit for tat' against S/Africa
- Allegation of bribery, 'long-leg' trails evacuation efforts

OBINNA EMELIKE

With the arrival of 282 returnees on Thursday, the fifth batch of stranded Nigerians evacuated from South Africa, the federal government has been commended by many on the voluntary evacuation exercise.

So far, about 1,143 Nigerian citizens and around 1,000 Ghanaians were among the 25,000 that have fled South Africa since the

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How persistent torrential rainfall in Nigeria wreaks havoc on homes, businesses

- Lagos, Kogi, Akwa Ibom, Delta, others among hardest-hit states
- NiMet urges caution

JOHN SALAU & KENNETH ATHEKAME

Persistent torrential rainfall has triggered severe flash flooding and rainstorms across multiple states, submerging homes, halting commerce, and displacing residents.

The Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) had earlier issued a warning about a probable flash-flood risk alert between July 1 and July 10, 2026, stating that intensified rainfall at the onset of the peak rainy season could trigger flash flooding across 27 states.

NiMet warned that the anticipated heavy rainfall could lead to localised flash floods, particularly in flood-prone communities and densely populated urban areas.

The hardest-hit states so far include: Lagos, Kogi, Pla-

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News

Don't scrap 6-3-3-4 education system, Eleazu advises FG

...Says 'NYSC reforms will promote skills acquisition, provide employment'

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Innocent Eleazu, a professor and former president of Nigerian Association of Economists (NAE), has advised the federal government, to withdraw its plan to scrap the 6-3-3-4 system of education policy.

Eleazu said that there was nothing wrong with the basic 6-years primary, 3 years in junior secondary and another 3 years at the senior secondary level.

The Federal Government on July 1, 2026, announced plans to abolish the long-standing policy separating junior secondary schools from senior secondary schools after revealing that more than 20 million pupils are dropping out before reaching senior secondary education.

Eleazu argued that while planners of the system made good policy proposals and spent huge public funds in building structures, acquiring equipment, computers and setting up laboratories and workshops in schools, poor management and zero security arrangements with no maintenance policy, led to the stealing and vandalism of the facilities, thereby rendering the system impotent.

"I have just read that the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration is scrapping 6-3-3-4 education system. They want to replace it with a straight 12-year primary and secondary education system.

"Right now, the problem of primary and post primary education in Nigeria, is not restructuring, it is the provision of better learning environment, laboratory, infrastructure, qualified teachers, among others, as most of the schools are dilapidated and lacks teachers."

The former lecturer and school proprietor, regretted that Nigeria lacked prioritised economic policies to employ its scarce resources for the overall benefits of reaching the highest use value, blaming policy makers of prioritising politics in place of socio economic wellbeing of the citizens.

He posited that as an emeritus principal and proprietor, versed in secondary education management, he was in a better position to provide quality counseling to the government on the issues at hand, stressing that abandoning the current system was akin to one joining others to make the same mistake twice.

"I was a proprietor of a post-primary institution, a principal emeritus in Imo Sate. Unfortunately, Nigeria doesn't have a prioritisation policy, an economic policy that prioritises the proper use of the nation's scarce resources, so that limited resources can reach the highest use value. Our policy makers allow political consideration to override their economic decisions.

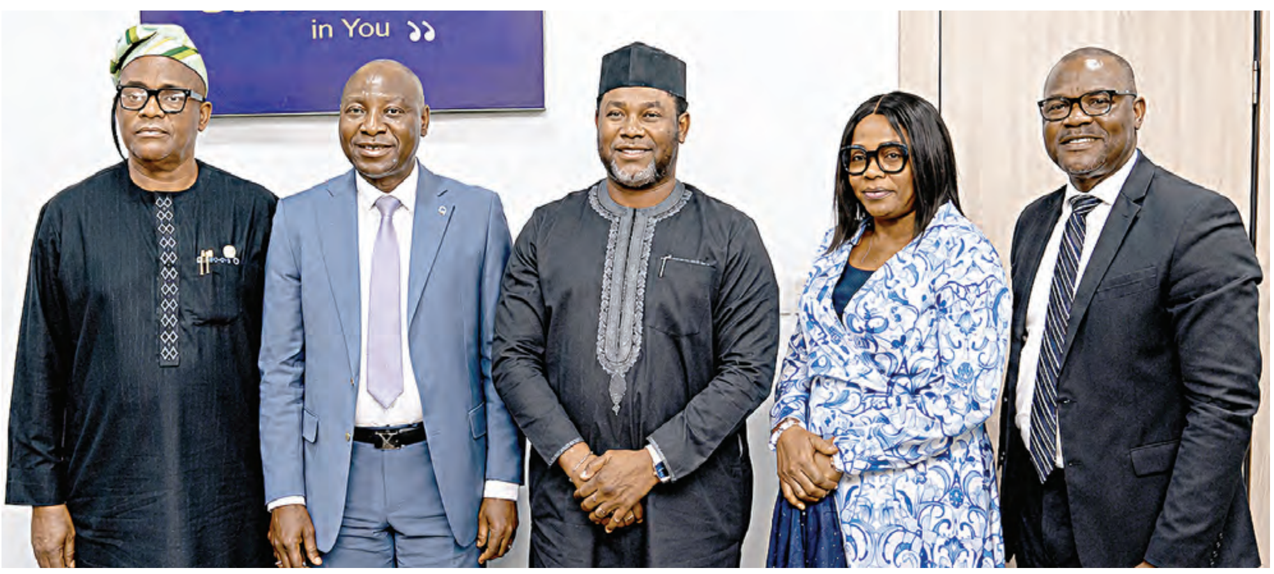
"In this circumstance, why should the federal government want to reform the 6-3-3-4 education system now, when it has pressing multiple economic and political problems? I recommend rather that government make provisions for budgetary allocation on how to secure the laboratories, equipment, computers and locations, where these schools and workshops exist instead of bringing in another programme," he said.

He further spoke on the proposed reforms to reposition the National Youth Service Corps, giving the government a pass mark. He also emphasised that the new concept, when in place, would create enabling environment for the school leavers/corps members to acquire skills and engage in meaningful trades after service without waiting for white collar jobs.

He however, pleaded that the military training aspect of the programme be retained, to instill discipline and ensure good health habits on the corpers.

"I can understand the reform of the NYSC, because it is skill acquisition-oriented. The reform will most likely, increase productivity and employment.

"Let me quickly add that I strongly suggest that the military training aspect should not be scrapped. It should be retained, because it is good for the youth Corps members," he said.



L-R: Nunayon Travih, director of sports, Lagos State Sports Commission; Olufemi Bakre, managing director, Parallex Bank; Lekan Fatodu, director general, Lagos State Sports Commission; Ifeoluwa Ogunlaja, technical director, Lagos State Sports Commission; and Abimbola Ayodeji, head of treasury and institutional banking, Parallex Bank Limited, during the presentation of cash gift to the athletes of Lagos State Contingent at the 2025 National Youth Games in Lagos, recently.

Yola court fines ADC governorship candidate N3m over poster violations

HANNY HENRY

A Chief Magistrate Court in Yola has imposed a N3 million administrative fine on the governorship candidate of the African Democratic Congress (ADC) in Adamawa State, Suleiman Omarana over alleged violation of an executive order.

Chief Magistrate Musa Adamu delivered the judgment Thursday in Yola, in a suit filed by the Ministry of Environment and the Office of the Attorney General.

Salihu Mohammad, counsel to the state government, said that Omarana was accused of defacing public property through indiscriminate placement of campaign posters on government buildings, public infrastructure and other state-owned facilities.

He said that the action violated an executive order prohibiting political parties, candidates and supporters from pasting campaign materials on public structures across the state.

The counsel said the directive formed part of its environmental protection policy aimed at preserving public infrastructure and promoting environmental sanitation.

Reacting, counsel to Omarana, Bala Sanga, said the court did not convict his client of any criminal offence.

Sanga described the proceedings as administrative, stressing that no criminal charge was read, no plea was taken and no formal arraignment was conducted.

"He has not been found guilty of any offence; it is an administrative fine. No charge was read, no plea was taken and no arraignment was made," he said.

He said the defence would have challenged the allegations vigorously if the matter had been prosecuted as a criminal case.

Also speaking, Director-General of the Omarana Campaign Organisation, Mark Wosi, said the organisation welcomed the court's ruling.

Wosi described the decision as an affirmation of the judiciary's role as an independent institution committed to justice, fairness and the rule of law.

He said the organisation had consistently maintained that legal disputes should be resolved through lawful and constitutional means.

According to him, the campaign appreciates the court for discharging its constitutional responsibility with dignity and impartiality.

Wosi commended the legal team for its representation and thanked the media, civil society organisations, security agencies and supporters for maintaining peace during the proceedings.

He urged supporters of Omarana to remain calm, humble and respectful following the judgment.

"This is not a moment for provocation or triumphalism but an opportunity to reaffirm commitment to peace, democratic values and the rule of law," he said.

He reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to pursuing its political aspirations peacefully, responsibly and in compliance with the Constitution and laws of Nigeria.

Lagos flood: Insurers urge affected policyholders to come for claims

MODESTUS ANAESORONYE

The Nigerian Insurers Association (NIA) has called on individuals, families, and businesses affected by the recent flooding across several parts of Lagos State following the persistent heavy rainfall, to come for claims.

Ebelechukwu Nwachukwu, chairman of the Association, said that the insurance industry acknowledges the emotional, social, and financial hardship occasioned by the flooding and stands in solidarity with all those who have suffered the loss of lives, homes, vehicles, businesses, and other valuable assets.

While emphasising the importance of proper environmental sanitation, responsible waste disposal, and the regular clearing of drainage channels to reduce the incidence of flooding, Nwachukwu noted that natural disasters can occur despite preventive measures.

"These unfortunate events further underscore the importance of insurance as a critical financial protection mechanism for individuals and businesses."

The NIA Chairman therefore, urged all policyholders whose insured properties or businesses have been affected by the flooding to promptly notify their insurance companies, insurance brokers, or insurance agents and commence the claims process without delay.

"Early notification and the submission of the necessary supporting documents will facilitate the timely assessment and settlement of valid claims."

She assured the public that its member companies remained committed to providing professional support and the prompt settlement of all genuine claims in accordance with the terms and conditions of their insurance policies.

Nwachukwu also promised that policyholders who require guidance on how to initiate or process their claims are encouraged to contact their insurers, insurance brokers, insurance agents, or the NIA for further information.

Nwachukwu, who is also the managing director/CEO, REX Insurance reiterates that insurance is more than a financial product; it is an essential pillar of economic resilience that enables individuals, families, and businesses to recover more quickly from unforeseen losses.

"As climate-related events such as flooding continue to pose significant risks, adequate insurance protection remains one of the most effective safeguards against financial disruption," she stated.

She extended her thoughts and prayers to all those affected by the floods and wished them strength, comfort, and a speedy recovery.

The NIA chairman reaffirmed the commitment of the Nigerian insurance industry to fulfilling its promise of providing financial relief and restoring policyholders to their financial position prior to the loss through the prompt settlement of valid insurance claims.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Sports

2026 WAFCON: Nigeria's Super **Falcons fire up** for mission XI

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FIFA, SAFA lead tributes as South Africa's Jayden Adams dies at 25

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2026 FIFA World Cup drives multimillion-dollar sales for Nike, Adidas

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Ghana picks 2026 FIFA U-17 Women's World **Cup qualification**

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Scaloni urges Argentina to show grit against Switzerland

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How Gossy Ukanwoke is **redefining** responsible leadership in Africa's gaming industry

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Yamal shrugs off goal drought, says Spain's success matters

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Oyo appoints Adejumon-Smith as Crown FC technical director

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News

Global visionaries honoured at LOSD Excellence Awards 2026 at University of Oxford

FARIDA EL-SAYED

Global leaders, innovators, policymakers and changemakers from more than 40 countries gathered at the Saïd Business School and the historic Examination Schools, University of Oxford, as the London Organisation of Skills Development (LOSD) hosted its prestigious LOSD Excellence Awards 2026.

The awards ceremony, held physically recently, followed a successful virtual edition in April, creating a truly inclusive international celebration of excellence. With 77 awardees recognised across Business, Education, Health, Media, Social and Technology, the event reflected LOSD's expanding global footprint and its mission to empower excellence and inspire transformational leadership.

The event was led by Professor Parin Somani, CEO of LOSD, alongside Louise Upton, The Worshipful Mayor of Oxford.

Distinguished dignitaries in attendance included Sunny Lambe, The Worshipful Mayor of Southwark; Anjana Patel, The Worshipful Mayor of Harrow; Tushar Kumar, The Worshipful Deputy Mayor of Elstree & Borehamwood; and Smita Rajesh, Deputy Mayor of Chelmsford City.

The gala evening also welcomed distinguished royalty, civic leaders and global advocates including HRH Princess Kendal Aminat, H.E Daniel Wood, Lance Haggith OBE, Sunil Chopra, Salim Chowdhury, Cllr Mohammad Amirul Islam, Shehzad Sajid, Zulfikar Bhutto, Desziree Richardson and Muhammad Nissan Abdul Rasheed.

In the Business category, LOSD recognised leading entrepreneurs and corporate executives driving innovation and enterprise growth. Honourees included Ayub Shaikh for Excellence in Human-Centred Leadership, Carlota A. De Gula-Iremedio for Excellence in Business Leadership, Dr. Mina A. Iskander for Outstanding Achievement in Law & Arbitration, and Kamran Khan for Global Hospitality Leadership.

Winners at LOSD Award

Additional business honours went to Sanjay Muthal for Lifetime Achievement in HR Excellence, Mahendrasinh C. Jadeja (Dada) as a Business Icon, and Muhammad Nissan Abdul Rasheed for International Business Leadership. Recognition was also given to Fahmi Rais, Wazid Hassan Shelim BEM, Chaitanya R. Metkar and several others for outstanding achievements in business transformation and innovation.

The Education category celebrated academic excellence and research leadership. Among those recognised were Farah Ghanem for Global Impact in Education, Joyce Wazirali as Global Women Visionary Leader of the Year, Matthew Siu Ting Yip as The GOAT in Mathematics Education, and Yahia Baiza for Global Research Excellence.

In Health, LOSD honoured professionals making exceptional contributions to healthcare, mental wellbeing and preventive medicine. Recognised figures included Mudhsuden Singh "Monty" Panesar as Global Mental Health Champion, Amish Purohit for Healthcare Transformation Leadership, Greg Kunst for Lifetime Achievement in Healthcare Innovation, and Nishtha Sareen as Healthcare Changemaker of the Year.

The Media category recognised influential voices shaping communication and creative storytelling. Afsha Khan was honoured for Media Influence, Hari Krishna Maram for Creative Media Impact, while Ivan Siyanko of PHOTO. VIDEO. LONDON received the Professional Photography Excellence Award.

The Social category highlighted leaders driving public service, humanitarian work and community development. Anjana Patel, The Worshipful Mayor of Harrow, was recognised for Lifetime Public Service, while Sunny Lambe, The Worshipful Mayor of Southwark, received recognition for Community Empowerment.

Further honours went to Tushar Kumar for Outstanding Public Service, Rami Ranger for Community Service, Lance Haggith OBE for Humanitarian Excellence, and HRH Princess Kendal Aminat as Community Hero.

In Technology, LOSD recognised digital innovators and technology leaders shaping the future of engineering, AI and cybersecurity. Awardees included Amit Lingarchani for Technology Leadership, Howard L Zach for Lifetime Achievement in Engineering & Sustainability, Loukas Tzitzis as Global Technology Visionary, and Sergey Tairyan for Excellence in Cybersecurity & Managed Services.

Education stakeholders seek greater investment in teacher training, resilient schools

BLESSING ADIMABUA

Education stakeholders have called for greater investment in teacher training, resilient learning systems and stronger partnerships to improve access to quality education for children living in Nigeria's informal settlements.

The call was made at the Lagos Informal Settlement Education Improvement Programme (LISEIP) 2026, organised by Youth Advocate for Change (YAFC) with the theme: 'Future-Ready Teachers and Resilient Schools: Advancing Quality Education in Informal Settlements.'

The programme attracted teachers from public and private schools, school proprietors, government officials, development partners, non-governmental organisations, financial institutions and education advocates who examined practical strategies for improving learning outcomes through keynote presentations, panel discussions and interactive sessions.

Delivering the keynote address, 'Reimagining Education for Every Child: Building Inclusive, Resilient and Future-Ready Learning Systems in Underserved Communities,' Stephanie Nwabuikwu, education management consultant and executive director, Meadowbrook Educonsult Ltd, challenged governments, educators, businesses and civil society organisations to rethink education for children in disadvantaged communities.

"We gather not just to discuss education, but to reimagine it," she said. "How do we build learning systems that are inclusive, resilient and future-ready? How do we ensure that every child, regardless of circumstance, has access to learning that unlocks their full potential?"

She identified poverty, inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers and social exclusion as major barriers to quality education, stressing that schools have enormous potential to change children's life trajectories through effective teaching and inclusive learning environments.

According to her, future-ready teachers must evolve beyond being transmitters of knowledge to becoming facilitators of learning, mentors and technology integrators capable of nurturing creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and resilience.

"The future-ready teacher prepares students not simply to pass examinations but to thrive in a rapidly changing world," she said.

Nwabuikwu urged governments and development partners to invest deliberately in teacher development, educational technology, infrastructure and mentorship programmes, noting that examples such as solar-powered classrooms, mobile libraries and digital learning initiatives have demonstrated that innovation is possible even in underserved communities.

Former Director of Basic Education Services at the Lagos State Ministry of Education, Adeyemi Adebayo, said teachers should be measured by their impact rather than their titles.

"A teacher is not measured by name. A teacher is measured by impact," he said.

Adebayo urged teachers working in low-cost schools to embrace innovation, child-centred learning and instructional creativity, stressing that effective teaching depends more on sound pedagogy than expensive facilities.

He encouraged teachers to engage learners through practical activities, collaboration and locally improvised teaching materials, noting that children retain knowledge better when actively involved in the learning process.

During the plenary session, Yonodu Okeugo, Group Head, Education Finance, Partnerships and Ecosystem Growth at Sterling Bank, emphasised the need for sustained private sector investment in education.

She said that education financing should go beyond corporate social responsibility to long-term partnerships that strengthen learning systems, reward excellence and improve educational opportunities.

Founder of SEED Care and Support Foundation, Olanrewaju Oniyitan, described teachers as society's unsung heroes and called for stronger collaboration between schools, government and development organisations.

She urged schools to take advantage of available social protection initiatives and education interventions, stressing that accurate learner data remains critical to effective planning and service delivery.

"Resilient schools are not built by accident. They are built intentionally," she said, urging teachers, policymakers and development partners to pursue educational transformation with purpose and commitment.

Olamide Oduola, Programme Officer at Cedars STEM Entrepreneur Hub, challenged teachers to reposition entrepreneurship education around innovation and problem-solving.

She explained that entrepreneurship is fundamentally about creating solutions rather than simply starting businesses, urging schools to cultivate creativity, critical thinking and design thinking from an early age.

"Those who create solutions become valuable," she said, encouraging educators to nurture children's natural curiosity and innovative abilities through STEM education and experiential learning.

She further stated that the biggest misconception is that AI is coming to replace teachers. It isn't. If anything, AI makes great teachers even more effective. AI cannot comfort a child who is struggling. It cannot notice when a quiet learner is losing confidence. It cannot inspire a student to dream bigger.

"Technology will continue to change. Artificial Intelligence will continue to evolve. Jobs will change. The world will change. But one thing remains constant: a teacher who believes in a child can change the direction of that child's life forever", she said.

Earlier, in his opening address, YAFC, Convener and Founder, Adeola Ogunlade, described the programme as a call to action rather than another education conference.

He said that children in informal settlements continue to pursue their dreams despite overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure and limited teaching resources, while teachers and school owners remain committed against all odds.

"No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers," he said.

Ogunlade called for stronger collaboration among government, schools, development partners, civil society and the private sector, insisting that education is a shared responsibility.

"Government cannot do it alone. Private schools cannot do it alone. The private sector cannot do it alone. Civil society cannot do it alone. But together, we can create an education ecosystem where every child has access to quality learning opportunities," he said.

He reaffirmed YAFC's commitment to reducing educational inequality through advocacy, innovation and partnerships, while urging participants to leave the programme with practical commitments capable of transforming education in underserved communities.

News

Finally, Fubara presents Rivers' N1.85trn 2026 budget

...As FAAC, others hike state revenue by 24%

KELECHI NWAUCHA, Port Harcourt

Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State has at last presented a budget of N1.85 trillion to the Rivers State House of Assembly (RSHA) for consideration.

The presentation came less than three weeks after he submitted his 2026–2028 Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) to the Assembly, and more than eight months after he and the legislators returned from a State of Emergency–induced suspension.

Since the lifting of the State of Emergency by President Bola Tinubu, the Martin Amaewhule–led House of Assembly had repeatedly called on the governor to present the 2026 Appropriation Bill.

Analysts suggest Fubara's eventual presentation of the budget signals a reconciliation of the rift between him and Nyesom Wike, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), which had plunged the state into a political crisis.

While presenting the budget Friday, Fubara placed the total estimated revenue for the year at N1.8 trillion but gave total expenditure at N1.85trn.

He said that the 2026 budget, titled 'Budget of Resilience for Growth and Development,' is the result of considerable public participation in a shared vision for building an economically resilient, thriving and prosperous Rivers State.

Fubara said that despite the challenges confronting the state, "The machinery of governance has continued to function, and we have made significant progress in our priority areas of road infrastructure, human capital development, as well as in the security of lives and property."

The governor said the total projected revenue for the 2026 fiscal year N1.85trn only. "This means our proposed total operating revenue for 2026 is projected to increase by 24.49 per cent over the 2025 adjusted budget projections, due to possible increases in returns from FAAC, derivation funds and internally generated revenue, as the national economic outlook continues to show positive growth," he said.

Fubara noted that the details of the 2026 budget assumptions and fiscal objectives were outlined in the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework 2026–2028, which he said the House had already considered.

He listed projected revenue and sources as follows: Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) N487.6bn; total FAAC allocation, including derivation funds, value-added tax and exchange gain N936.0bn; opening and closing balances N48.1bn; and total capital receipts, including domestic loans, grants and asset sales N382.5bn; with total projected revenue placed at N1.85trn.

Fubara further said a total of N413.1bn is allocated to recurrent expenditure.

A breakdown of recurrent expenditure included: total personnel costs, including salaries for ministries, departments and parastatals N154.7bn; new recruitments N15.2bn; consolidated revenue fund charges N772.9m; overheads for MDAs N36.7m; grants, contributions and subsidies N9.7bn; gratuities N20bn; death benefits N7.bn; and monthly pensions N55bn.

Others include Employee Compensation Act N4bn; legacy pension gratuities N20bn; group life insurance N5bn; interest on domestic loans N28bn; interest on foreign loans N6.5bn; short-term domestic loan principal repayment N3.9bn; long-term domestic loan principal repayment N30.4bn; and foreign loans principal repayment N15.7bn, totalling N413.1bn.

L-R: Adebolanle Badejo, non-executive director, Chemical and Allied Products PLC (CAP PLC); Folasope Aiyesimoju, chairman; Bolarin Okunowo, former MD/CEO; Olalekan Aluko, new MD/CEO; Muhibat Abbas, independent non-executive director, and Vitus Ezinwa, non-executive director, at the 61st Annual General Meeting of the Chemical and Allied Products PLC in Lagos, recently.

Abia ready to partner Stanbic IBTC on infrastructure financing, SME development

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State has expressed his administration's readiness to partner with Stanbic IBTC Holdings on infrastructure financing, with priority interest in the proposed Abia Medical City, the Obuaku Seaport and the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Governor Otti made the disclosure Thursday during a business meeting with senior staff of the financial institution, led by Chuma Nwokocha, its Group Chief Executive, held in his office at Umuoro Nvosi, Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area (LGA) of the state.

The governor said that infrastructure financing remained one of the key areas where the state was seeking strategic private-sector collaboration, noting that the proposed Abia Medical City ranked among his administration's top priorities.

He noted that the state had acquired land for the Medical City project and was ready to commence implementation, once the right development partners came on board.

Governor Otti added that a feasibility study had already been conducted for the proposed Obuaku Seaport.

"But clearly, infrastructural financing is the area we have a lot of things that we have proposed to do.

"One of them is a Medical City. It sits as a top priority. The land has been acquired; we are just at the point where we need to hit the ground running. So, it may be an area that you may want to look at with us.

"We also conducted a feasibility study for a sea port in Obuaku. It is also another area that you may want to look at. And a few other things," the governor said.

He commended Stanbic IBTC for its interest in partnering with the State and noted that the collaboration, will expand citizen's access to finance, improve welfare and support business growth across the state.

Chuma Nwokocha, Group Chief Executive, Stanbic IBTC Holdings and leader of the delegation, earlier applauded the pace of development under the Otti led administration in Abia State.

Nwokocha, described Abia, as one of Nigeria's most vibrant industrial and commercial hubs, driven by a strong concentration of SMEs, manufacturing firms and markets.

He said that the bank's visit was aimed at exploring practical ways of partnering the state to accelerate economic growth and unlock investment opportunities.

"Given the opportunities we see, we recognise the potentials in Abia. There is a convergence of values that we have seen. There is a convergence of purpose. There is a convergence of governance. There is a convergence of ambition to better the lives of the ordinary citizen. That's why we are here", Nwokocha said.

Other members of the delegation in their contributions said that Abians and residents would benefit from the proposed partnership, which would provide mortgage financing, ranging from N12.5 million to N100 million to eligible residents.

They added that the collaboration, would also cover financing for SMEs, value addition, agricultural and industrial development, infrastructure funding and initiatives to enhance the state's internally generated revenue (IGR).

Baobab Microfinance reaffirms commitment to improving Nigerians well-being

FATOBA TOMISI

Baobab Microfinance Bank has distributed 500 sanitary pads to schoolgirls in Kwara State as part of the first phase of its Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Project, reaffirming its commitment to improving community well-being.

The project was implemented in partnership with Sisters of Jannah (SOJ), a trusted grassroots organisation whose local knowledge and community presence played a critical role in identifying the school with the greatest need.

Menstrual hygiene remains one of the most overlooked challenges affecting young girls in Nigeria, particularly in low-income communities where access to sanitary products is limited.

Period poverty continues to contribute to school absenteeism, reduced academic performance, and, in severe cases, school dropout among adolescent girls.

By providing reusable sanitary pads, Baobab Microfinance Bank is offering a sustainable, cost-effective solution that supports long-term menstrual health management while helping young girls stay in school and learn with dignity.

Speaking on the initiative, Joy Micheal-Oti, chief business development officer of Baobab Microfinance Bank Nigeria, said,

"At Baobab Microfinance Bank, we believe that every girl deserves the opportunity to learn without interruption," Joy Micheal-Oti, chief business development officer of the microfinance bank, said.

"Menstrual health is not a privilege; it is a basic right. This intervention in Ilorin marks the beginning of a broader commitment to addressing period poverty across Nigeria," she explained.

"We are determined to scale this initiative to multiple states and ensure that no girl's education is disrupted because of a lack of access to menstrual products," she added.

According to her, the initiative is part of the bank's broader corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, aimed at promoting inclusive development and improving the quality of life for underserved populations.

Reflecting on the impact of the outreach, Barisi Samuels, social performance manager at Baobab Microfinance, added that "Executing this project reinforced why this work matters so deeply."

"Beyond the distribution of sanitary pads, we delivered something even more important: dignity, confidence, and reassurance to these girls that they are seen, valued, and supported." "I am proud of what we achieved alongside Sisters of Jannah, Sana Pads and enthusiastic about the future of this initiative."

The reusable sanitary pads were supplied by Sana Pads, a female-owned business located in Kano with a commitment to providing sustainable menstrual health solutions for women and girls.

By supporting a women-led enterprise while addressing a critical need, the initiative delivered meaningful impact on multiple levels and reflects Baobab's commitment to empowering communities through sustainable and inclusive interventions.

Emphasising the partnership, Mistura Afolabi of Sisters of Jannah explained the significance of community-led collaboration.

"Our work within this community has shown us the daily realities many girls face due to a lack of access to menstrual hygiene products. We are proud to have partnered with Baobab on this important intervention. Through this collaboration, we ensured that support reached the girls who needed it most." "This is how meaningful and lasting change begins."

Building on the success of its first phase, the Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Project is set to expand its reach across Nigeria, supported by Baobab Microfinance Bank's network of 38 branches spanning 16 states.

This broad presence will enable the Bank to identify and support more communities with pressing menstrual health needs while partnering with trusted local stakeholders to deliver sustainable, community-driven impact.

Additional details on expansion plans and beneficiary schools will be announced in due course.


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News

Tyre marketers extol achievements of retiring president

...As Ezeifeoma succeeds Isaa Akanbi for four-year term

EMMANUEL SALAWU

After 20 years of meritorious service as President of the Association of Nigeria Tyre Marketers, and pioneer Chief Executive Officer of Africa Tyre Village, Issa Mohammed Akanbi last Thursday, bowed out of office in a glamorous ceremony attended by many stakeholders from the market sector, Trade Fair Complex Community, and within the tyre industry.

The occasion, which was the official handing over and inauguration of the newly elected executives of ANTM, led by Okechukwu Ezeifeoma who received the mantle of office to lead the union for the next four years as its president, while Akanbi retires back to his full trading business.

In his acceptance speech, Ezeifeoma, who was deputy and vice president under the Issa Akanbi administration, extolled the rare qualities and legacies of his boss, which he said were deeply rooted in discipline, transparency, tolerance, humility, hard work, generosity, among many other virtues.

Okechukwu Ezeifeoma, new president, Antm/Africa Tyre Village

"Sir, I learnt a whole lot from you and I promise to maintain and build on all your legacies. It is hard to believe that any moment from now, we will start addressing you as our former president. But that has become necessary because of time and progress. May God continue to bless and keep you for us in good health and long life," he said.

Christian Maduchukwu, outgoing secretary, in his remarks said that the inauguration was the first transition of government since the establishment of Africa Tyre Village 12 years ago.

Maduchukwu described Ezeifeoma as the best man for the job and as one who can sustain the high standards laid down by his predecessor.

In his address, the outgoing president, Issa Akanbi said: "In February 2006, I was elected president of our union with an individual who believed in my abilities, shared my visions, and was completely loyal to me, Okechukwu Ezeifeoma as my vice. We suffered together and sacrificed so much to see the union through its difficult moments. After stabilising the market and restoring discipline, my vice being an importer alerted me that our control on shop rents at Idumota was not sustainable because our number kept growing everyday which can result to scarcity. Hence, we decided to relocate. To God be the glory, we relocated and became shop owners here in Africa Tyre Village on 20th January 2014. It was so difficult such that some of our members went back to the Island, but my exco members and I were able to stabilise the market."

Despite the differences in tongues and faith, Akanbi also noted that no religious or tribal crisis was recorded throughout the 12 years of ATV's existence.

Other members of the new executive committee who took oath of office include Abiodun Oyenuga as vice president; Lateef Olawale, general secretary, and Olatunji Kayode as treasurer.

Guild of Analysts expresses concerns over rising insecurity, urges FG to tweak strategy

SEYI JOHN

The Guild of Public Affairs Analyst of Nigeria (GPAAN) has expressed deep dismay over the rising cases of insecurity in the country, regretting the spread and intensity in recent times.

A statement by the Guild signed by its President, Ayo Baje Oyoze, registered its concerns about the seemingly endless scourge that has continued to threaten the peace of the nation, and safety of lives and property in many parts of the country.

The group stated that more disturbing is the sustained cases of the canker across the country, despite the huge financial costs to the nation, and the invaluable sacrifices of the security agencies, aimed at arresting the menace over the years.

Although it acknowledges the efforts to end the onslaught on citizens, it also asserts that the threat to the education system, teachers, safety of students, security of homes and the entire national life demands urgent and comprehensive review, tweaking of approach and strategies, and redrawing of the country's entire security architecture to outclass the operations of the bandits, terrorists, and other malefactors troubling the nation.

The Guild frowns at the loss of precious children, parents, teachers, clerics, security personnel, and other valuable professionals, maintaining that the situation has become too absurd, disruptive, and debilitating to be allowed to continue.

While the government sustains the momentum of the fight to end the onslaught, the Guild calls for the prosecution of all those named as culprits with regards to the sponsorship of terrorism in the country.

GPAAN also urges continued support by all relevant state and non-state actors to ensure that the country successfully resists and battles to overwhelm the presence and dastardly activities of criminal elements in the society.

The drive for investment, image, and integrity of the country make its footwork towards uprooting the menace more urgent than ever before, the statement maintains.

Forum highlights growth, scaling, sustainability as major business challenges

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Business growth, scaling and long-term sustainability were some of the critical issues highlighted at a one-day forum held in Lagos.

Speaking at the forum which held under the theme, 'GAH Elite Series: Business Growth and Scaling', the organiser, Kelechi Oghene, described the event as a transformative platform for entrepreneurs, professionals and aspiring business leaders seeking to scale their income and broaden their influence.

According to Oghene who is the CEO of GMYT Fashion Academy, growing, scaling and sustaining business remain major challenges for entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

Explaining further, she said: "Most people know how to start a business, the challenges is how to grow, scale and sustain a business".

To overcome such challenges, she stressed the need for entrepreneurs to pursue leadership development to grow their knowledge of the business world.

She also stressed the need for entrepreneurs to build strategic partnerships and networks; create sustainable revenue streams and transition from entrepreneur to institution builder.

Speaking on, 'Building scalable business systems for sustainable growth', Creative Director/CEO, Chomzx Group, Chioma Oliver, defined building a scalable business as the ability of an organisation to grow and serve an increasing number of customers, without creating additional operational problems.

This approach, she said, was critical for accelerating business growth, saving time and money, reducing mistakes, maintaining customer satisfaction, and simplifying overall business management.

While identifying over-reliance on the business owner as a core challenge for many organisations, she said: "When the owner is absent, work often slows down, customer complaints increase, and sales decline.

"To address these challenges and ensure long-term success, businesses must establish robust systems defined as the consistent, documented ways in which essential tasks such as receiving orders, serving customers, managing payments, and delivering products or services are performed."

Michael Nwabufo, who spoke on 'Leveraging technology', presented a strategic framework for achieving sustainable wealth which involves transitioning from a survival-based approach to a growth-oriented mindset.

According to him: "The core premise is that personal income is a direct reflection of one's knowledge and value; therefore, to earn a six-figure income, one must fundamentally evolve into a six-figure person."

Emmanuel Osoteku, who spoke on, 'The power of networking: Leveraging relationships for career and business growth', said that networking was a vital catalyst for both individual career advancement and sustained business success.

"Rather than viewing connections as mere transactions, professionals who cultivate authentic, mutually beneficial relationships gain unique access to hidden opportunities, valuable industry insights, strategic mentorship, and powerful advocacy", he added.

Adeyemi Adeniyi, CEO, Dealclinchers Homes Limited, noted that "The ultimate objective of an entrepreneur is not merely to manage a profitable operation, but to build an enduring institution that thrives beyond their lifetime."

Participants at the forum

Strong institutions remain indispensable to national development - Stretford Hill

JOHN SALAU

Lakunle Runsewe, chief executive officer (CEO) of Stretford Hill Limited, has reiterated that strong institutions remained indispensable to national development.

According to him, sustainable development depends on an environment where businesses can invest with confidence, contracts are respected and institutions provide the stability required for long-term growth.

"At Stretford Hill, we believe infrastructure is more than the physical assets we build," Runsewe said in a statement, highlighting the partnership between Stretford Hill and the Lagos branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA).

He also reaffirmed the company's commitment to strengthening institutions that enable sustainable infrastructure development through its bronze sponsorship of the NBA Lagos Branch Law Week 2026.

"As technology continues to reshape industries, collaboration between engineers, legal practitioners, policymakers and business leaders will become even more important," he stated.

The 2026 Law Week theme, 'Lawyering in the Digital Age: Navigating Technology, Justice & Innovation,' examined how digital transformation is reshaping legal practice, governance and the wider economy.

Runsewe reiterated that the partnership reflects a core belief that sustainable infrastructure depends not only on engineering excellence, but also on strong institutions, legal certainty and an environment that inspires business and investor confidence.

He added that building resilient infrastructure requires transparent governance, accountability and a shared commitment to innovation. "We are proud to support a platform that is advancing these conversations and contributing to Nigeria's future."

Runsewe disclosed that Nigeria's infrastructure ambitions will be realised through stronger partnerships between industry, government and professional institutions.

According to him, such partnership will help in creating an enabling environment for responsible investment, innovation and sustainable development.


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News

Balogun, at AGM, hails NACC's resilience for 65 unbroken years

EMMANUEL SALAWU

The Nigerian American Chamber of Commerce (NACC), under the leadership of Sheriff Balogun, national president and chairman of its Board of Directors, held its 65th Annual General Meeting recently at Apapa Hall, Radisson Blu Anchorage Hotel, Victoria Island, Lagos.

Balogun, now in the third year of his presidency, said: "That this chamber has stood for 65 unbroken years as the foremost bridge between Nigerian enterprise and American capital is no small achievement."

He described it as a testament to the vision of the chamber's founders and the loyalty of the membership gathered before him.

A statement released by Ehi Braimah, deputy president, NACC, stated that Balogun also spoke on the state of the economy, noting that the Nigerian economy held a moderate but steady growth pace of approximately four percent in 2025, driven largely by the services sector, particularly information technology, finance and real estate, alongside encouraging gains in agriculture and construction.

According to him, "Inflation, though still weighing heavily on households, eased

L-R: Tobi Oduyale, national treasurer; Ehi Braimah, deputy president and chairman of the Finance & General-Purpose Committee; Sheriff Balogun, national president and chairman of the Board of Directors; Mary Ade-Fosudo, chairperson, Membership Committee, and Chuba Mbanefo, Legal adviser, during the 65th Annual General Meeting of the Nigerian-American Chamber of Commerce in Lagos, recently.

meaningfully from over 33 percent in 2024 to 23 percent in 2025," a shift he attributed to tighter monetary discipline and greater exchange rate stability.

He also pointed to a healthier current account, buoyed by resilient oil receipts, growing non-oil exports and steady diaspora remittances.

The President however, noted that "Numbers on a page are not yet bread on a table," adding that the burden of poverty had deepened for many compatriots even as macroeconomic indicators improved.

He therefore said: "Our task is not merely to celebrate reform, but to ensure that its gains translate into shared prosperity."

He described the chamber as the channel through which American capital and expertise reach Nigerian enterprise.

The AGM also served as an occasion to reflect on a packed calendar of activities since the chamber's 64th Annual General Meeting last year.

The year opened with a breakfast meeting on the 2025 Economic Outlook for Nigeria, held on February 6, 2025 at Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, Victoria Island, where veteran actor and filmmaker Richard Mofe-Damijo received the chamber's Creative Industry Legend Award in recognition of his contributions to Nigeria's entertainment sector.

In August, the chamber partnered the Nigerian Export Promotion Council for a high level Export Roundtable, equipping exporters with practical insight into United States tariff regulations.

February 2026 brought a second economic outlook roundtable, at which filmmaker Femi Odugbemi was honoured with the Creative Industry Excellence Award.

An International Roundtable on immigration policy and governance reform followed in April 2026, examining Nigeria's evolving immigration and border management framework.

Filmmaker and cultural entrepreneur Bolanle Austen-Peters was presented with the Creative Industry Trailblazer Award at that event in recognition of her work across culture and entertainment.

The chamber also carried Nigeria's trade voice abroad, taking part in the AfCFTA Biashara Afrika Summit in Lomé, Togo, between May 17 and 21 2026.

Days later, on May 26, a delegation led by Balogun paid a courtesy visit to Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu at the Lagos House, Marina, where the chamber unveiled its Lagos Legacy Project, a proposal to establish a permanent centre for United States Nigeria commercial diplomacy in the state.

Governor Sanwo-Olu was conferred with the honorary title of Life Patron during the visit.

Balogun described the governor's warm reception as deeply encouraging for the ease of doing business in Lagos.

Membership growth featured prominently too, with the president noting a heartening surge of interest from businesses across the country, several of which have since been interviewed and approved by the Board.

Looking ahead, the chamber disclosed plans for its most ambitious undertaking yet, the construction of NACC Plaza, a permanent secretariat building.

A Fundraising and Building Committee has been constituted to drive the project, which Balogun called "this generational undertaking," urging members to lend their support so that the home built today would serve those who come long after.

Closing his address, Balogun thanked the board, sponsors, partners, state chapter chairmen and secretariat staff, stressing that "no achievement of this Chamber is the work of one person."

He urged members to leave the hall recommitted to building bridges for commerce and turning ideas into lasting impact.

The 65th Annual General Meeting reaffirmed the Nigerian American Chamber of Commerce's standing as one of the most consistent platforms for Nigeria United States trade relations, even as its leadership signalled that the institution's next chapter, anchored by a permanent home and deeper diaspora engagement, is only just beginning.

MEA Energy targets 3000 jobs across 250 fuel retail stations

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

MEA Energy has launched its first retail filling station in Lagos, marking a major step in its ambition to build a technology-driven fuel retail network across Nigeria while creating 3,000 jobs over the next five years.

The company commissioned the new outlet, located along Itokin Road in Ikorodu, on Thursday, signalling its entry into Nigeria's largest commercial market and reinforcing its long-term strategy to establish 250 retail stations nationwide.

Speaking at the commissioning, Chinenye Atanda, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), MEA Energy, described the Lagos outlet as a strategic milestone in the company's nationwide expansion plans.

"Lagos is the commercial capital of Nigeria. It is a very dynamic market and the business hub of the nation.

"Establishing our footprint here is a testament to show that we are serious about what we are saying. We are showing the work and not just doing the talking," she said.

Atanda said the company's expansion into retail reflects its commitment to bringing energy services closer to customers while delivering a more transparent and technology-enabled fueling experience.

"We are going into retail because we want to be closer to our customers, closer to the end user. We want to hear what they are saying, hear their pain points, and also establish our presence in places that would have ordinarily been ignored," she said.

She described MEA Energy as a long-term player focused on sustainable growth and assured investors of the company's financial discipline while expressing appreciation to the Ikorodu community for welcoming the business.

As part of its expansion strategy, Atanda said the company plans to create 3,000 jobs over the next five years, largely through the rollout of its retail network.

She noted that MEA Energy prioritizes hiring from host communities to support local economic development and strengthen community partnerships.

"In the places where we establish our retail stations, we employ people from the host communities. MEA has a long-term goal of creating 3,000 jobs in the next five years, and we are doing that mainly through our retail station expansion," Atanda said.

She explained that the company uses a data-driven approach for selecting retail locations, focusing on population density, commercial activity, and long-term market potential. According to her, extensive market research identified Ikorodu as a strategic location for the company's first Lagos outlet.

Atanda emphasised that the station represents MEA Energy's vision of smart energy retail, combining automation, digital technology, and customer-centric services to improve efficiency and eliminate common challenges associated with fuel purchases.

"We are not just a traditional filling station. We operate a smart filling station, meaning people will have access to smart options in terms of energy retail," she said.

The CEO disclosed that the company plans to introduce self-service fuel pumps and digital fuel wallet solutions as part of its broader retail innovation strategy.

According to Atanda, the station's automated dispensing system ensures measurement accuracy and transparency, giving customers confidence that every litre purchased is accurately delivered.

"Every litre purchased is guaranteed," she said, adding that the company is committed to maintaining the same service standards across all its retail outlets nationwide.

Beyond fuel sales, the Ikorodu station will also feature a convenience store where customers can purchase beverages, snacks, and other everyday essentials, supporting MEA Energy's goal of creating a modern, one-stop retail experience.

The commissioning ceremony concluded with a tour of the facility and the symbolic activation of the station's first fuel pump, witnessed by commercial drivers, commuters, and residents, many of whom welcomed the company's investment in the community.

Chinenye Atanda, chief executive officer (CEO), MEA Energy, cutting the ceremonial tape during the unveiling of the MEA Retail Station in Itokin, Lagos, flanked by members of MEA Energy Team and the Ikorodu community.

News

Shettima emerges Tinubu's running mate for 2027 as APC predicts landslide victory

SAAWUA TERZUNGWE

Vice President Kashim Shettima has officially emerged as President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's running mate for the 2027 presidential election, ending months of speculation over whether the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) would retain its 2023 ticket.

The confirmation came on Friday at the Abuja Continental Hotel during the submission of Tinubu and Shettima's completed nomination forms to the National Working Committee (NWC) for transmission to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Representing President Tinubu at the event, Ibrahim Masari, the President's Special Adviser on Political Matters, formally presented the joint nomination forms of the President and Vice President.

"I am here on behalf of our father, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to submit his nomination forms, duly completed and signed, together with the sworn affidavit for Mr. President and Vice President, Kashim Shettima," Masari said.

The development effectively puts to rest persistent reports that Tinubu was considering replacing Shettima ahead of the 2027 election.

The speculation had been fuelled largely by renewed debates over the Muslim-Muslim ticket that generated controversy before the 2023 presidential election.

The APC had earlier nominated Tinubu as its presidential candidate for a second term, paving the way for the renewal of the Tinubu-Shettima ticket that won the 2023 presidential election.

Speaking on behalf of APC governors, Chairman of the Progressive Governors' Forum and Imo State governor, Hope Uzodimma, said the governors were united in their support for the President's re-election bid.

"We are here to submit the INEC nomination forms of Mr. President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and Vice President Kashim Shettima," Uzodimma said.

He praised the Tinubu administration's performance, insisting that the governors remained committed to delivering victory for the APC in 2027.

"We, the governors of the APC, are happy with the way the President is piloting the affairs of this country. We are here to say that our President has done very well in the last three and a half years, and we will continue to support him to take this nation to greater heights," he said.

"We reaffirm our support for the President to win a second term in 2027. We are ready to face the campaigns and deliver the President and all APC candidates in the 2027 elections. APC has come to stay," he added.

Also, Nentawe Yilwatda, APC national chairman, expressed confidence that President Tinubu was already on course for victory, claiming that the party's strength and the administration's achievements had secured widespread public support.

"Millions of Nigerians across the six geopolitical zones are waiting to vote for Mr. President in 2027. Farmers, students and many other Nigerians are waiting with their Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs)," he said.

Yilwatda further claimed that Tinubu already had over 12 million votes virtually secured, while urging party leaders to intensify publicity around the administration's achievements.

"I want to tell you, leaders, that come January, Nigerians will come out en masse and vote for him in 2027. What we need is effective publicity of what the President has done in the last three and a half years," he said.

He dismissed suggestions that the APC's popularity was declining, insisting the party remained the country's largest political platform.

"Tinubu's success story is there; it is not propaganda. Nigerians have seen governance that has touched the people. We will mobilise from door to door, house to house and state to state," he said.

"The APC is presenting the best candidate in terms of good governance in this country. Come 2027, our victory is assured," he added.

The APC chairman also defended the party's membership strength.

L-R: Manur Chandak, director of Financial Services, OmniPay; Gbola Lawson, MD, Fastizers; Eka Obaigbena, founder, Toasties; Livinus Obu, Investment analyst, Aruwa Capital; Deji Maradesa, COO, Yikodeen Footwear; Timi Oke, co-founder & CEO, AgroEknor; Atunde Shamsideen Yinka, Founder & CEO, Yikodeen Footwear; Adesuwa Okunbo Rhodes, founder & managing partner, Aruwa Capital; Henrietta Ibeawuchi, Company Legal Counsel, Polysmart Group; Wasiu Balogun, founder & Group managing director, Polysmart Group; Oluwasoga Oni, founder & CEO, Mdaas Global; Genevieve Oni, co-founder & CFO, Mdaas Global; Ayoola Dominic, founder & CEO, Koolboks; Deborah Gael, co-founder & COO, Koolboks; Deepankar Rustagi, founder & CEP, OmniRetail, and Oba Odunaiya, founder & COO, Wemy Industries, during Aruwa Capital Investor Meeting and Award in Lagos, recently.

L-R, Oluwole Adama, executive director, Midstream and Downstream Gas Infrastructure Fund (MDGIF), Ismaeel Ahmed, chairman, Presidential Initiative on Pi-CNG and EV, Y. AWONUGA, Yemisi Awonuga, team lead, Projects and Natural Resources Practices, law partners, Chichi Emenike, 2nd vice president Nigerian Gas Association and Moses Duku, head of communication, Greenville LNG after the panel discussion on boosting the domestic gas market during the Nigerian Oil and Gas (NOG) Energy Week in Abuja.

Picture by TUNDE ADENIYI.

Why public service workers are ideal architects of Nigeria's AI future

CHUKA UROKO

Nonye Ujam

Every major national transformation has an unseen force behind it. In the industrial age, it was engineers who translated ideas into infrastructure. In the internet era, it was network builders and platform pioneers who turned connectivity into socioeconomic change.

In the age of artificial intelligence (AI), however, it is policymakers and public sector officials who will determine whether AI becomes a driver of prosperity or a missed opportunity.

Microsoft West Africa says that, across the world, evidence is mounting that the countries making the fastest progress with AI are not necessarily those with the most advanced technology, but those that invested early in institutional capability.

The company's recent research shows that countries accelerating AI adoption deployed it within the public sector early on, well before generative AI became widely accessible. It was introduced gradually, embedded into public services and governance processes, and socialized through national conversations. When generative AI arrived, it felt familiar rather than disruptive.

Research from the OECD explains why this sequencing matters. Studies show that AI delivers gains in efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness only when governments have the skills to move beyond experimentation.

Where civil servants understand the technology well enough to ask informed questions, coordinate across agencies and exercise oversight, AI initiatives are more likely to scale.

Many governments today are running AI pilots, but where AI literacy is uneven, projects often struggle to scale or fail to translate into lasting public value.

In keeping pace with the rapid evolution of AI, Nigeria's ambition is clear. The National AI Strategy sets out a vision of ethical, inclusive AI anchored in local talent, strong governance and strategic partnerships.

This reflects a deep understanding that the AI opportunity begins with a new era of governance. With the country positioning for AI leadership on the continent, the opportunity to accelerate AI diffusion remains palpable.

Growth in National AI adoption in 2025 was evident, albeit modest, with studies pointing to skills gaps, particularly in data engineering, machine learning, and AI system optimization.

"This aligns with broader ecosystem insights that identify skills development as central to accelerating adoption and readiness," Nonye Ujam, Government Affairs Director at Microsoft West Africa, said.

Ujam noted that this challenge is not unique to Nigeria, adding that, globally, the pace of AI advancement is outstripping the ability of institutions to keep up. Governments are navigating how to adapt policy, regulation, and delivery systems in real time.

Historically, effective public sector reform has been anchored in capability. Financial systems improve when regulators understand markets, and health systems work when administrators understand delivery systems.

AI follows the same logic, and according to Ujam, public sector leaders do not need to become technologists, but they do require sufficient fluency to design effective policies, assess risk, and guide innovation with confidence.

What building public sector skills looks like in practice

She cites global research that suggests effective public sector skilling follows a clear progression. It begins with understanding where skills gaps exist across institutions and using that insight to shape learning priorities.

"In many countries, this work starts at the leadership and policymaker level. Governments that make early progress with AI ensure that senior officials and legislators have a working understanding of emerging technologies, enabling them to shape laws, policies, and oversight frameworks with foresight rather than hindsight," she said.

Leading public institutions increasingly recognize that AI capability must also be built across non-technical roles, raising overall digital literacy and ensuring that decisionmakers throughout the organization can engage meaningfully with technological change.

News

African women urged to move beyond talent, position for make leadership impact

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

African women have been challenged to go beyond talent and position themselves for visibility, leadership and impact.

Founder of Talented Women Network Africa, (TWN) Amarachi Okwuobi, gave the charge while speaking at the maiden Talented Women Corporate Conference she organised in Lagos.

According to Okwuobi Africa has no shortage of talented women, but many are held back by fear, societal pressure and limited access to opportunities.

In her words: "While Africa is full of talented women, the challenge is moving beyond talent through visibility, positioning and opportunity."

She drew lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that the crisis proved people could adapt under pressure.

"The pandemic showed us that when life demands more, we discover capacities we never knew existed. People learned skills, started businesses and embraced technology to survive," she added.

For her, TWN was set up to bridge that gap by helping women turn gifts into influence.

The idea, she said, was inspired by watching women pour into others while neglecting themselves.

According to her, "We are not just motivational. We are a solution platform. We give women structures that turn talent into influence and impact."

While urging women to embrace consistency and not fear criticism she said: "Every time consistency breaks, we lose ground. When it is sustained, we gain ground.

"You cannot grow without criticism. If no one has criticised you, maybe you haven't stepped out enough. Don't stay hidden. Your voice, your ideas, your contribution matter."

She also told women to stop waiting for permission, adding, "If you are not invited to the table, invite yourself. The world is no longer debating if women are capable. The question now is whether women will step forward and take their place."

Family Business Advisor & Executive Coach, Abiola Adeniran who spoke at the conference said the future of society depends largely on the quality of values instilled in children by parents, particularly mothers.

Adeniran, who works with ultra-high-net-worth families and family-owned businesses on wealth preservation, legacy planning and succession, noted that while many people focus on building successful careers and businesses, the home remains the most important institution for shaping future leaders.

She charged women to see the work of nurturing and raising children as a responsibility with far-reaching consequences.

"The future of the next generation lies in our hands as nurturers and home builders. The leaders of tomorrow are being raised in our homes today, and the values we teach them will determine the kind of nation we build," she said.

According to her, women possess the unique ability not only to give life but also to nurture it, making them critical to raising responsible, ethical and visionary leaders.

She emphasised that the standards and value systems upheld within families would ultimately shape individuals capable of leading with integrity and contributing positively to Nigeria's development.

Also speaking, Executive Director of SAS Textiles, Oluwatoyin Bakare, encouraged participants to move beyond transactional relationships and cultivate genuine human connections.

She said that many interactions today were driven by personal gain rather than sincere concern for others, urging women to intentionally build relationships founded on empathy, kindness and encouragement.

"We need to move from being transactional to being relational. It is not always about what you want from people. Sometimes, simply calling someone to ask how they are doing or encouraging them can make a significant difference," she said.

Bakare stressed that genuine relationships reveal humanity and create lasting impact, adding that people should strive to become transformational rather than merely transactional in their dealings with others.

She further reminded participants that talent alone is not enough to guarantee success.

According to her, true character is revealed in private, urging women to build strong personal foundations based on integrity, resilience and consistency.

"It is not about having talent. The real question is, who are you when nobody is watching? Build your life quietly on the right foundation, remain resilient and never give up. Believe that you can succeed," she said.

The conference was held under the theme 'Beyond talent' and it brought together women entrepreneurs, leaders from various sectors.

Oyo group slams Folarin, Adelabu, Buhari, Olaniyan over anti-party statement

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

Oyo Rising Citizens Forum (ORCF) has strongly condemned a joint statement by Teslim Folarin, Bayo Adelabu, both senators, Abdulfatai Buhari, and Rauf Olaniyan, former deputy governor of Oyo State, pledging to work only for the re-election of President Bola Tinubu, labelling their actions a hypocritical and anti-party posture ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The group, in a press statement signed by Aderemi Adebisi and Owolabi, demanded an explanation for this political stance by the quartet, saying that the statement issued was contradictory and smacked of hypocrisy.

"While the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Oyo State has already constituted a committee to reconcile all aggrieved aspirants and party members ahead of the general election in 2027, the protest today by some loyalists of Bayo Adelabu and also a meeting held among Teslim Folarin, Bayo Adelabu, Fatai Buhari and former Oyo Deputy Governor Rauf Olaniyan, where all of them concluded that they would only work to deliver Oyo State for President Bola Tinubu come 2027, smacks of hypocrisy and divided loyalty, which even the President, as a true democrat, will not accept," the ORCF statement said.

ORCF accused the quartet of refusing to accept the party's primary election that produced Senator Sharafadeen Alli as the APC governorship candidate for Oyo State.

The group described the meeting and the message issued by the four politicians as undermining party unity and warned that President Bola Tinubu would not tolerate divided allegiance from APC members in the state.

"It is so unfortunate that these individuals have refused to accept the will of God over the emergence of Senator Sharafadeen Alli as the party's governorship candidate. One wonders why Senator Teslim Folarin, who once enjoyed unalloyed loyalty from Senator Alli during the last governorship election in Oyo State, has not uttered any statement in support of Senator Sharafadeen Alli," the statement added.

ORCF therefore urged all aggrieved aspirants to embrace the spirit of sportsmanship and work for the overall success of the APC in Oyo State, reminding party members that a reconciliation committee is already in place to address grievances before the 2027 polls.

The group also used the opportunity to criticise the current state government, saying Oyo State "deserves better" than the present administration under Governor Seyi Makinde.

ORCF described Senator Sharafadeen Alli as "a man of integrity and a grassroots politician who will bring succour to the people of the state."

Condemning the joint statement by Folarin, Adelabu, Buhari and Olaniyan, ORCF said that the communiqué's wording, framed as an announcement of their meeting "to deliberate on strategies for working closely with other stakeholders of the great party to ensure the successful delivery of Oyo State for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in the 2027 general election", is disingenuous.

The group argued that the message attempts to position the four as kingmakers while simultaneously undermining their party's chosen governorship candidate.

Media veterans, corporate leaders celebrate Ndiulo's transition to academia at Covenant University

BLESSING ADIMABUA

Corporate leaders across West Africa, colleagues and media industry veterans, have congratulated Ejike Ndiulo following his formal appointment to the faculty at Covenant University, Ota.

The strategic transition marks a significant win for both the academic and corporate sectors, bringing one of Nigeria's most respected marketing and communications minds into the lecture halls of one of Africa's premier private universities.

Ndiulo, an accomplished C-Suite leader with over 20 years of experience driving market leadership, recently earned his PhD in Strategic Marketing Management from Babcock University. His peers in the media and public relations industries view his move to academia as the ultimate culmination of a career dedicated to elevating corporate communication standards.

Throughout his distinguished career, Ndiulo has been a passionate, vocal champion for shifting how corporate organisations view the role of public relations. He has consistently used his platforms to advocate for the strategic integration of communication managers into core boardroom decision-making structures, arguing against the traditional view of PR as a mere reactionary tool.

Most recently, as the Chief Thinker at Henryjvaleens Limited, a top-tier public relations, marketing, communications, and corporate consulting firm, he put these exact frameworks into action. In this executive capacity, he routinely advised major corporate clients on brand equity, operational cost reductions, and targeted market penetration strategies.

Before his tenure at Henryjvaleens Ltd, Dr. Ndiulo served as the Head of Corporate Communications at Air Peace Limited, where he engineered high-impact brand campaigns and stabilised investor confidence. His extensive banking footprint also features a decade-long run heading corporate communications at Fidelity Bank Plc, where he managed a multi-billion Naira marketing portfolio.

"For years, Ejike has been a leading voice in our industry, fighting to dismantle the old notion that PR is just an afterthought used to clean up corporate missteps," said a close professional colleague and industry stakeholder. "Whether managing bank portfolios or acting as Chief Thinker at Henryjvaleens Ltd, he has always proven that true strategic resilience happens when the communication leader has a seat at the boardroom table before decisions are finalized."

His early career laid an incredibly strong foundation for this boardroom advocacy, featuring pivotal roles as a Business Development Representative for the BBC World Service and Special Projects Manager for the Delegation of German Industry and Commerce (DIHK). He also boasts deep roots in mainstream journalism, having served as an award-winning Senior Financial Correspondent for ThisDay Newspapers.

As a past winner of the Insurance Reporter of the Year and runner-up for Financial Reporter of the Year at the Nigeria Media Merit Awards (NMMA), Dr. Ndiulo maintains active professional affiliations. He remains a highly regarded member of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigeria Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), APCON, and NIMN.

News

SSK's 20th anniversary initiative spotlights young legal talents, OAU takes top prize

BLESSING ADIMABUA

As part of activities marking its 20th anniversary, commercial law firm Streamsowers & Köhn has launched what it described as a long-term investment in grooming the next generation of legal practitioners through its maiden Moot Court Competition, with Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, emerging overall winner.

The grand finale of the competition, held recently at the MUSON Centre, Lagos, brought together the top five law faculties selected from submissions received from universities across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones.

After a rigorous written stage, Obafemi Awolowo University and Bayero University Kano advanced to the final oral advocacy round, where participants argued a mock case before a panel of distinguished judges.

At the end of the contest, Obafemi Awolowo University was declared the overall winner, while its lead counsel, Ase Hephzibah, was named Best Advocate of the competition.

Other finalists were the University of Abuja, the University of Lagos and the University of Calabar.

Speaking after the event, Chief Operating Officer of Streamsowers & Köhn, Modupeola Olusoga, said the competition was conceived as the firm's corporate social responsibility project to commemorate its two decades of legal practice while creating opportunities for aspiring lawyers.

According to her, the firm deliberately chose an initiative that would have a lasting impact on legal education rather than limiting its anniversary celebration to social activities.

"When we started planning the 20th anniversary, there were questions around, aside from coming together to celebrate, what can we do to give back to society as part of our CSR," she said.

"One of the partners reminded us that when the firm started, the vision was never about passing it on to their children. It was about creating a firm where people can come in, learn, grow through the ranks and make a difference in the legal profession and even the world.

"So we thought about creating a platform where students could come, showcase themselves, showcase their learning and be exposed to something that mirrors the real court experience. Students participate in moot courts in their universities, but this is often different from what happens in actual courtrooms."

Olusoga explained that the competition attracted entries from 17 universities after more than 30 institutions were invited, with independent assessors screening the written memorials before five schools qualified for the finals.

"We did extensive planning and engaged independent assessors. About 32

schools were contacted, 17 responded and submitted memorials. From those submissions, five finalists emerged and today the top two competed in the oral advocacy round.

"It is really about equipping the next generation of lawyers and reminding them that they have the competence, the skills and the opportunity to excel irrespective of where they come from."

She described the standard displayed by the students as impressive, saying the competition reinforced confidence in the future of the legal profession.

"It was a thing of pride for me. I was smiling throughout because I could see the depth of knowledge, the capability and the capacity these students possess.

"They are still undergraduates, yet they conducted extensive research, presented confidently and responded intelligently to difficult questions from the judges. They didn't give shallow answers; they gave thoughtful and detailed responses."

"To me, it is an encouragement that there is hope for the future of legal practice because we have young people who are not just attending law school but are committed to excellence."

She added that the moot court competition would become the firm's flagship annual programme.

Also, SSK partner Vincent Owhor said the initiative was designed to expose law students to areas of legal practice beyond conventional courtroom litigation while strengthening their advocacy skills.

"It is our 20th anniversary and, as part of the celebration, we decided to incorporate a CSR activity. We thought the best place to invest was in our constituency, which is law students who will become future lawyers.

"What we witnessed exceeded our expectations. For students who have not even gone through procedural law to perform the way they did was thoroughly impressive. Their advocacy skills were excellent and the quality of their legal arguments was fantastic.

"The judges took time to deliberate before reaching their decision, and that tells you how closely matched the finalists were."

He noted that the winning advocate distinguished herself through composure and quick thinking during the oral arguments.

"This is a moot competition where presentation is just as important as the quality of legal content. What stood out in the winner was her ability to think on her feet. That was a remarkable quality, and I have no doubt she is going to become a star in the legal profession."

Owhor said the competition also introduced students to specialised areas of law such as aviation, election petitions and oil and gas law, broadening their understanding of career opportunities within the profession.

Speaking with our correspondent, Best Advocate Ase Hephzibah of Obafemi Awolowo University described the recognition as both humbling and challenging.

"I feel very humbled because everyone who appeared here was exceptional. Even after people kept telling me I had done well, I still wasn't expecting my name to be announced.

"At the same time, I feel challenged to become even better. Being named the best advocate is not the destination. The sky is not the limit; it is the starting point. This is simply an opportunity and a motivation to keep improving."

She attributed her success to years of preparation, supportive teammates, dedicated lecturers and family encouragement.

"I have very good teammates and an exceptional coach who has invested so much in training us. I also benefited from seniors who started mentoring me from my first year in the university.

"My parents encouraged me throughout, and my friends constantly challenged me to improve. I believe being surrounded by the right people and trusting God made a significant difference."

Ase commended Streamsowers & Köhn for exposing participants to specialised areas of legal practice that many students rarely encounter.

"This competition opened our eyes to fields like aviation law, labour law and other specialised areas. It made us realise that law is much broader than many of us imagined, and it has inspired many participants to explore new career paths."

Winpart by CFAO backs Bethesda Foundation to support vulnerable children

JULIET ONYEMA

Winpart by CFAO, in partnership with CFAO Solidarity, has supported the Bethesda Child Support Foundation in a community development initiative to improve the welfare of vulnerable children.

The support is expected to enhance the Foundation's programmes focused on providing care, protection, education, and development opportunities for disadvantaged children, reinforcing efforts to improve their well-being and prospects.

Speaking during the presentation, Kunle Jaiyesimi, deputy managing director of CFAO Mobility Nigeria, said the initiative reflects the company's belief that business growth should be accompanied by meaningful social impact.

L-R: Lanre Abu, director of operations and pastoral care, Bethesda Child Support foundation; Olamide Adeleye, representative of the founder, Bethesda Child Support foundation; Eric Fantodji, general manager, Winpart by CFAO, and Kunle Jaiyesimi, deputy managing director, CFAO Mobility, at the presentation of financial support from CFAO Solidarity and Winpart by CFAO to Bethesda Child Support Foundation in Lagos recently

"At CFAO, we believe that business success must go hand in hand with social responsibility. Our support for the Bethesda Child Support Foundation reflects our commitment to backing initiatives that create meaningful and lasting impact in the lives of children and communities," Jaiyesimi said.

As part of this initiative, CFAO Solidarity and Winpart by CFAO donated €7,000 and N1 million to support the activities of the Bethesda Child Support Foundation.

This initiative forms part of several social initiatives selected and supported by CFAO Solidarity, the group's employee-led social impact programme, which supports community projects across the countries and communities where CFAO operates.

Through partnerships with non-profit organisations, the programme seeks to improve the lives of vulnerable populations and contribute to sustainable community development.

Eric Fantodji, General Manager of Winpart by CFAO, said the company remains committed to supporting initiatives that create lasting value for society.

"The work being done by the Bethesda Child Support Foundation is truly inspiring. We are honoured to support a cause that provides care, hope, and opportunities to children who deserve the chance to build brighter futures. Through CFAO Solidarity, we are proud to be part of a wider movement supporting impactful community projects across our areas of operation," Fantodji said.

Receiving the support on behalf of the Foundation, Barr. Olamide Adeleye thanked Winpart by CFAO and CFAO Solidarity for partnering with the organisation, noting that the intervention would strengthen its programmes for children under its care.

"We are deeply grateful to Winpart by CFAO and CFAO Solidarity for their generosity and belief in our mission. This support will contribute significantly to the welfare, development, and empowerment of the children under our care," she said.

The initiative underscores CFAO's broader commitment to sustainable development and community engagement, demonstrating how strong partnerships between businesses and social institutions can generate lasting impact for future generations.

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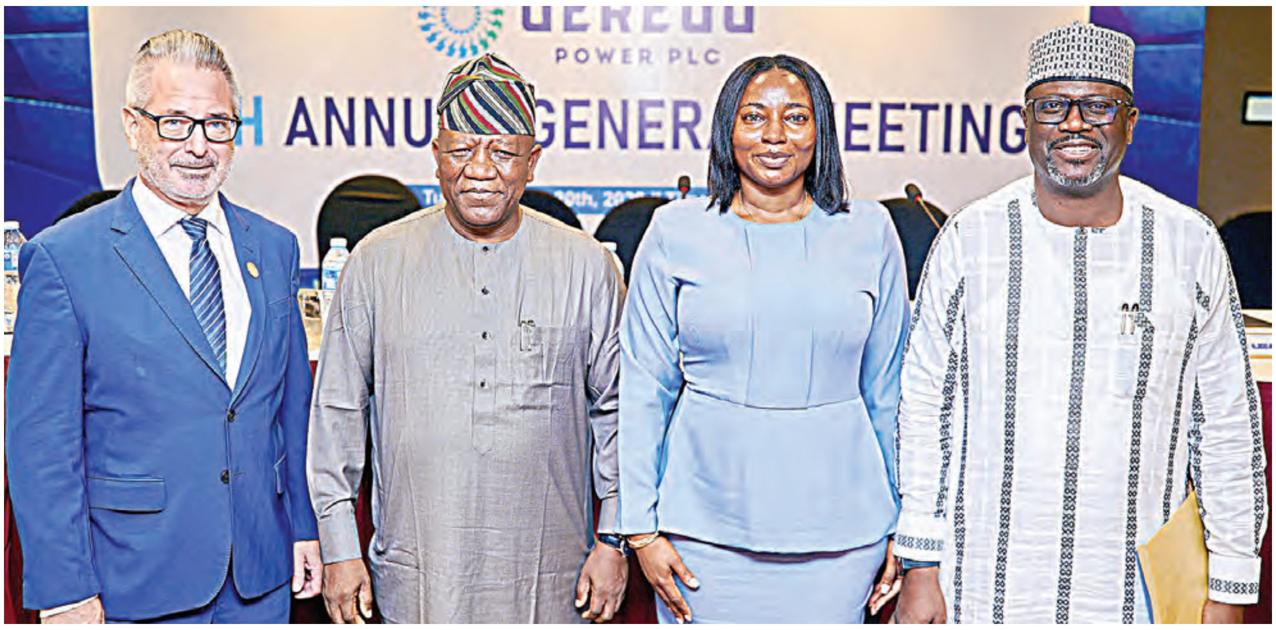


L-R: Sean Manley, CEO; Abdul-Aziz Abubakar Yari, board chairman; Gbeminiyi Shoda, (The Structure HQ), company secretary; and Abdullahi Abdulkarim Tsafe, non-executive director, at the 14th annual general meeting of Geregu Power plc. The high-profile event took place electronically, recently.

PAPSS expands to 28 African countries as Central Africa joins payment network

HOPE MOSES-ASHIKE

The Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) has expanded its footprint to 28 African countries following the entry of the Bank of Central African States (BEAC), a milestone expected to strengthen cross-border payments and accelerate financial integration across the continent.

BEAC's participation marks a major step in extending Africa's cross-border payment infrastructure into Central Africa and significantly broadens PAPSS's reach into Francophone Africa.

As one of only two regional central banks on the continent, BEAC serves the six member countries of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Chad. Its membership gives PAPSS a strategic gateway into a regional market of more than 72 million people while enhancing connectivity between West, Central, East and Southern Africa.

With BEAC joining the platform, PAPSS now connects 28 African countries, bringing together more than 190 commercial banks and fintechs through 16 payment switches. Through its extended network partners, participants can also send funds to more than 250 additional financial institutions across the continent.

The development comes as PAPSS continues to expand its infrastructure to support the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by enabling seamless cross-border payments in local currencies. A pilot phase with the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) is expected to commence later this year, moving the platform closer to its goal of connecting all regions of Africa through a single payment network.

Yvon Sana Bangui, governor of BEAC and Chairman of the Association of African Central Banks (AACB), said joining PAPSS would create the conditions for faster, cheaper and more efficient cross-border payments between CEMAC countries and the rest of Africa.

"By joining PAPSS, BEAC is creating the conditions for faster, more affordable and more efficient cross-border payments between the CEMAC countries and Africa. We encourage commercial banks and financial institutions across our member states to embrace this opportunity and prepare for participation in the platform," he said.

According to him, the success of Africa's trade integration will depend not only on sound policies and infrastructure but also on the active participation of financial institutions, describing PAPSS as a practical solution to support that vision.

Mike Ogbalu III, chief executive officer of PAPSS, described BEAC's entry as a significant milestone in advancing Africa's financial integration.

"We commend governor Yvon Sana Bangui for his leadership and unwavering commitment. This development opens new trade and payment corridors between Central Africa and the rest of the continent, enabling faster, more affordable and more efficient cross-border payments that will support trade and economic activity," Ogbalu said.

Developed by Afreximbank in partnership with the African Union and the AfCFTA Secretariat, PAPSS enables instant cross-border payments in local African currencies, allowing funds to move between African markets within seconds without relying on third-party currencies or offshore correspondent banking networks.

Alternative Bank pushes for private-led green transition in Nigeria

GODSGIFT ONYEDINEFU, Abuja

The Alternative Bank (AltBank) has urged Nigeria's private sector to take an active, leading role in driving climate action, as stakeholders at the Nigerian Environmental Summit (NESt) 2026 called for stronger environmental governance, greater accountability and increased investment in the country's green economy.

The summit, held in Abuja under the theme 'Unlocking Nigeria's Green Economy: Driving Climate Action and Sustainable Environmental Governance,' brought together government officials, business leaders and development partners to confront Nigeria's growing environmental challenges, including flooding, pollution, desertification and biodiversity loss.

Mohammed Abdul, Divisional Head, Commercial and Institutional Banking (Core North) at The Alternative Bank, delivered the call to action at the summit's opening, making clear that environmental responsibility is inseparable from business purpose.

"Our role here is to support an initiative that has a direct impact on the nation. Every private-sector organisation should see itself as a stakeholder and team player in this effort because it serves a national objective," Abdul said.

He described environmental sustainability as a core business priority for the bank, with social, environmental and ethical considerations embedded across its operations and financing decisions.

"At The Alternative Bank, we view our Corporate Social Investment (CSI) through an impact-driven lens, focusing on sustainable interventions that create measurable value for communities and the economy," he said.

AltBank's sustainability commitments span environmental and social action. Its WasteBanc recycling programme, currently active in Lagos State and set to expand to Kano and beyond, addresses waste at the community level. The Walk4ZeroPlastic campaign takes that mission further, targeting plastic pollution reduction and responsible waste habits at the grassroots level. The bank also supports women entrepreneurs through the Matazalla Women's Mobility Initiative and the Light Her Program, providing eco-friendly electric tricycles, capital and mentorship.

NESCAFÉ reiterates commitment to Nigerian hustle, rewards entrepreneurial journey of young business owners

JOHN SALAU

NESCAFÉ has reiterated its commitment to the Nigerian hustle and business resilience, by supporting the entrepreneurial journey of young business owners with critical equipment to help deepen and grow their businesses.

The brand supported four young Nigerians with sewing machine, make-up kit, camera and laptop to scale their businesses through the next level promotion inspired by the resilience of everyday Nigerians.

"The NESCAFE Next Level Promotion was inspired by a simple insight. Across Nigeria, people are working hard every day to build businesses, learn new skills, and create better futures for themselves and their families," Wassim Elhusseini, MD/CEO, Nestlé Nigeria, said during the NESCAFE Next Level winners announcement held on Friday July 10, 2026.

According to him, the promotion was geared towards celebrating the entrepreneurial spirit of young Nigerians that continues to inspire everyday living. He added that campaign aimed to do more than reward loyalty; rather to reward the hard work, resilience, and determination that drive so many Nigerians every day.

"For decades, NESCAFE has been part of Nigerian mornings, helping people start each day with purpose. Over the years, we have seen our consumers grow, adapt, and pursue new ambitions. As a brand, it is important that we continue to grow with them," Elhusseini said.

Jean-Pierre Duplan, Category Manager, Coffee, reiterated the commitment of the brand to always support the everyday hustle of Nigerians. According to him, the promotion was inspired by the business ingenuity of everyday Nigerians.

"For decades, we have been part of their mornings, helping them start each day strong. But beyond every cup of coffee, we are always looking for meaningful ways to stay true to that commitment," Duplan said.

According to him, the promotion was a strategic way of bringing the brand promise to life by rewarding its consumers with prizes that could make a real difference in their entrepreneurial journeys.

"The NESCAFE Next Level Promotion may be coming to an end today, but our commitment to supporting the ambition of Nigerians continues. We look forward to creating more experiences that inspire progress and reward the loyalty of the consumers who choose our brand every day.

"The response exceeded our expectations. We received over 240,000 entries from consumers across the country, and more than 41,000 winners received airtime, cash prizes, and other exciting rewards," Duplan said.

Education minister commissions smart school in Abia

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Maruf Tunji Àlausa, minister of Education, officially commissioned the Ogbo Central Smart School, Ubakala, built by the Abia State Government under Governor Alex Otti to enhance education and enable Abia children to compete favourably with their counterparts globally.

Alausa, while commissioning the facility, commended Governor Otti for his visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to transforming education through strategic investments in human capital.

He noted that sustainable development is not measured solely by physical infrastructure such as roads and bridges, but by deliberate investments in education and the intellectual capacity of the people.

"The governor's education reforms are aimed at equipping every child in Abia State with the knowledge and skills required to compete successfully at the local, national and global levels," the minister stated.

"That's what we are witnessing in Abia State today. When you have a Governor that is committed and thought and said, 'I'm going to build a smart school, not just one, not two, not three, not four, but ten, twenty,' that's a Governor that cares for the people. That's a Governor that wants your kids to lead Nigeria and lead the world.

"Today, your kids and Abia children will sit in this school. They will get the best educational material that a child in America, in London would also have right here in this community. They will learn how to use AI. Five years from now, ten years from now, Abia will lead the world," Alausa stated.

Vote for credibility, track records in 2027 - Sani Dawop

Sani Dawop, is the governorship candidate of the Action Democratic Party (ADP) in Plateau State for the 2027 general election. A corporate executive, and the current National Publicity Secretary of the ADP. In this exclusive interview **AKOMBO AONDONA**, he spoke on national politics and why he wants to govern Plateau State. Excerpt:

Some observers say that Plateau State needs a change of leadership. How will your campaign turn this sentiment into actual votes at the grassroots level?

Well, I don't think the desires, the dreams and aspirations of Plateau people have been met, particularly in terms of uniting the people, in terms of enjoying peace, and in terms of enjoying security and prosperity. So, our campaign focus is premised on these things. We want to create an enabling environment where every life will be secured. There is so much hunger, poverty and no new industries set up in the last 27 years since the advent of the current Republic. We have more industries closing down and we need to create jobs. So, we are looking at the areas of peace and security, economic revitalisation through industrialisation, and we are looking at industries in the areas of agric businesses, mining and tourism and lastly, infrastructural development. There is a huge gap. For example, the area where I live in the part of Jos, there has been no water supply for the past 3 to 4 months. In fact, in some areas, more than 10 to 15 years even some 20 years and there are new expansions. There are huge gaps, no public water supply. Our educational institutions need a lot of interventions in terms of infrastructure, in terms of curriculum development, in terms of teacher training and development. The health care sector is the same thing. We need to achieve the universal health target and we need to invest more in health education in line with the United Nations requirements. We need adequate resources to meet these standards and we will make sure that there is accountability for the investment or expenditure that we incur. So, this is really what we are going to do differently. In Plateau State, once there is peace and security everything will fly. Plateau used to be the epicentre of the entire commercial activities in the Middle Belt and entire North East. But all these we have lost.

Plateau State politics has traditionally rotated between PDP and APC. So, what specific strategies does ADP has to dismantle this entrenched control in the 2027 general election?

No, I don't think Plateau is rooted in PDP or APC. APC is just a 2015 creation. So, you cannot say Plateau has been deep-rooted in APC and PDP. Plateau is rather deep-rooted in progressive politics. Is not about the political parties. Since it's rooted in progressive politics, that's why we are bringing in the Action Democratic Party, ADP. Even from our name, you can see. We won a Senator in the rerun in 2024 after the PDP election was cancelled to currently our Senator representing Plateau North from ADP. But he just recently decamped to APC in January this year. So, you can see that we are a progressive party and Plateau people accept our party. So, we are a progressive party and that's where Plateau is deep-rooted.

So, let's look at the security in the Plateau State. We have prolonged communal clashes- farmers-herders' conflicts and rural displacement. What are your precise actionable plans to guarantee security in venerable local government areas?

The issue of farmers-herders 'clashes, if you look at it, prior to the Fourth Republic, we did not experience these kinds of things. But there is a lot of politicisation of the whole issue. And that's why the insecurity has become exaggerated. So, we are going to tackle this from the roots and we are going to engage with critical stakeholders to swing security not from the periphery. There is no amount of force that you can bring that can engender peace. Peace must be as a result of the enforcement of key stakeholders and the people and carrying everyone along. I studied strategy and security administration from the Nigeria Defence Academy, NDA, at Master's level, and in my own carreer in the private sector where I worked for more than 10 years as the General Manager in Human Resources and Administration, the security department has always been under me. I have worked with the Military, the police everywhere, in multi-national conglomerates. So, I have understanding of security and their architecture and what we need to do to bring sustainable peace and security. And we will deploy both the kenetic and non-kenetic strategies. And where you do not have fairness, equity and justice, you can hardly also achieve peace. So, this is part of the non-kenetic. Also, where there is hunger, poverty, unemployment, criminality you can hardly have security. These are areas we have to tackle. We work on these areas by carrying everyone along and by the time we do that, everybody will have a sense of belonging. With mutual coexistence, hopefully we can get there.

What are your plans to create conducive environment for farming in Plateau State?

Well, this is not the first time I am contesting the governorship election in Plateau State. In 2023, I was the governorship candidate of this same party ADP. And out of the 18 gubernatorial candidates, I was declared 4th position after PDP, APC and Labour Party, then, I was number 4. So, this is not the first time I am contesting.

In terms of agriculture, I told you we are going to look at the areas of economic revitalisation, improve agriculture and agri businesses in particular. I am lucky to have worked with international organisations. And the experience that I have gathered, we will bring it to bear. For example, agriculture, the minimum recommended budgetary allocations we will make sure we meet that. And without a strategy, to establish an agric transformation agency. This agency is what is completely lacking and that's why our projects in agriculture are not working for us. Also, I would not want to talk about that so much for now but I tell you that agric strategy is all encompassing. We have shared it previously with some governors who were in power in Plateau State but they didn't implement it. Even before I aspired, this model had been adopted in other countries. Then, what are the interventions? What are the strategies? Then, another thing that I have noticed is the lack of discipline when it comes to implementation of policies and will fine-tune these areas and make sure that our policies achieve the purpose. We will work the talk.

Plateau State has been a tourist state. What are your strategic plans to boost tourist activities in the state?

Yes, if you remember, I gave you a three-point agenda, peace and security, economy and revitalisation through agriculture, mining and tourism. You are talking of creative industry itself, which is an economy that has great potential in Plateau State. We have so many talents. Look at the dramas, the theatres, and everything. The environment is very natural. We even have the National Film Institute here in Plateau State that is the Federal Government agency. We are not even doing much to market the potentials and not even develop the potentials to attract people to even come and visit. We are blessed with the natural climate and weather but we are not even maximising them. But for tourism to flourish, we also need sustainable peace. So, we will work at all these.

This political season, what is your message to Nigerians?

Yes. My message is that without opposition, there is no democracy. The attempt of the APC government to muscle opposition is going to be counterproductive and that is what will doom this government if they are not very careful. Nigerians are watching. My advice is that if they believe they have done well, let them go and campaign to the people rather than to muscle opposition. Even the present president is the beneficiary of the Goodluck Jonathan allowing even APC to come to power. But this president is trying to muscle all oppositions in the political parties and that's is very bad and very dangerous for democracy. We should play politics of nonviolence, we should do politics of ideas, politics of development. Nigeria should be very careful. Let them not vote because someone has given them money. Let them vote for credibility and for people who have track record and people they can hold accountable.

Politics

Northern governors unite as APC eyes 2027: Will the North remain the party's stronghold?

BENJAMIN AGESAN

The back-to-back meetings of governors in Kebbi and Kaduna last week have underscored one unmistakable reality in Nigeria's political landscape, the battle for the 2027 general election has quietly begun, with the North once again emerging as the principal political battleground.

Although the meetings were officially convened to discuss governance, security and regional development, political observers believe they also reflected the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC)'s determination to consolidate its hold on the 19 northern states ahead of what is expected to be one of the country's most competitive elections.

The first indication came in Kebbi State, where first-term APC governors met to review governance performance and strengthen collaboration among states controlled by the party. Barely days later, Kaduna hosted the Northern States Governors' Forum and the Northern Traditional Rulers Council, where governors resolved to deepen regional cooperation against insecurity and inaugurated a committee to establish a Northern States Security Trust Fund.

The initiative is expected to mobilise resources from governments, the private sector and development partners to support intelligence gathering, logistics, surveillance technology and other measures aimed at addressing banditry, terrorism, kidnapping and communal violence that continue to threaten lives and livelihoods across Northern Nigeria.

For many analysts, security remains the defining issue that could shape voting patterns across the region in 2027.

Across Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Plateau, Benue, Borno and parts of Adamawa and Taraba, persistent insecurity has disrupted farming activities, forced the closure of schools, displaced thousands of residents and discouraged local and foreign investment. The resulting decline in agricultural production has contributed to rising food prices and weakened rural economies.

Against this backdrop, APC governors appear determined to convince northern voters that they are taking collective responsibility for solving the region's most pressing challenge.

Governor Uba Sani of Kaduna State, who hosted the Northern Governors' Forum meeting, stressed the need for a coordinated regional response, arguing that insecurity can no longer be tackled effectively by individual states acting alone. The proposed Security Trust Fund is expected to complement ongoing federal efforts while encouraging greater collaboration among states.

Beyond security, APC governors are increasingly presenting governance as their strongest campaign asset. Several APC-controlled states have embarked on road construction, healthcare expansion, school rehabilitation, agricultural support programmes and revenue reforms aimed at strengthening state finances. Kaduna has promoted reforms in internally generated revenue, infrastructure renewal and social investments. Borno continues post-insurgency reconstruction efforts. Gombe has maintained a reputation for fiscal discipline, while Kebbi and Kwara have pursued agricultural and infrastructure projects intended to stimulate economic activity. These initiatives are expected to feature prominently in APC's campaign narrative as the elections approach.

However, political analysts caution that governance achievements alone may not guarantee electoral success.

Economic realities remain a major concern for millions of Nigerians. High inflation, rising transportation costs, unemployment and the lingering effects of economic reforms have placed enormous pressure on household incomes. While the Federal Government maintains that ongoing reforms will produce long-term economic gains, many voters may ultimately judge political parties by present-day living conditions.

> **"The African Democratic Congress (ADC) has also gained increasing attention as politicians seeking alternatives to the dominant parties explore new political platforms**

The opposition is already positioning itself to capitalise on these concerns.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP), despite internal divisions, still maintains formidable political structures in several northern states and retains experienced politicians capable of mounting serious electoral challenges.

The New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) remains a major force in Kano, where its grassroots support continues to pose a significant challenge to APC's ambitions in Nigeria's most populous northern state.

The African Democratic Congress (ADC) has also gained increasing attention as politicians seeking alternatives to the dominant parties explore new political platforms. Although its organisational reach remains limited compared to APC and PDP, strategic defections could strengthen its position in selected states.

The National Democratic Congress (NDC), Labour Party and Accord Party are equally seeking to expand their influence by attracting younger voters, professionals and citizens dissatisfied with the country's economic and security situation. While they may struggle to secure widespread victories independently, they could significantly alter electoral outcomes by splitting votes in closely contested states.

Political calculations are also likely to vary across the region.

In Kaduna, religious balancing, zoning and candidate selection will again dominate political discourse. In Kano, the contest between APC and NNPP is expected to remain intense. In Plateau and Benue, security and farmer-herder conflicts are likely to influence voter decisions, while states such as Bauchi, Taraba and Adamawa may witness renewed competition between APC and PDP.

Another factor that may shape the elections is the quality of alliances built before party primaries. Political history suggests that the North often rewards broad coalitions capable of accommodating diverse ethnic, religious and political interests. Whether APC can maintain internal cohesion after its primaries—or whether opposition parties can overcome their own divisions to form effective alliances—may prove decisive. For now, the ruling party appears to enjoy several structural advantages. It controls a majority of northern state governments, has access to extensive grassroots networks, benefits from incumbency at both the federal and state levels, and possesses stronger organisational and financial capacity than most of its rivals.

Yet recent Nigerian elections have shown that incumbency alone no longer guarantees victory. Voters have become increasingly willing to reward performance and punish perceived failures, particularly where insecurity and economic hardship persist.

The meetings in Kebbi and Kaduna therefore, represent more than routine gatherings of governors. They signal the beginning of an intensive political season in which governance, security and economic performance will become central themes of electoral campaigns across Northern Nigeria.

Whether APC retains its dominance in the 19 northern states will depend largely on developments over the next several months. If security improves, agricultural production rebounds and the economy begins to ease the burden on ordinary Nigerians, the ruling party could strengthen its grip on the region. But if insecurity persists and economic hardship deepens, opposition parties may find unprecedented opportunities to reshape Northern Nigeria's political map.

As the countdown to 2027 continues, one conclusion is increasingly clear: the contest for the North has begun, and its outcome is likely to determine not only the region's political direction but also the future of Nigeria's presidency.

Politics

Kaduna: Reforms have improved service delivery – Uba Sani

BENJAMIN AGESAN, Kaduna

Governor Uba Sani has promised that Kaduna State remained committed to deepening reforms that strengthen fiscal resilience and improve service delivery.

The governor also pledged that every financial resource that is entrusted to government would deliver measurable value for the people of Kaduna State.

He made these commitments when members of the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission visited him Wednesday.

Members of the Commission, led by their Chairman, Mohammed Bello Shehu, have been touring states in their efforts to review Nigeria's horizontal revenue allocation formula.

In his remarks, Governor Sani disclosed that his administration has demonstrated that prudent resource management, institutional reforms and strategic investments can produce transformative outcomes.

According to him, Kaduna State has made significant progress in fiscal sustainability, healthcare delivery and education in the last three years.

The governor disclosed that reforms, improved technology and transparency have resulted into an increase in the Internally Generated Revenue of Kaduna State.


Governor Uba Sani

"This achievement did not occur by chance. It was the product of deliberate reforms aimed at diversifying revenue sources, modernising tax administration and improving compliance through technology-driven systems.

"The introduction of Project C.R.A.F.T. and the PAYKADUNA platform has simplified revenue payments, enhanced transparency and significantly reduced leakages," he said.

The governor also pointed out that his administration has made deliberate efforts to build public confidence in government.

"As trust in public institutions has grown, voluntary tax compliance has strengthened accordingly, reinforcing the principle that citizens are more willing to contribute when they see tangible evidence that public resources are managed responsibly and translated into improved public services," he argued.

Governor Uba Sani also said that his administration has undertaken an extensive expansion and modernisation of healthcare infrastructure across the state.

He said that Kaduna State Government has upgraded one Primary Healthcare Centre in each Local Government Area into a Centre of Excellence.

The Governor further said that he has procured modern medical equipment and three ambulances, recruited and improved remuneration of healthcare personnel.

Kaduna State has also expanded access to quality education and has remained at the centre of the Governor Uba Sani administration's development strategy.

"We have achieved near-perfect gender parity in school enrolment, with boys and girls now represented in almost equal numbers.

"This milestone reflects the impact of sustained collaboration with development partners, particularly through the AGILE and ROOSC programmes, which have significantly expanded educational opportunities for girls and other vulnerable children," he added.

The Governor argued that the clearest indicator of the progress made by Kaduna State Government is the substantial decline in the number of out-of-school children from a projected estimate of 535,000 in 2023.

"However, our most recent household mapping exercise identified 187,720 out-of-school children across all twenty-three Local Government Areas," he disclosed.

Governor Uba Sani acknowledged that although there are still challenges in the efforts to reduce the number of out-of-school children, but the direction of travel is unmistakably encouraging in Kaduna State.

According to him, the gains recorded by his government have been driven by sustained public investment, including allocating 26.5 percent of the state budget to education.

The governor also listed the successful utilisation of UBEC intervention funds, implementation of the World Bank-supported BESDA programme as drivers of the success recorded so far.

He further listed the expansion of school feeding and free education initiatives, consolidation of schools in security challenged communities into safer learning environments, and the extension of teachers' service years to retain experienced professionals within the system.

Governor Uba Sani pointed out that "these achievements illustrate what is possible when sound fiscal management is matched by purposeful leadership, strong institutions and sustained investment in human development."

He said that Kaduna State deeply appreciates the steadfast partnership between RMAFC and sub-national governments "in revenue mobilisation, fiscal oversight, data verification and the development of institutional frameworks that enable states to deliver more effectively on their obligations to citizens."

PFIPC: Human rights lawyer seeks answers, calls for unbiased, independent probe

EMMANUEL SALAWU

Akinwole Okenile, a human rights lawyer, has called for greater transparency and an independent review of the circumstances surrounding the alleged Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council (PFIPC), saying the controversy raises broader questions about institutional accountability and government oversight.

Okenile made the call in a public statement, arguing that while the ongoing criminal proceedings against Adeniyi Adeyemi will determine the defendant's legal responsibility, the matter also presents an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of public institutions in preventing alleged abuse of government processes.

The Federal Government has charged Adeyemi with offences including alleged forgery, impersonation and related crimes. The defendant has, however, denied the allegations and maintained that he would establish his innocence before the court. The case is currently before the court.

According to Okenile, the criminal trial should not overshadow what he described as legitimate public concerns over how an alleged non-existent government body was able to gain public attention before authorities intervened.

He said that if the Presidency's position is that the PFIPC never existed as an official government agency, Nigerians deserve an explanation about how an alleged fictitious body was able to circulate official-looking documents and allegedly carry out activities that attracted national attention.

"The courts will determine the criminal liability of the accused, but the controversy has also placed Nigeria's public institutions under scrutiny," he said.

Okenile maintained that asking such questions should not be seen as an attack on the government but as a legitimate demand for accountability in a constitutional democracy. He argued that governments are assessed not only by how they prosecute alleged offenders but also by how effectively they prevent institutional failures.

He added that the controversy has reinforced concerns among many Nigerians that government institutions often respond only after public confidence has been shaken, stressing that transparency remains critical to restoring trust.

The lawyer noted that the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu assumed office with promises of strengthening institutions, improving governance and promoting transparency, adding that controversies such as the PFIPC matter inevitably test those commitments.

He called for a transparent and independent review of the circumstances surrounding the alleged operations of the PFIPC, including an assessment of existing oversight mechanisms and any institutional weaknesses that may have contributed to the controversy.

According to him, where credible evidence establishes misconduct by any public official, accountability should follow without fear or favour, while any systemic deficiencies identified through such a review should be addressed through meaningful reforms.

Okenile further argued that the issue should not be viewed through a partisan lens, saying accountability strengthens democracy regardless of which political party is in power. He said governments inspire public confidence not merely through official assurances but by demonstrating that institutions function effectively.

He concluded that while the rule of law requires that the accused be given a fair trial, democratic governance also demands openness and accountability from public institutions. According to him, justice and accountability are complementary principles that remain essential to strengthening Nigeria's democratic institutions and maintaining public trust.

Politics

Nigeria's exorbitant party nomination fees and the CPPI challenge

SAMUEL ESE, Port Harcourt

Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria has been witnessing rising cost of expression of interest and nomination forms across the political divide, which has sparked concerns for the future of politics in Africa's most populous nation.

This year, the All Progressives Congress (APC) pegged the presidential forms at N100 million (N30 million for expression of interest and N70 million for nomination), governorship forms went for N50 million, Senate N20 million, House of Representatives N10 million, and state House of Assembly N6.0 million.

For the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the combined cost of the presidential forms was N51 million while the African Democratic Congress (ADC) charged the presidential forms at N90 million after a downward review, and the governorship forms cost N30 million, Senate N10 million, House of Representatives N5.0 million, and state House of Assembly N2.0 million.

Both the Labour Party (LP) and Action Democratic Party (ADP) charged N15 million each for the presidential forms.

In the past, it was the PDP that used to charge higher amounts for their nomination forms because it was believed that the party's ticket was a guarantee for electoral victory; now it is the APC.

The exorbitant fees have drawn the attention of a non-partisan group, Citizens Platform for Political Inclusion (CPPI), which has challenged political parties on the high fees charged for the expression of interest and nomination.

CPPI, a coalition of citizens, public policy advocates and democratic governance stakeholders, committed to promoting inclusive political participation and strengthening Nigeria's democracy, said the exorbitant fees exclude poor citizens from participating in the political process.

In association with the Athena Centre for Policy and Leadership and the Embassara Foundation, CPPI said it has commenced robust and coordinated legal and legislative steps to challenge the exorbitant expression of interest and nomination form fees charged by political parties in Nigeria.

The group has issued pre-action notices to all the major political parties, and is also seeking the intervention of the National Assembly to put an end to the exorbitant nomination fees.

It issued separate pre-action notices to the national leadership of the All Progressives Congress (APC), African Democratic Congress (ADC), Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

In the letter to the APC addressed to Nentawale Yilwatda, national chairman of the party, made available to BusinessDay Sunday, CPPI said it is "acting in the public interest and on behalf of millions of Nigerians who are effectively excluded from seeking elective office by prohibitive fees."

The letter was signed by all the members of the Steering Team of CPPI including Osita Chidoka, Amagbe Denzil Kentebe, Iniruo Wills, Ken Lewis-Allagoa, Famous Obebi Famous, and Adeniyi Ajayi.

BusinessDay Sunday reliably gathered that the letters to the other political parties bore the same wording, and gave a 14-day ultimatum to meet their four demands.

They are: "The immediate review and substantial reduction of the expression of interest and nomination form fees charged by political parties including the All Progressives Congress.

"The immediate adoption of a reasonable, transparent and non-discriminatory fee structure which reflects the purchasing power and economic realities of the average Nigerian citizen and does not operate as a barrier to democratic participation.

"The publication of the criteria, methodology and legal basis upon which the current expression of interest and nomination form fees were determined and fixed by your party.

"The establishment of an appropriate compensation and/or refund mechanism for aspirants was have been adversely affected by the imposition of such prohibitive fees.

"Should your party fail, refuse or neglect to comply with these demands within fourteen (14) days of receipt of this letter, we shall be left with no alternative but to seek redress before a court of competent jurisdiction."

It also referred to Articles 2, 3 and 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which guarantee equality, equal protection of the law and every citizen's right to participate freely in the government of his or her country.

"The imposition of prohibitive nomination fees also runs contrary to Articles 2, 3 and 13 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act, which guarantees equality before the law, equal protection of the law and every citizen's right to participate freely in the government of his or her country.

"Nigerian courts have consistently recognised the African Charter as an enforceable part of our domestic law and have relied upon its provisions in public interest and human rights litigation," the group said.

The group described the prevailing nomination fee regime as a grave threat to Nigeria's constitutional democracy, and excludes a vast majority of Nigerians including women, youths and the disabled from participating and seeking electoral office.

It its petition to the National Assembly, CPPI urged lawmakers to amend the Electoral Act by prescribing a statutory cap on nomination fees, empowering the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to regulate and approve such fees, requiring political parties to justify and publicly disclose their fee structures, providing statutory fee concessions for women, youths and persons with disabilities, and mandating annual disclosure of nomination fees, the number of forms sold and revenues generated therefrom.

"To preserve the integrity of our electoral process and promote inclusive grassroots representation, we respectfully request the National Assembly to amend the Electoral Act to: Set a cap or maximum threshold for expression of interest and nomination form fees charged by political parties and empower INEC to regulate and approve the actual fees set by political parties.

"Mandate political parties to publicly submit their fees structures to INEC for oversight, preventing exclusionary and inflated charges.

"Require political parties to disclose and justify the basis and methodology used in determining expression of interest and nomination form fees.

"Provide for reduced and special fee arrangements that promote inclusion and encourage participation by women, youth and persons with disabilities.

"Require appropriate transparency measures, including public disclosure of nomination fees, the number of forms sold and revenues generated from nomination forms," the petition stated.

The group also requested the Senate and House Committees on Electoral Matters to convene a public hearing on the impact of nomination fees on democratic participation in the country.

It urged the National Assembly to facilitate a broad stakeholder engagement involving political parties, INEC, civil society organisations, youth and women's groups and constitutional law experts to examine appropriate reforms that will strengthen political inclusion and internal party democracy.

"We believe that full disclosure of revenues earned by political parties from nomination forms during electoral cycles, including the 2023 and 2027 electoral cycles, and how such revenues are applied, will further enhance transparency and accountability within Nigeria's democratic process," CPPI said.

According to the group, the inevitable consequence is the systemic monetisation of political participation across the Nigerian political landscape, whereby access to elective office is increasingly determined by wealth rather than merit, competence or public service.

CPPI maintained that the practice is inconsistent with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), particularly Sections 40 and 42, which protect freedom of association and equality before the law.

It said the practice offends the spirit of Section 14(2)(c), which provides that the participation by the people in their government shall be ensured.

The group further cited Section 17(2)(a) of the constitution, which envisioned a social order founded on freedom, equality and justice, and Section 15(5), which enjoined the state to abolish corrupt practices and abuse of power.

"The disparity illustrates the extent to which excessive nomination fees exclude qualified Nigerians, particularly women, youths, persons with disabilities, low-income professionals and grassroots political actors, from seeking elective office.

"We believe that the imposition of such exorbitant barriers undermines the principles of democratic inclusion and constitutes a challenge to the constitutional guarantees contained in Sections 40 and 42 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), which guarantees freedom of association and prohibit discrimination.

"We also believe that the practice is inconsistent with the spirit of Section 14(2)(c) of the Constitution, which requires that participation by the people in their government shall be ensured," the group stated.

The statement noted that, although nomination fees imposed by political parties now run into tens and hundreds of millions of naira, Nigeria's national minimum wage stands at N70,000 per month (N840,000 annually).

It observed that, "A Nigerian worker earning the national minimum wage would require well over one hundred years of income to afford certain presidential nomination forms," describing the disparity as compelling evidence of the exclusionary nature of the existing regime.

The group said the consequences extend beyond financial exclusion, saying "Exorbitant nomination fees encourage political sponsorship, entrench godfatherism, promote undue financial influence over public office, incentivise the recoupment of political investments after elections and ultimately undermine internal party democracy, transparency, accountability and good governance."

There has been the argument that the high cost of expression of interest and nomination forms helps to sanitize the electoral process.

It is believed that should the cost of the forms be so reduced to allow every interested citizen to participate, the field will become too crowded and also pose a serious challenge to INEC.

Johanna Raymond, a concerned resident of Port Harcourt, told BusinessDay Sunday that the issue often sparked debate resulting in frustration amongst party members.

She said it rules out people who are not from affluent families and does not provide an equal playing ground for all aspiring elective office seekers while lowering the chances of healthy competition.

"The exorbitant nomination fees charged by political parties is a significant issue amongst party members that often sparks debate and frustration.

"This can discourage aspirants and prospective leaders because it tends to rule out those who are not from affluent backgrounds who possess the passion and vision for leadership.

"This does not also provide an equal playground for all aspirants and lowers the chances of healthy competition amongst party members," she stated.

Rivers N1.85trn 2026 budget leaves more questions than answers

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Governor Abdullahi Sule

Whereas other states seem to be putting together facts for their 2027 budgets, Rivers State just woke up Friday, July 10, 2026, to hear that their 2026 budget has been presented. They had inkling to this last week when news filtered out through social media (as is often the case these days) that Gov Sim Fubara had gone to the Rivers State House of Assembly where he was said to have presented the state's Medium Term Expenditure Framework.

Many wondered how the executive and legislature that never saw eye to eye suddenly found enough warmth to sit and present any matter of the state. The last presentation the governor made after their latest conflict was list of commissioner-nominees which actually didn't fare well because some nominees perceived as close to Fubara were bounced. Since then, fresh coldness chilled the relationship.

Now, Gov Fubara truly went to the House and presented a budget of N1.85trn to the Martins Amaewhule-led House which is believed to be controlled by the former governor, the FCT Minister, who actually brought every person into government before he left.

While presenting the budget on Friday, July 10, 2026, Fubara placed the total estimated revenue for the year at N1.85 trillion and maned it; "Budget of Resilience for Growth and Development."

He said it is the result of considerable public participation in a shared vision for building an economically resilient, thriving and prosperous Rivers State.

Fubara said that despite the challenges confronting the state, "The machinery of governance has continued to function, and we have made significant progress in our priority areas of road infrastructure, human capital development, as well as in the security of lives and property."

The governor said the total projected revenue for the 2026 fiscal year N1.85trn only. "This means our proposed total operating revenue for 2026 is projected to increase by 24.49 per cent over the 2025 adjusted budget projections, due to possible increases in returns from FAAC, derivation funds and internally generated revenue, as the national economic outlook continues to show positive growth," he said.

Fubara noted that the details of the 2026 budget assumptions and fiscal objectives were outlined in the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework 2026–2028, which he said the House had already considered.

Areas of clarification:

The budget has already elicited questions in areas the citizens did not understand, probably due to many political conflicts in the state that have affected governance.

Non-state actors taking first look at the budget which actually was only available through unverified social media influencers, wondered how the warring parties seem quiet and smooth-going. They wondered what the agreement was in the budget of almost N2trn for parties to be at peace on this only one subject.

The House had few months ago raised alarm that the Sole Administrator left N300bn in the treasury. Gov Fubara, an accountant, said it was true, but that he too had added N300bn to it. This immediately set off interest from everywhere to the fact that Rivers had cool N600bn sitting in its treasury. Wike accused some persons of rushing to Rivers State to support Fubara because of N600bn in one pack. In fact, he accused some federal leaders of collecting from it.

Many now ask what agreement that has made everyone quiet enough to approve the state budget.

Another point was the statement in the budget speech where Gov Fubara said he focused on road infrastructure. Many wondered if roads were the only form of infrastructure affecting the people in the face of decayed schools, hospitals, streets in the city, etc. Water remains a thing for the masses to source from the numerous boreholes.

The governor named human capital and security as other areas of his attention while the crisis lasted. Many want him to understand what human capital development meant and how it has been pursued in the crisis period.

They said if there were to be budget analysis sessions, they would want him to help explain the achievements in security in Rivers State. They referred to the that the Rivers Neighbourhood Watch agency which has remained comatose while other states have created one, the one for Rivers has been allowed to die.

They wanted to know how he has created jobs as claimed in the budget. "You said you have created jobs, please how and where? Is it the recently rumoured employment of 5000 teachers, or any other scheme? Is there a boost caused in the private sector traceable to the administration?

Budget details:

While presenting the budget on Friday, July 10, 2026, Fubara placed the total estimated revenue for the year at N1.8 trillion but gave total expenditure at N1.85trn.

He said the 2026 budget, titled "Budget of Resilience for Growth and Development," is the result of considerable public participation in a shared vision for building an economically resilient, thriving and prosperous Rivers State.

Fubara said that despite the challenges confronting the state, "The machinery of governance has continued to function, and we have made significant progress in our priority areas of road infrastructure, human capital development, as well as in the security of lives and property."

The governor said the total projected revenue for the 2026 fiscal year N1.85trn only. "This means our proposed total operating revenue for 2026 is projected to increase by 24.49 per cent over the 2025 adjusted budget projections, due to possible increases in returns from FAAC, derivation funds and internally generated revenue, as the national economic outlook continues to show positive growth," he said.

Fubara noted that the details of the 2026 budget assumptions and fiscal objectives were outlined in the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework 2026–2028, which he said the House had already considered.

He listed projected revenue and sources as follows: Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) N487.6bn; total FAAC allocation, including derivation funds, value-added tax and exchange gain N936.0bn; opening and closing balances N48.1bn; and total capital receipts, including domestic loans, grants and asset sales N382.5bn; with total projected revenue placed at N1.85trn.

Fubara further said a total of N413.1bn is allocated to recurrent expenditure.

A breakdown of recurrent expenditure included: total personnel costs, including salaries for ministries, departments and parastatals N154.7bn; new recruitments N15.2bn; consolidated revenue fund charges N772.9m; overheads for MDAs N36.7m; grants, contributions and subsidies N9.7bn; gratuities N20bn; death benefits N7.bn; and monthly pensions N55bn.

Others include Employee Compensation Act N4bn; legacy pension gratuities N20bn; group life insurance N5bn; interest on domestic loans N28bn; interest on foreign loans N6.5bn; short-term domestic loan principal repayment N3.9bn; long-term domestic loan principal repayment N30.4bn; and foreign loans principal repayment N15.7bn, totalling N413.1bn.

Fubara added: "Mr Speaker may wish to note that we have proposed at least a 50% increase in overhead expenditure, to be enacted immediately once the budget becomes law."

He said the sum of N1.4trn is allocated to capital expenditure. The sectoral breakdown is as follows: Administration N278.7bn, Economic N625.9bn, Law and Justice N65.3bn, and Social N435.4bn, totalling N1,4trn.

Fubara noted that "the capital budget has increased from N713.7bn in 2025 to N1.4trn in 2026, saying it is a 22.49% rise in infrastructure services expenditure.

"Major capital expenditure is planned in the following areas: Works and Infrastructure N533.3bn, Educational Development N315bn, Healthcare Delivery N105.4bn, Rivers State House of Assembly N41.5bn, Rivers State Judiciary N30bn, Agriculture N19.3bn, Power N15bn, Chieftaincy and Community Development N8.5bn, Sports N8bn, Youths N7bn, Women Affairs N6.5bn, and Environment and Sustainable Development N6.6bn."

Governor Fubara made it clear that his administration did not tolerate mismanagement at any level. "We have wisely utilised public funds to provide services, attract investment, create jobs, and offer socio-economic opportunities for our people.

He said the budget has proposed at least a 50 per cent increase in overhead expenditure, to be enacted immediately once the budget becomes law. He said the N15bn has been provided for payment of new employees.

Conclusion:

Analysts suggest that Fubara's eventual presentation of the budget signals reconciliation of the rift between him and the FCT Minister that had plunged the state into a political crisis. Fubara has withdrawn from 2027 reelection.

He has pledged support to the anointed successor. This means funds from government may be expended henceforth to run campaigns. Whatever is agreed needs the budget to be approved first.

Suspicion was high that the budget was to remain unapproved and funds were to remain untouched till the next governor would take over and may beet over N1trn in account and use it 'better'.

Politics

Kano APC disputes NDC's defection claims, accuses Kwankwasiyya of political diversion

ADEOLA AJAKAIYE, Kano

The All Progressives Congress (APC) in Kano State has dismissed claims that its members in Kumbotso Local Government Area have defected to the National Democratic Congress (NDC), insisting the party remains united and retains a strong grassroots structure in the area as political activities ahead of the 2027 general elections gather momentum.

Auwalu Soja, the APC State publicity secretary, said in a statement issued on Wednesday that reports of mass defections were false and intended to divert public attention from what he described as internal challenges within the Kwankwasiyya movement.

He maintained that the APC still enjoys the support of key political stakeholders and loyal members across Kumbotso, adding that the party has no record of the individuals allegedly said to have abandoned its fold.

According to Soja, the identities of the purported defectors remain unknown to the party, making the claims unverifiable and lacking in credibility.

"The APC remains intact in Kumbotso. Our members are united, committed and fully aligned with the leadership of the party in Kano State. Those being paraded as defectors are unknown to our structures," he said.

Soja attributed the continued loyalty of party members in the local government to ongoing Federal Government infrastructure projects, including the Ajaokuta-Kaduna-Kano (AKK) Gas Pipeline and the Kaduna-Kano-Maradi standard gauge railway, both of which pass through parts of Kumbotso.

He also said that APC members appreciate the investment initiatives being attracted to Kumbotso by Abba Kabir Yusuf, noting that the projects are expected to stimulate economic growth and expand employment opportunities for young people.

The APC spokesman urged the Kwankwasiyya movement to concentrate on resolving what he described as its internal leadership crisis instead of engaging in propaganda.

He argued that Kano voters are becoming increasingly discerning and would not be persuaded by what he called politically motivated claims of mass defections.

Soja therefore, called on residents to disregard reports circulating on social media alleging that APC members in Kumbotso had joined the NDC, reiterating that the ruling party remains firmly established in the local government.

The APC's reaction followed an earlier statement by the Kwankwasiyya movement, which had claimed that several APC members in Kumbotso formally defected to the NDC, describing the development as another indication of growing support for the opposition coalition in Kano State.

According to the Kwankwasiyya movement, the defectors were received at a political gathering attended by party supporters and local coordinators, where they were welcomed into the NDC. The group claimed that the new entrants cited dissatisfaction with the APC's leadership and the desire to align with what they described as a broader movement for political change ahead of the 2027 elections.

The movement further alleged that the defections reflected increasing public confidence in the NDC and predicted that more APC members across Kano's 44 local government areas would join the party in the coming months.

However, the APC has rejected the claims in their entirety, insisting that no recognised member of its Kumbotso structure defected and describing the announcement as a political stunt aimed at creating a false impression of declining support for the ruling party.

The exchange marks the latest in a series of verbal confrontations between the APC and the Kwankwasiyya movement as political parties intensify grassroots mobilisation and seek to consolidate support across Kano State ahead of the 2027 elections.

Kogi 2027: Faleke-Bello rivalry rekindles as APC power struggle deepens ahead of governorship race

ADEOLA AJAKAIYE, Kano

Fresh political undercurrents are emerging within the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Kogi State as renewed signs of a supremacy contest between James Faleke, member representing Ikeja Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, and Yahaya Bello, former governor of Kogi State, continues to dominate political discourse ahead of the next governorship succession battle.

Although the next governorship election is still some distance away, political stakeholders believe the struggle for influence within the ruling party has already begun, with analysts suggesting that the contest is less about party administration and more about who will ultimately shape the APC's future and determine its governorship candidate after the tenure of Governor Usman Ahmed Ododo in 2028.

The renewed political calculations come against the backdrop of growing agitation by leaders and stakeholders from Kogi West Senatorial District, particularly the Okun-speaking people, who have consistently argued that it is time for their region to produce the state's governor for the first time since Kogi was created in 1991. The agitation has continued to gather momentum, with many political actors insisting that power rotation and equity should guide the choice of the APC's next governorship candidate.

Within those conversations, James Faleke has increasingly been mentioned by supporters across Kogi West as one of the leading political figures who could spearhead the district's quest for the state's highest office. While Faleke has not publicly declared an intention to contest the governorship election, speculation within political circles suggests he could emerge as a major contender should the race become open.

Political observers argue that such a development could place him on a collision course with Yahaya Bello, whose influence within the APC remains significant following his eight-year administration. Bello is widely regarded as one of the dominant political figures in Kogi politics and is seen by many as the principal political ally of Governor Usman Ahmed Ododo, who assumed office in January 2024.

There is widespread speculation among political watchers that Bello's camp is focused on preserving its grip on the APC structure while ensuring continuity of its political influence beyond the current administration in 2028. Although no official position has been announced regarding succession plans, discussions within the party suggest that control of the APC machinery will be a decisive factor in determining the direction of the governorship race.

Supporters of Faleke, on the other hand, are believed to view the coming political season as an opportunity to revive the governorship ambition that ended under extraordinary circumstances nearly a decade ago.

Faleke was the running mate to the late Abubakar Audu, the APC governorship candidate in the 2015 election, when Audu died before the conclusion of the electoral process. Following legal and political developments at the time, the APC substituted Yahaya Bello as its governorship candidate, a decision that eventually paved the way for Bello's emergence as governor after the supplementary election. The episode remains one of the most defining moments in Kogi's political history and continues to shape alignments within the state's political landscape.


Yahaya Bello

The renewed interest in Faleke's political future has also been linked to his growing profile within the APC at the national level. His recent appointment into the Lagos State Governor's Advisory Council has further fuelled speculation among supporters that he may be positioning for a return to frontline politics in his home state, although he has yet to make any formal declaration regarding the governorship contest.


James Faleke

Analysts believe that as the political calendar gradually moves closer to the next election cycle, the battle for the soul of the Kogi APC could intensify. The eventual outcome may not only determine the party's governorship candidate but could also redefine existing political alliances across the state's three senatorial districts.

For many observers, the unfolding political contest is increasingly being viewed as a clash between continuity and a growing demand for power shift. While Bello's political structure is expected to remain a formidable force within the APC, advocates of the Okun governorship project argue that the time has come for Kogi West to occupy the Lugard House after decades of waiting.

Whether the APC eventually embraces continuity under Bello's enduring influence or yields to mounting calls for an Okun candidate remains uncertain. However, what is becoming increasingly clear is that the struggle for control of the ruling party has begun well ahead of the governorship race, setting the stage for what could become one of the defining political battles in Kogi State's recent history.

Politics

As 2027 campaigns near, hardship threatens to overshadow reform gains

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

As political parties prepare to commence campaigns for the 2027 general election next month, many Nigerians are entering the electoral season with a sense of frustration rather than optimism.

Three years after President Bola Tinubu assumed office and launched some of the most far-reaching economic reforms in decades, the gap between government assurances and the daily realities of citizens remains wide. While officials point to improving economic indicators as evidence that the reforms are working, many households continue to grapple with rising living costs, shrinking purchasing power and worsening poverty.

For millions of Nigerians, the question is no longer whether the reforms were necessary but when, if ever, their benefits will become visible in their everyday lives.

The administration has repeatedly argued that the removal of petrol subsidy and the liberalisation of the foreign exchange market were unavoidable decisions needed to rescue the economy from years of distortions. Government officials maintain that the difficult adjustments are beginning to produce positive outcomes and that the country is gradually moving towards economic stability.

Recent economic data appears to support part of that argument. Nigeria's foreign reserves have risen above $51 billion, their highest level in almost two decades. Economic growth accelerated to about 3.87 percent in 2025, while international credit rating agencies have acknowledged improvements in the country's fiscal position. Public revenues have also increased significantly following the end of fuel subsidies and reforms in the foreign exchange market.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) echoed some of these positive developments in its July 2026 World Economic Outlook Update.

"Nigeria is supported by improved macroeconomic stability and favourable terms-of-trade effects, though higher prices for essentials are expected to further aggravate poverty and food insecurity," the Fund stated.

That single sentence captures the contradiction defining Nigeria's economy today.

L-R: The Deputy Governor, Economic Policy, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Mr. Philip Ikeazor; the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr. Taiwo Oyedele; the Governor, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Mr. Olayemi Cardoso; and the Deputy Governor (Corporate Services) at the CBN, Dr. Muhammad Sani Abdullahi, when the minister paid a working visit to the CBN Head Office, Abuja, on Friday, July 10, 2026.

At the macro level, the country appears more stable than it was three years ago. At the household level, many citizens say life has become considerably harder.

Across urban centres and rural communities, the effects of inflation continue to dominate daily conversations. Food prices remain elevated despite periodic declines in headline inflation. Transportation costs consume a larger portion of household incomes. Rent, healthcare and education expenses have risen sharply, forcing families to make difficult choices about spending priorities.

The result is an economy where positive national statistics coexist with deepening hardship.

For many Nigerians, the reforms have translated into immediate pain with few visible rewards. While government revenues have improved, citizens often question whether those gains have translated into better public services, improved infrastructure or stronger social protection.

This disconnect has become increasingly significant as the country moves closer to another election cycle.

Citizens who were urged to endure temporary hardship in anticipation of future prosperity are beginning to ask how much longer the waiting period will last.

According to IMF estimates, the proportion of Nigerians living below the national poverty line rose from 56 percent in 2023 to 61 percent in 2024 before reaching 63 percent in 2025.

Those percentages represent more than statistical trends. They reflect the lived experiences of millions of households whose economic conditions have deteriorated despite signs of broader macroeconomic recovery.

The IMF's 2026 Article IV Consultation estimated that about 27 million Nigerians faced severe food insecurity, driven by high transport costs, rising food prices and disruptions to agricultural supply chains.

Independent estimates based on World Bank data suggest the situation may be worsening.

Enugu State Forest Guard issues standing operational order

...Harps on discipline, professionalism

REGIS ANUKWUOJI

The Enugu State Forest Guard has issued a new Order introducing comprehensive standards governing the dress code, operational turnout, accoutrements, corporate identity, discipline, and professional appearance of all officers and operatives of the Corps.

The new policy issued entitled Headquarters Standing Operational Order No. 178/2026 was announced by the the Commander of the Enugu State Forest Guard, Akinbayo Olasoji, in Enugu.

He said the reforms are fully aligned with the vision of the Governor of Enugu State, Peter Ndubuisi Mbah, to build a disciplined, intelligence-driven, technologically enabled, and highly professional security architecture capable of safeguarding lives, property, forests, and other critical assets across the State.

A statement issued by Geraldine Chiagozie, an Assistant Superintendent of Forest Guard, Olasoji stated that the Order formed part of the ongoing institutional reforms aimed at strengthening discipline, reinforcing command and control, enhancing operational professionalism, and projecting a distinctive corporate identity for the Corps.

"As the operational activities of the Forest Guard continue to receive increasing public visibility through field operations, community engagements, television, radio, newspapers, and digital media platforms, it has become imperative to institutionalize uniform standards that reflect the discipline, professionalism, and values expected of a modern government security organization.

"The Standing Operational Order prescribes approved uniforms and their designated days of wear, operational dress for bush-combing and other field deployments, standards for approved accoutrements, lanyards, rank insignia, footwear, and personal grooming. It also establishes special dress codes for Administrative Officers and the Provost Unit to promote uniformity, professionalism, and easy identification throughout the Corps.

"The Order further prohibits the wearing of unauthorised uniforms, civilian attire (mufti) without authorization while on official duty, unauthorized footwear, and the use or public display of improvised wooden weapons during official assignments.

"It emphasizes that only Headquarters-approved uniforms, equipment, and accoutrements shall be worn by personnel in the discharge of official duties."

2027: LP names Bintu Konto as party's VP candidate, seeks Nigerians support

AKOMBO AONDONA

The National Leadership of the Labour Party has said that it was pleased to formally unveil Hajja Bintu Konto as the party's Vice Presidential Candidate for the 2027 presidential election, to run alongside the party's Presidential Candidate, Chibuzo Okereke.

Ken Eluma Asogwa, national publicity secretary, Labour Party in a statement in Abuja said the party's decision followed extensive consultations across critical stakeholders of the party and reflects the unwavering commitment to presenting Nigerians with a ticket that embodies competence, integrity, inclusiveness, patriotism and proven capacity for public service.

Bintu Konto is a distinguished public health expert, humanitarian leader and development practitioner whose professional career spans over three decades of dedicated service in healthcare delivery, community development, humanitarian intervention and stakeholder engagement.

Her impressive record of service, particularly in conflict-affected communities across Northern Nigeria, has earned her widespread respect as a bridge-builder, consensus mobiliser and compassionate leader.

Following a distinguished career with Catholic Relief Services, from which she has since retired, Konto served in several strategic leadership capacities, including as Community and Government Liaison Programme Officer. Throughout her career, she led high-level engagement with governments, traditional institutions, civil society organisations and local communities in advancing health, nutrition, WASH and humanitarian programmes.

She also held several leadership positions across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States, coordinating community mobilisation, humanitarian response and multisectoral interventions that improved the lives of thousands of vulnerable Nigerians, including internally displaced persons.

A trained Nurse, Midwife, Health Educator and Public Health Specialist, Hajja Konto holds a Master's Degree in Public Health and has also served as a lecturer in Community Health, contributing significantly to the training of future health professionals. She currently serves as a Member of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) of the Global Fund in Nigeria and is the National Treasurer of the Civil Society for Malaria Control, Immunization and Nutrition (ACOMIN), among several other professional affiliations.

Her vast experience in governance engagement, humanitarian coordination, conflict-sensitive programming, women's empowerment, community mobilisation and public policy implementation.

Politics

We're fully prepared for the next year general elections - APM presidential candidate, Makinde

AYUBA MAFFI, Bauchi

The presidential candidate of the Allied People's Movement (APM) and the Governor of Oyo State, Seyi Makinde, on Friday said that the party was fully prepared for the 2027 general election.

Makinde said this during his visitation to Governor Bala Mohammed Abdulkadir of Bauchi State, which held at the Ramat House, Bauchi.

"Consulting with my brother is a no-brainer because if I have challenges, before I run to anybody, I'll run to somebody that I know is of the same stock as myself," Makinde said.

He disclosed that security dominated discussions, saying Bauchi's experience offered practical lessons that could be adapted in Oyo State.

"I wanted to run a few things by him, and it's no regret that I came here because I'm fully briefed and I'm taking back with me ideas that we may want to also try out in our state,"

Makinde also said the meeting reviewed the state of the APM and the country's democratic journey, stressing that the party was determined to provide Nigerians with a credible alternative built on constructive engagement rather than political hostility.

"We discussed issues surrounding our party and the future of democracy in Nigeria," he said.

Bala Mohammed described the visit as a continuation of the long-standing peer-review culture among governors, where leaders exchange ideas and adopt best practices to improve governance and tackle shared challenges.

"Governance is a continuous collaboration and interaction with our colleagues at the sub-national, even at the national level, to look at challenges and borrow ideas from each other," he said.

He commended Makinde's achievements in infrastructural development and public service delivery, describing the Oyo governor as a visionary leader whose performance had transformed the state.

"When you go to Oyo, you will not know that it is the same city. It is now a new city with big roads, with an airport and what have you," he said.

Governor Bala Mohammed further said that their party, APM, was steadily emerging as Nigeria's next major opposition party, driven by competent leadership and a commitment to national development.

"The APM is growing as the next opposition party that is ready and repositioning itself to give constructive opposition in the country.

"We have the knowledge and the human capital to deliver if given the opportunity," Bala Mohammed said.

Cross River's Chief of Staff hails Imoke's enduring legacy as ex-governor clocks 65

EMMANUEL SALAWU

Chief of Staff to the Governor of Cross River State, Emmanuel Ironbar, has felicitated former governor of Cross River State, Senator Liyel Imoke, on the occasion of his 65th birthday, describing him as an accomplished statesman whose years in public service left an enduring imprint on the political and developmental landscape of the state.

In a goodwill message to commemorate the milestone, Ironbar said Senator Imoke's 65th birthday presents an opportunity for Cross Riverians to celebrate a leader whose commitment to service, institutional development and people-centred governance continues to inspire successive generations of public office holders.

According to the Chief of Staff, Imoke's distinguished career—from his election into the Senate at a youthful age, through his service in the Federal Executive Council, to his stewardship as Governor of Cross River State—epitomised dedication, patriotism and an unwavering resolve to advance the common good.

"His Excellency, Senator Liyel Imoke belongs to that distinguished class of leaders whose contributions transcend the tenure of office. His commitment to building institutions, expanding opportunities for the people and strengthening the foundations of governance remains a defining feature of his public life," Ironbar stated.

He particularly commended the former governor's enduring commitment to rural development, noting that Imoke consistently demonstrated that governance must be measured by its impact on the most vulnerable and underserved members of society.

"Senator Imoke was a passionate advocate of taking government to the grassroots. His administration expanded access to primary healthcare across communities, opened up rural areas through strategic road infrastructure and pursued policies that brought essential public services closer to the people. Those interventions reflected a deep understanding that development must be inclusive and must reach every corner of the state," he said.

Ironbar observed that many of the initiatives implemented during the Imoke administration continue to bear testimony to the enduring value of visionary leadership anchored on compassion, equity and sustainable development. He added that the former governor's emphasis on rural inclusion remains a worthy example for leaders committed to improving the welfare of ordinary citizens.

The Chief of Staff further prayed that the occasion would afford the former governor renewed strength and fulfilment, expressing confidence that his wealth of experience and statesmanship would continue to enrich public discourse and contribute to the progress of Cross River State and Nigeria.

"As you celebrate your 65th birthday, I join your family, friends, associates and countless well-wishers in thanking Almighty God for a life of impactful service and remarkable accomplishments.

Red Chamber

Beyond the N1.3bn PFIPC Scandal: How the Senate lost control of budget it passed

TOPE OMOGBOLAGUN

It was not the allegation itself that shocked many observers of the National Assembly. Nigeria has witnessed budget controversies before.

What made the Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council (PFIPC) affair different was that, even after the Presidency publicly disowned the council and directed the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to investigate its activities, senators themselves were still searching for answers.

One of them was Senator Suleiman Kawu Sumaila.

Standing on the floor of the Senate, the Kano South lawmaker did not merely ask for an investigation into the mysterious N1.302 billion allocation to the PFIPC.

He warned that the controversy threatened "the integrity of the Senate," exposed weaknesses in legislative scrutiny and risked eroding public confidence in the National Assembly.

Hours later, while speaking with journalists, he insisted that the President's directive to the ICPC could not replace a legislative investigation.

More revealingly, he acknowledged that lawmakers themselves needed to know how the budget line found its way into the 2026 Appropriation Act.

That admission may well become the defining moment of the entire controversy.

It suggested that the biggest question was no longer whether a controversial budget line existed.

Rather, it was whether the institution constitutionally entrusted with approving the nation's spending had become increasingly detached from the very process it was meant to scrutinise.

That is why the PFIPC controversy is bigger than N1.3 billion.

It is a story about legislative oversight, transparency and whether the Senate is gradually losing its grip on one of its most important constitutional responsibilities, the power of appropriation.

The motion sponsored by Kawu was remarkable, not because it accused anyone of wrongdoing, but because of what it revealed about the Senate's own concerns.

In seeking an investigation, the senator noted that while senior Presidency officials had publicly described the PFIPC as a "fake," "fictitious" and unauthorised entity, the same organisation appeared in the 2026 Appropriation Act under Budget Code 0111062001 with an allocation of N1,302,978,784, comprising personnel costs, overhead and capital expenditure.

He warned that the development raised "serious questions regarding the integrity of the budget preparation and appropriation process."

The motion went further.

It argued that the inclusion of a purportedly non-existent entity in the national budget "undermines the credibility of the appropriation process, exposes weaknesses in institutional budgetary scrutiny, erodes public confidence in the National Assembly, and subjects the Federal Government to avoidable domestic and international criticism regarding transparency, accountability and fiscal governance."

Those were not accusations from opposition politicians or civil society organisations. They were concerns formally placed before the Senate by one of its own members who also belonged to the All Progressive Congress.

Even more striking was what followed.

Addressing journalists after his motion was rejected, Kawu explained that his concern extended beyond the alleged existence of the PFIPC.

What he wanted to establish was how the allocation found its way into a budget already passed by the National Assembly and assented to by the President.

"I am more concerned about the budget because it directly affects our National Assembly," he said.

He explained that budgetary provisions could originate from either the Executive or the Legislature during appropriation, adding that lawmakers deserved to know where the proposal came from.

"This is what I am after," he said.

His remarks exposed a troubling reality.

If a senator moving a motion on the floor of the chamber is publicly admitting that he is still searching for answers about an allocation contained in a law passed by Parliament, then the issue extends beyond one budget line.

Kawu emphatically told journalists that he was not alone as many other senators were also on the same page as him.

It raises broader questions about the quality of legislative scrutiny during the appropriation process.

For those who have covered the National Assembly over successive assemblies, the PFIPC affair did not emerge in isolation.

It exposed a gradual but unmistakable shift in how Nigeria's budget is scrutinised.

During much of the 8th Senate and significant periods of the 9th Senate, budget defence was arguably the busiest season in the National Assembly.

Committee rooms remained occupied for weeks, sometimes months.

Ministers, permanent secretaries and heads of agencies appeared before lawmakers to defend every aspect of their proposals.

Journalists moved from one committee room to another, following lengthy sessions where lawmakers questioned expenditure patterns, challenged revenue projections and demanded explanations for new projects and recurrent spending.

The process was not flawless. Politics often influenced outcomes. Constituency projects generated controversy. Executive-legislative disagreements delayed passage. Yet one feature remained largely intact: rigorous scrutiny.

Budget defence was a public exercise.

It was difficult for significant appropriations to escape attention because hundreds of eyes; lawmakers, legislative aides, journalists, civil society groups and government officials were examining the figures simultaneously.

That culture appears to have changed.

In recent years, budget defence has become increasingly compressed.

Some committee engagements are concluded in remarkably short periods. Hearings often receive little public notice.

In several instances, agency heads spend only a few minutes before committees, exchange pleasantries, submit documents and depart after minimal interrogation.

For parliamentary correspondents, one of the biggest changes has been the gradual disappearance of the rigorous committee engagements that once defined budget season. Instead of moving from one hearing to another over several weeks, many proceedings now take place with limited visibility, making independent scrutiny considerably more difficult.

Whether this procedural shift directly contributed to the PFIPC controversy is for investigators to determine.

But it undoubtedly provides important context.

The controversy has exposed weaknesses that can emerge when legislative scrutiny becomes less visible, less rigorous and less participatory.

Equally significant was the Senate's response to Kawu's motion.

Rather than mandate its Committees on Ethics, Code of Conduct and Public Petitions and Appropriations to investigate the circumstances surrounding the PFIPC allocation, the Senate declined the request, citing the President's directive to the ICPC to investigate the matter.

From a constitutional standpoint, that decision deserves careful reflection.

Nigeria's democracy is built on the doctrine of separation of powers.

The Executive investigates crimes through agencies such as the ICPC, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Police.

The Legislature performs oversight over public institutions, public expenditure and implementation of laws.

These responsibilities are complementary, not interchangeable.

The ICPC can determine whether offences such as forgery, impersonation, fraud or abuse of office were committed.

Only the Senate, however, can answer institutional questions about its own appropriation process.

How did the PFIPC appear in the Appropriation Act?

Which ministry, department or agency proposed the allocation?

Was it part of the Executive's original estimates?

Was it introduced during legislative consideration?

Which committees scrutinised it?

Were established procedures followed?

Did anyone object during appropriation?

Those questions fall squarely within Parliament's oversight responsibilities.

Historically, the National Assembly has not considered the existence of investigations by anti-corruption agencies as sufficient reason to suspend legislative inquiries.

Parliamentary investigations and criminal investigations have often proceeded simultaneously because they pursue different objectives.

The recognised limitation has generally been matters actively before the courts, where lawmakers avoid actions capable of prejudicing judicial proceedings.

Against that backdrop, the Senate's decision to defer entirely to the ICPC has attracted criticism from constitutional lawyers, governance advocates and legislative observers, who argue that Parliament appeared reluctant to interrogate its own processes.

That perception matters.

The National Assembly is not merely another public institution. It is the custodian of the nation's power of the purse.

Every appropriation reflects Parliament's approval.

Every budget line carries legislative authority.

Every naira authorised for expenditure passes through the National Assembly.

Consequently, any suggestion that questionable allocations can find their way into the budget without lawmakers fully understanding how they got there strikes at the heart of legislative credibility.

The PFIPC controversy is therefore not simply about whether N1.302 billion was appropriated for a council the Presidency now says does not exist.

It is about whether the safeguards within Nigeria's appropriation process remain sufficiently robust.

It is about whether committees are still conducting the level of scrutiny expected of them.

It is about whether transparency has gradually given way to expediency.

And it is about whether ordinary lawmakers have become increasingly detached from decisions that shape the country's annual spending.

Perhaps, that explains why Kawu's motion focused repeatedly on one phrase: the integrity of the Senate.

Because ultimately, institutions are judged not only by the laws they pass, but by their willingness to question themselves when those laws come under scrutiny.

The PFIPC affair may eventually reveal who inserted the controversial budget line and whether any laws were broken. The ICPC may establish criminal culpability where appropriate.

But those findings alone will not resolve the larger institutional question now confronting the Senate.

How did the country's foremost lawmaking body find itself debating an appropriation that many of its own members were still struggling to explain?

Until that question is answered, the PFIPC controversy will remain more than another budget scandal.

It will stand as a cautionary tale about what happens when legislative oversight loses the rigour, transparency and institutional confidence that once defined Nigeria's appropriation process.

From Other Lands

Mystery airstrikes hit Iran after US declares military operations complete

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN
with Agency Report

Fresh airstrikes struck several parts of Iran on Thursday despite the United States declaring that it had completed its military operations, raising new questions about who may have carried out the attacks.

No group or country claimed responsibility for the strikes, which occurred as Iran prepared for the funeral of its late Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The attacks hit multiple locations across southern Iran, including Bushehr and Sistan and Baluchestan provinces, as well as the cities of Ahvaz and Chabahar.

Iranian authorities have not directly accused any country of carrying out the strikes. However, an Iranian lawmaker alleged that the United Arab Emirates had supported the U.S. military campaign against Iran.

The UAE and other Gulf Arab states, which have repeatedly come under Iranian attacks since the conflict began on Feb. 28, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The latest developments come as Gulf countries and the United States continue to insist that the Strait of Hormuz remain open to international shipping.

Iran, however, maintains that it should exercise sole control over the strategic waterway and has argued that vessels using the strait should pay transit fees to Tehran, despite its longstanding status as an international shipping route.

Before the conflict, roughly one-fifth of the world's traded oil and natural gas passed through the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's disruption of shipping during the war triggered a global energy crisis, although oil prices have since retreated from wartime peaks of about $120 per barrel.

Israel, which participated in military operations against Iran earlier in the conflict, has also not claimed responsibility for the latest strikes.

Additional Explosions Reported After U.S. Declared Operations Complete

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) announced at about 6:30 a.m. local time on Thursday that it had concluded a wave of strikes targeting 90 sites in Iran.

Shortly afterward, Iranian state media and local news outlets reported additional explosions and airstrikes in several parts of the country.

CENTCOM did not respond to requests for comment regarding the reported attacks.

Iran retaliated later on Thursday with a broader wave of missile attacks targeting Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar.

Air raid sirens sounded across the four countries, forcing residents to seek shelter. Authorities in Kuwait reported that one person was injured while air defense systems intercepted incoming missiles.

The renewed exchange of attacks further strained an already fragile ceasefire between Tehran and Washington.

On Friday, U.S. President Donald Trump reiterated on social media that he considered the interim agreement "OVER!"

At the same time, Trump said the United States would continue negotiations aimed at reaching a permanent end to the conflict.

A spokesperson for U.S. Central Command, Capt. Tim Hawkins, said there were "no operational updates" following the president's remarks.

Iran Says It Will Honor Deal if U.S. Does

Speaking at United Nations headquarters, Iran's ambassador said Tehran remained committed to the ceasefire agreement provided Washington fulfilled its obligations.

Iran would continue implementing the agreement if the United States "fully and faithfully complies with its own obligations," Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani said.

"And if not, Iran will no longer be bound by its obligations" under the agreement, he added.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts intensified across the Gulf.

UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan traveled to Kuwait after the Iranian attacks for talks with the country's emir.

Gulf Arab governments also held discussions with Qatar's foreign minister, who has played a central role, alongside Pakistan, in mediating talks between Iran and the United States.

Trump's Patriot production pledge offers long-term boost for Ukraine

US President Donald Trump's proposal to allow Ukraine to produce Patriot air defense systems could significantly strengthen Kyiv's long-term defense capabilities, but military experts and Ukrainian officials caution that turning the promise into operational weapons is likely to take years.

Speaking alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at a NATO summit in Ankara, Turkey, on Wednesday, Trump said Washington would grant Ukraine a license to manufacture the U.S.-designed Patriot system, which has become one of Kyiv's most sought-after weapons for defending against Russian missile and drone attacks.

"We'll give them the right to make Patriots. We'll show them how to do it," Trump said. "I think they can produce them pretty quickly."

However, the announcement left unanswered a key question: what exactly Ukraine would be permitted to manufacture.

"America has recognized Ukraine as a country that is ready to do this," Zelenskyy told reporters on Thursday, adding that Ukrainian and American officials must now work "without pauses" to finalize the licensing arrangements.

Scope of Production Remains Unclear

Patriot interceptor missiles, used to destroy incoming missiles, drones and aircraft, are manufactured by U.S. defense companies Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, a division of RTX.

Analysts say a production license would not necessarily allow Ukraine to build complete Patriot systems, including launchers, radar stations, command centers and missiles.

Instead, the agreement could initially cover the production of interceptor missiles, final assembly using imported component kits or manufacturing of selected parts.

Serhii Beskrestnov, an adviser to Ukraine's defense minister, said such a license would typically include technical documentation, specialist training, supplier contacts and support from foreign consultants to help establish production.

Other defense experts expect any arrangement to begin on a smaller scale before expanding into broader manufacturing.

Anatolii Khrapchynskyi, development director of Ukrainian defense company Fly Group Ukraine, said Trump's remarks lacked specificity.

He noted that the president referred broadly to producing "Patriots," without clarifying whether he meant missiles, launchers, radar systems, command centers or individual components.

Khrapchynskyi said manufacturing Patriot missiles alone would require an extensive industrial network involving hundreds of suppliers producing engines, guidance systems, control surfaces, communications equipment and other specialized parts.

The Trump administration has not released further details of the proposed licensing agreement.

Iran war: Trump in assassination attempt as Israel reportedly shared new intelligence

AKOMBO AONDONA

Israel has reportedly shared new intelligence with the United States indicating that Iran may be planning an assassination attempt against President Donald Trump, allegedly in retaliation for the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

According to the reports, Israeli intelligence recently alerted U.S. officials to what it described as a new Iranian plot targeting Trump. While the exact details of the alleged plan have not been made public, the intelligence reportedly prompted heightened security discussions between Washington and Jerusalem.

U.S. officials have not publicly confirmed the existence of a specific, imminent assassination plot. However, reports say American intelligence has been monitoring persistent threats against Trump from Iranian-linked actors, with the latest Israeli warning focusing on a newly identified threat.

The reported warning comes amid sharply escalating tensions between the United States and Iran following the killing of Ayatollah Khamenei and renewed military confrontations in the region. Trump has previously declared that if Iran were to succeed in assassinating him, the United States would respond with overwhelming military force.

Food & Beverages

Food & Beverages
With
Ayo Oyoze Baje

Appraisal of FG's cocoa value chain support

Back in 1960, as at political independence Nigeria was renowned as a country with huge agricultural potentials.

In fact, commodities such as rice, maize, yam, rubber, cassava, cotton and cocoa were the backbone of the economy, contributing about 30percent to Nigeria's foreign exchange revenues with a dominant share of its GDP.

But by 2026, cocoa export's direct contribution to overall GDP is a dismal sub-1percent, though it remains the leading agricultural export.

A critical look at the shift between 1960 and 2026 shows that as at 1960 known as the Agrarian Era, agriculture contributed over 60percent of the total GDP, and cocoa was the single highest source of foreign exchange and government revenue.

So profound was the impact that the income from cocoa funded major foundational infrastructure projects in the then Chief Obafemi Awolowo -led Western Region, cementing it as the premier economic driver for the newly independent nation. But as of 2026 during the current he Oil-Dependent Era, the discovery and dominance of the petroleum sector in the 1970s vastly shifted Nigeria's economic paradigm.

This has caused the direct contribution of cocoa to total GDP to drop to below 1percent. Despite this drop with regards to overall GDP contribution, cocoa remains highly lucrative in raw financial terms. The crop accounts for roughly 24percent to 30percent of Nigeria's non-oil export earnings.

Considering the market revenue and buoyed by sustained high global prices, Nigeria's targeted export earnings for cocoa sit in the multi-billion-dollar range. That is, with raw and processed exports making up a vital part of the Superior-quality cocoa beans led exports. So, it is gratifying that the federal government is driving cocoa value chain support through the One Million Improved Cocoa Seedlings Roll-Out Programme. But what is it all about and how beneficial would it be in terms of economic value chain? The answer is not far-fetched.

The Roll&,Out Programme is targeting farmers across 14 producing states. Spearheaded by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the initiative aims

to rehabilitate aging plantations, boost export earnings, and improve compliance with global sustainability regulations. This is a noble initiative.

The support begins with seedlings' distribution of 1 million disease-resistant and climate-resilient hybrid cocoa seedlings to replace old, unproductive trees.

And there are: ongoing plans to resuscitate state-owned processing facilities and establish cottage factories to transition from raw bean exports to local processing and finished products.

Good enough, there are measures being taken for global compliance: alignment with the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). The aim is to ensure Nigerian cocoa remains competitive in international markets, heavily emphasizing farm traceability and sustainable farming.

As far as Extension Services are concerned there are strengthening agricultural advisory services and farmer training programs to help farmers adopt climate-smart practices and improve yield per hectare.

On how to access and benefit farmers seeking to plug into these federal interventions, they are advised to connect with local chapters of the Cocoa Farmers Association of Nigeria (CFAN). They can also reach out to their respective State Ministries of Agriculture. State governments—such as those in Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun—routinely partner with the federal government to ensure these inputs and financing initiatives reach registered cooperative clusters

Vied objectively, this is a bold and timely intervention because of what the Nigerian cocoa industry has witnessed over the decades. Yet, it is the largest agricultural non-oil export earner and is valued at approximately $6 billion. The sector generates over N356 billion annually for the GDP, accounting for roughly 5.6 percent of all non-oil exports. It directly employs over 300,000 smallholder farmers.

On the core economic value, Nigeria is the third-largest producer in Africa, generating up to $700 million from raw bean exports annually, with recent export revenues hitting N1.23 trillion year-on-year.

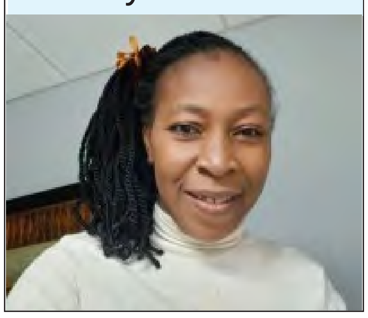
Cultivating an estimated 1.4 million hectares of land, the industry sustains local economies by providing a primary source of livelihood in major producing states like Ondo, Cross River, and Osun. Industrial Processing Potential:

While the bulk of cocoa is exported as raw beans, the push for domestic processing into chocolate, cosmetics, and beverages is projected to unlock an estimated $25 billion in potential market value.

Despite its massive footprint, the sector suffers from a lack of mechanised infrastructure. Nigeria loses around 90,000 tonnes of cocoa (equivalent to $180 million) every year due to inadequate processing and storage facilities. Additionally, the dominance of aging farmers and aging cocoa trees creates systemic yield gaps. For more insights into the macroeconomic performance of the sector, you can track current non-oil export data via the Nigerian Export Promotion Council.

To walk the talk on this potentially great programme with value addition the plans for full implementation at the states concerned should be well articulated. Funds should be provided as at when due. There should be records of progress made and challenges to be overcome. And above all, it must not be politicised.

Gourmet Guide
with
Lydia Eke



Cooked fresh corn and pear: Nigerian Superfood that can make UNESCO iCH List

Boiled fresh or cooked fresh corn and a living heritage of Ube (African pear) are age long street snacks in Nigeria. The rainy seasons of the tropical nation makes it possible for these homecooked delights to be well relished by foodies.

These two jolly good fellows are a timeless symbol of age long South Eastern traditions, cultural identity and community life, which has over the years, dovetailed into a national, continental and global phenomenon.

Very popular during the rainy season, this combination is enjoyed across Nigeria's eastern, southern and central regions as well as the west and the south.

Permit me to describe this combo as unity food and snacks.

This culinary combo represents a shared culinary tradition that cuts across ethnic, social, and generational lines, making it a powerful candidate for global recognition by UNESCO.

Cooked corn is also referred to as mouth organ in many parts of the world, but come to Nigeria, and understand that this popular street snack is well relished as a well-known street food. This is because eating so much can be filling and wholesome.

The same cooked corn can be roasted and grilled.

Although we simply say corn – the yoruba will say agbado, the ibo will say oka, while the hausa will say masara, and of course, other Nigerian ethnic groups have their names as well.

The 'cornfull' season between March and September of every year is always delightful as women and men are seen around the Nigerian community selling the yellow coloured 'agbado' while corn lovers are also seen buying and munching what is popularly known as 'mouth organ'.

To make this a complete delicacy, fresh cooked corn usually would be accompanied by freshly melted hot or warm butter looking African pear, which is known as Ube.

Described as people's favourite filling snack especially here in Nigeria, cooked corn becomes a traditional and cultural delight as small scale and large scale corn sellers are seen all over the place, boiling the popular food over charcoal embers on street corners, beckoning at passers-by to come and a bite!

This is why the combination of these duo should be comfortably considered for the UN list.

These humble friends are deeply woven into Nigeria's food culture. As they evoke strong memories of rainy days, school breaks, village visits, and communal eating under makeshift roadside stalls and even lately, parties and owambe delights.

These seasonal delicacies bring people together, as quick street snacks, or a means of communal and villiage bonding moment with elders, or even as a treat during road travel.

Corn and Ube, have impacted the culinary landscape of the Nigerian and African society while their cultural value lie in their simplicity and universality among Nigerians.

The health and nutritional benefits of these foods further strengthen their global relevance. Corn is a good source of carbohydrates and fiber, while Ube, African pear is packed with vitamins, antioxidants, and essential oils. Together, they form a locally sourced, minimally processed superfood, perfect for today's movement toward healthy, sustainable eating.

Preparation and consumption of this combo are rooted in traditional knowledge.

Cooking corn over hot coals, and softening ube in warm water or embers, are practices passed down informally through generations.

Street vendors, mostly women, use age old techniques to deliver the perfect balance of flavour and texture, a culinary heritage kept alive in daily routines.

Beyond nutrition and tradition, this food combo is linked to oral storytelling, proverbs, and folk wisdom. Vendors and elders often share stories while serving customers. Children hear sayings like "Ube na oka bu nri ndi Igbo" (Pear and corn is Igbo food), reinforcing identity and belonging.

These cultural expressions add layers of meaning to the experience of eating these foods.

With proper documentation, including videos, photos, recipes, and community testimonies, this tradition can be safeguarded and promoted globally.

To achieve UNESCO recognition, the voice of community involvement, and government backing, cooked corn, and pear could proudly stand alongside other global food traditions, as a symbol of Nigeria's cultural pride and culinary excellence.

• Meanwhile, log on to the YouTube Channel, Gourmet Guide234 Kitchen and the food blog gourmetguide234.com to read more about food, nutrition, and all you need to know about food journalism. Feel free to send a mail to gourmetguide234@gmail.com

Editorial

Why Nigeria must start measuring what really matters

Nigeria is not short of policies. It is short of execution. Every administration promises economic diversification, improved infrastructure, better schools, quality healthcare, stronger security and industrial growth. New initiatives are unveiled, strategic plans launched, budgets approved and implementation committees inaugurated. Many projects stall before completion, reforms lose momentum and institutions struggle to translate ambition into measurable results. Nigeria's challenge is no longer identifying what should be done. It is building the capacity to do it.

This capacity deficit receives far less attention than inflation, debt or economic growth, yet it lies at the heart of many of Nigeria's development challenges.

Public debate is dominated by outcomes. Gross Domestic Product measures economic output. Inflation tracks the cost of living. Debt figures reveal government borrowing. Unemployment reflects labour market conditions. These indicators remain indispensable because they show the state of the economy. However, they reveal what has happened, not why it happened.

Economic performance is shaped long before official statistics are released. Budgets must be implemented on schedule. Procurement systems must function efficiently. Ministries, departments and agencies must coordinate effectively. Projects must be monitored from conception to completion, while regulators must enforce policies consistently. When these systems fail, even well-designed policies struggle to produce meaningful results.

This distinction explains why countries with similar resources often achieve vastly different outcomes. Singapore transformed itself into one of the world's most prosperous economies despite possessing few natural resources. Its success rested on institutions capable of executing long-term national priorities with discipline and consistency. Rwanda has similarly strengthened public sector performance through its performance management system, while Malaysia's former Performance Management and Delivery Unit demonstrated how sustained monitoring and accountability can accelerate the implementation of national priorities. These examples show that development depends not only on sound policies but also on institutions capable of delivering them.

The same principle applies beyond government. Many of the world's most successful companies owe their reputation less to revolutionary ideas than to their ability to execute ordinary strategies consistently. Vision may inspire an organisation, but execution determines whether that vision produces lasting results.

Nigeria has never lacked vision. Successive governments have articulated plans for industrialisation, infrastructure, education, healthcare, agriculture and economic transformation. Technical expertise has been assembled, funding secured and implementation frameworks announced. Delivery frequently remains fragmented. Projects experience delays, reforms fade after their launch and institutional coordination breaks down. The problem is therefore not simply policy failure but constrained execution capacity.

This reality should reshape how government performance is assessed. Public attention often focuses on policy announcements while comparatively little scrutiny is given to whether the institutions responsible for implementation possess the capability to succeed. Strong leadership is important, but leadership alone cannot compensate for weak systems. Sustainable development depends on institutions that continue to perform regardless of political transitions.

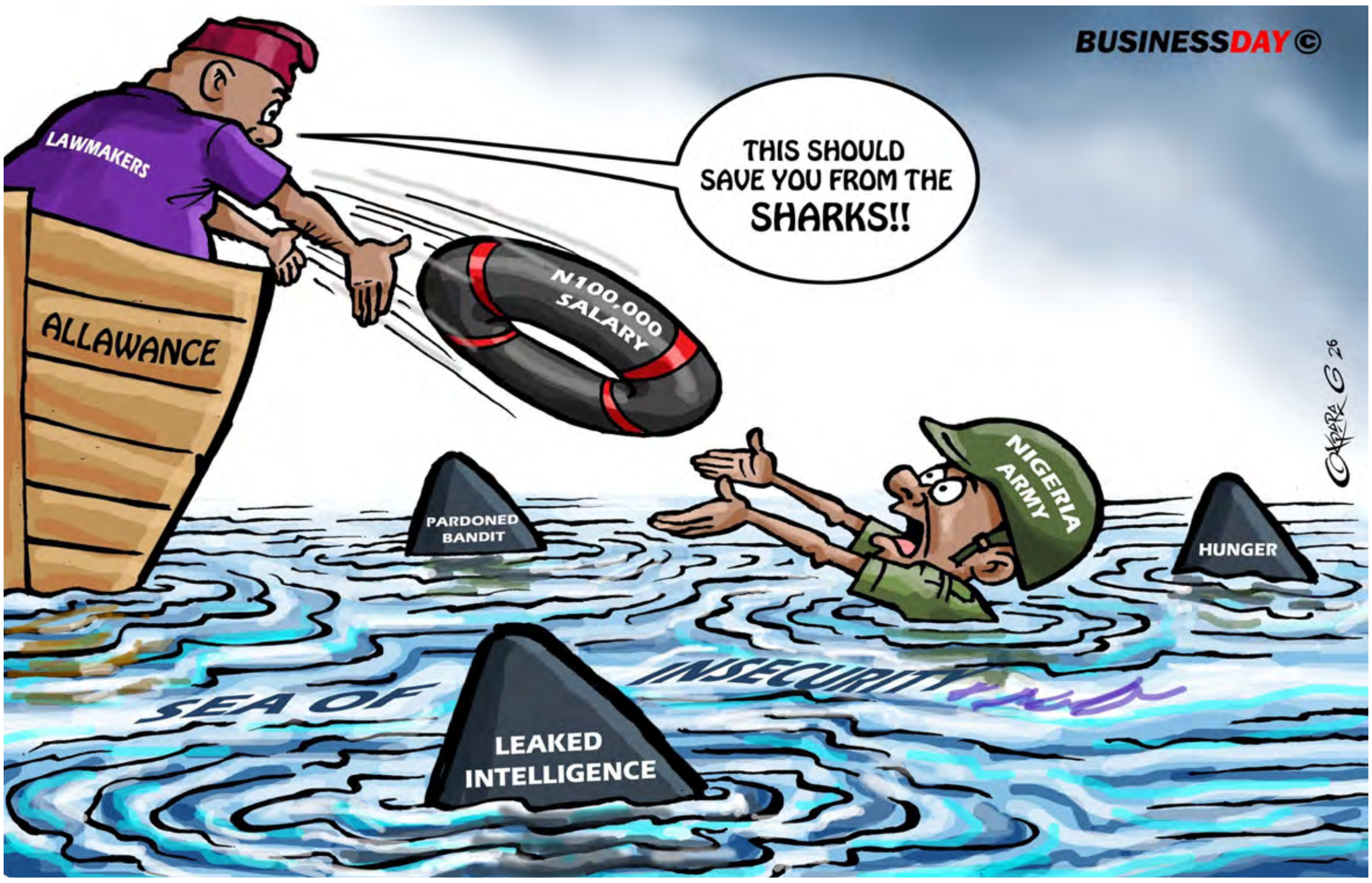
The implications extend beyond governance. Investors increasingly assess institutional quality alongside macroeconomic indicators when making long-term decisions. They look for predictable regulation, efficient public administration, timely project delivery, contract enforcement and policy consistency. A country with strong execution capacity inspires greater confidence because investors know that commitments are more likely to be honoured. Weak implementation, by contrast, increases uncertainty and discourages investment regardless of market size or natural resource endowment.

Nigeria must therefore broaden its understanding of accountability. Measuring GDP, inflation and unemployment will always remain essential, but these indicators should be complemented by regular assessments of institutional performance. Citizens deserve to know how efficiently budgets are implemented, how many public projects are completed on schedule, how effectively procurement systems operate, how well government agencies coordinate their responsibilities and whether public institutions consistently achieve their stated objectives. These are the leading indicators that shape future economic outcomes.

For too long, Nigeria has measured the consequences of weak governance while paying insufficient attention to the systems that produce those consequences. That imbalance must change. Measuring institutional capacity would not replace existing economic indicators. It would strengthen them by revealing whether the government possesses the machinery required to convert policy into performance.

Nigeria's future will not be determined solely by the quality of its policies or the abundance of its resources. It will depend on whether its institutions can consistently transform public decisions into measurable progress. Nations rarely fail because they lack ideas. They falter when the institutions responsible for implementing those ideas are unable to deliver.

If Nigeria is serious about sustainable development, it must begin measuring what has long been overlooked. Inflation, unemployment and debt are important indicators, but they are ultimately the consequences of institutional performance. Sustainable development begins long before GDP figures are published. It begins with institutions capable of turning national ambition into enduring results.



Perspective

IBIKUNLE 'KUNLE' OLATUNJI

How do you know your tax number is right?

.It is the simplest question an auditor can ask. It is also the one that can undo even the most respected companies. The world built an answer two decades ago. Africa is only now waking up to it.

The auditor is young and entirely unmoved by reputation. She has spent a week inside one of Lagos's most respected companies. This is a business with four decades behind it and a tax manager, Emeka, who has run its affairs for the better part of twenty years without ever being caught out. On the final afternoon she closes her laptop, looks across the table, and asks him one question. Walk me through how you know the tax figure in these accounts is correct. Not that it looks about right. How you know.

He starts to answer easily enough. Then something occurs that has never happened to him in two decades. He runs out of things to say. The number is correct, of that he has no doubt. Yet the whole of that certainty lives in his own head and in a spreadsheet only he can read. There is nothing on the table he can hand across that would prove it to anyone else.

Emeka is not incompetent. He is in truth very good. That is exactly what makes the silence so instructive. His difficulty is not that he lacks the answer. It is that his knowledge sits nowhere but in his own mind. It is governed by nothing and evidenced by nothing. So it is worth very little the moment he is asked to prove it. This is a failure of governance rather than expertise. It is one the corporate world has met before at ruinous cost.

The lesson of the collapse

That reckoning arrived most memorably in Houston. When Enron collapsed in 2001 and dragged a venerable auditor down with it, the wreckage laid bare how easily even celebrated companies could misstate their finances. No disciplined system stood behind the numbers. The American answer was the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. Its most consequential provision obliged management to document, test and vouch for the internal controls behind financial reporting. A figure could no longer simply be asserted. It had to emerge from a process that was written down, operated as described and checked by someone independent. Tax, among the most judgement-laden numbers in any set of accounts, sat squarely inside the new regime.

For tax functions long accustomed to running as a black box of expertise this amounted to a revolution. Every material tax number, from the position through to the handling of an uncertain position, now had to rest on a control that could be evidenced rather than a specialist who could merely be trusted. The discipline was uncomfortable at the outset and costly throughout. Yet it altered the culture of the function for good. Tax risk shifted from something discovered in the middle of a crisis to something managed by design. A generation of tax leaders learned to build the paper trail before it was demanded rather than after.

From discipline to doctrine

If Sarbanes-Oxley supplied the discipline the OECD supplied the doctrine. In 2016 it published a study that took the control idea and aimed it precisely at tax. It set out what it called a tax control framework and described the features a credible one ought to display. A strategy that leadership has genuinely endorsed, clear responsibility assigned to named people, governance written down rather than assumed, testing that proves the controls actually work, and independent assurance that someone has checked. These were its building blocks. What had begun as an American reaction to fraud matured into an international standard for how a serious taxpayer should govern its own affairs.

The framework was never intended as an end in itself. Its real purpose was to underwrite a different relationship between large taxpayers and the authorities that assess them. A company able to show that its tax affairs are properly governed earns something valuable in return. The OECD termed it co-operative compliance. The revenue body offers greater certainty and a lighter touch in exchange for real transparency and a demonstrably sound control environment. Trust is extended to those who can prove they have earned it. The tax control framework is the proof.

What Africa can borrow

So what can Africa take from all this? The instinct might be to wave it away as a preoccupation of listed multinationals with compliance budgets to match. That instinct is exactly wrong. The timing makes it more so. Right across the continent tax administration is being rebuilt at speed. Nigeria has stood up a new revenue service, moved decisively toward self-assessment and stiffer penalties, and switched on real-time electronic invoicing for its largest taxpayers. South Africa is legislating the global minimum tax and preparing its own digital reporting. The thread running through all of it is that the burden of proof is sliding onto the taxpayer. The authority increasingly watches the transaction as it happens.

In that environment a tax control framework ceases to be a luxury. It becomes a form of insurance. When the authority can see your transactions in real time and expects you to have assessed your own liability correctly the ability to show how you reached a number is no longer a nicety. It is the difference between a position you can defend and one you can only regret. The discipline scales down further than most assume. A mid-sized Nigerian group needs no New York listing to record who owns each tax judgement and to have an independent eye check the result once a year. What it needs is the will to treat tax as a governed process rather than a private art.

A prize for both sides

A larger prize still is on offer. It belongs to the revenue authorities every bit as much as to the taxpayers. Co-operative compliance, still uncommon across the continent, hands African administrations a way out of the exhausting cycle of suspicion and dispute that devours so much of their capacity. An authority that learns to reward well-governed taxpayers with certainty instead of treating every large company as a suspect collects more at lower cost. It builds precisely the trust a thin tax base so badly needs. The lesson travels in both directions.

Which returns us to that Lagos boardroom and to Emeka. His company will probably survive this audit on the strength of a reputation built over forty years. But reputation is a thin shield in the world now taking shape. The authority sees the transaction as it happens and expects the taxpayer to have got it right the first time. Somewhere across town sits a rival with a less celebrated tax manager and a far better answer. That company can open a folder and show line by line how every figure was reached and who signed it off. When the assessment lands and one day it will only one of them will sleep.

A scandal in Houston two decades ago produced the answer to that young auditor's question. It has been refined since in the committee rooms of Paris. It is now within reach of any African company prepared to build it. How do you know your tax number is right? Because you built a system that can prove it long before anyone thought to ask.

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LINDA OCHUGBUA

Digital transformation is no longer optional for SMEs, it is survival

Every SME owner makes a choice, whether they realise it or not. Customers search, compare and buy through screens before they ever walk through a door. Suppliers send invoices through apps. Rivals ship orders with a few clicks.

An SME that stands outside this shift does not stand still, it slips backwards, quietly, one lost sale at a time. Digital transformation once sounded like a term reserved for boardrooms and consultants. That era has passed. For SMEs today, it sits at the centre of whether the business exists in five years.

The data backs up what many owners already sense. Eurostat found that only 58% of EU SMEs have reached a basic level of digital use, against 91% of large firms, leaving SMEs roughly 30 percentage points short of the EU's 2030 target. McKinsey research shows that firms with strong digital and AI capabilities earn between two and six times the shareholder returns of firms that lag behind, across every sector studied. These figures point to a widening gap, not a level playing field.

Where SMEs fall behind

This gap does not appear in one place. It spreads across several parts of a business at once, and each one compounds the others:

- **Customer expectations.** People expect to order, pay and get support online, at any hour. An SME without these options simply loses the sale to a rival who has them.
- **Cost control.** Manual processes, paper invoices, spreadsheets, phone-based scheduling, eat hours that staff could spend on customers or growth. Those hours cost money every single week.
- **Talent.** Younger workers judge employers partly by the tools they use. A business running on outdated systems struggles to attract and keep staff.
- **Resilience.** Cloud storage, digital payments and remote access let a business keep trading through disruption, a supply shock, a storm, a lockdown. Paper-based operations cannot do this.
- **Competition.** Larger firms already move fast on this front. An SME that waits hands them the advantage for free.

What owners can do now

Transformation does not require a large budget or a full rebuild overnight. It requires a start, then steady steps:

- Pick one process to digitise first. Invoicing, bookings or stock tracking are common starting points, and the wins show up quickly.
- Choose tools built for smaller teams. Cloud accounting, e-commerce platforms and scheduling apps now come at prices that suit SMEs, not just large firms.
- Train staff alongside the rollout. New software helps nobody if the team cannot use it with confidence.
- Review progress every quarter. Set a short list of goals, check them, adjust the plan, repeat.
- Treat data as an asset. Even a simple spreadsheet of customer habits reveals patterns worth acting on.

None of this asks an owner to abandon what makes their business work. Relationships, trust and local knowledge still matter, arguably more than ever, since these are the things a spreadsheet cannot replace. Digital tools should support that foundation, not erase it.

The businesses that survive the next decade will not be the ones with the largest budgets. They will be the ones who treated change as routine rather than a crisis to postpone. An SME that starts today, even with one small process, stands a step ahead of the one that waits for a perfect moment that never comes. Survival rarely announces itself with a deadline. It arrives quietly, in the gap between the business that adapted and the one that didn't.

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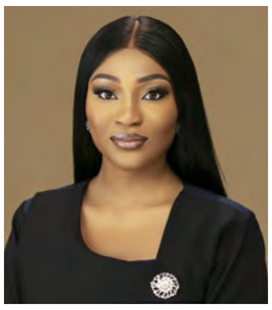
Perspective

I went to Harvard to learn about family business. What I found changed how I see everything



UCHENNA EZENNA

In 2023, I launched the Generational Business Podcast with a simple but urgent question: how do family businesses actually thrive in Nigeria?

I wanted to know if other next-generation leaders were wrestling with the same tensions I was wrestling with, and more importantly, how they were navigating them. These weren't questions I could answer from a textbook. They came from lived experience, from sitting inside a family business and feeling the weight of legacy, expectation, and the complexity that comes when business and family share the same roof.

Two years later, I found myself at Harvard Business School for a course, surrounded by family business leaders from across the world, still searching for answers to the same questions.

What I discovered first surprised me

I expected regional differences. I expected the Nigerian experience to feel distinct from what a business family in Europe or Latin America would describe. What I found instead was striking in its consistency; regardless of geography, we were all dealing with the same fundamental tensions. The same conversations about succession. The same friction between generations. The same unspoken question hanging over every boardroom table: who is really in charge here?

But what set the McKinsey/Harvard family-owned business CEO and family excellence program apart from other family business frameworks I had encountered was this: it didn't treat the business and the family as separate issues. It addressed every facet; the governance structures, yes, but also the relationships, the psychology, the identity, the grief that sometimes accompanies transition.

That was when a key insight landed for me, one I haven't stopped thinking about since:

Family business problems are rarely business problems. They are almost always people problems.

The notes that have stayed with me

Some of what I learned was tactical. Some of it was deeply human. Here is what my notebook looked like:

On conflict, which is arguably the defining challenge of most family enterprises, we explored the conditions that tend to escalate tension and the factors that help families navigate it more effectively as well as alleviate it. One of my biggest takeaways was that conflict rarely emerges in isolation. Certain dynamics make it more likely, while values like clarity, structure, and shared purpose create the environment for healthier relationships and better decision making.

It sounds simple. It is not. But having language for what you're experiencing is the first step toward addressing it.

On trust, I was reminded that it is not a fixed asset. It is built over time through consistent actions and intentional relationships. More importantly, trust is not irreparable. Even when damaged, it can be restored. That reframing alone was worth the trip.

On capital and strategy, one of the most powerful shifts the program challenged me to make was in how I, as a next generation family member, thought about my place in the business. There comes a point in every family business where the next gen leader must step back from the day to day running of operations and move toward governing the entity at a higher level. In many of our family businesses, the next gen steps in and immediately gets consumed by daily operations. But the real work, the work that builds lasting wealth across generations, lies in how you deploy resources, allocate capital, and position the business for the future it has not yet entered. That transition requires an entirely different set of skills, and recognising when you need to make it is half the battle.

On people, there was a clear-eyed acknowledgement that next generation leaders are operating in a fundamentally different work environment than the one their parents built these businesses in. Today's next gen is intelligent, ambitious, and deeply hungry for feedback. They are leading teams that expect transparency, demand purpose, and will not stay anywhere they feel unseen. The future of work inside family businesses will require a new kind of leadership, one that understands that high performance and the need for validation are not contradictions, they coexist. Building feedback loops, creating space for honest conversation, and leading with emotional intelligence are no longer soft skills. For the next generation inheriting these businesses, they are the job.

What I learned about my own role

Before I arrived in Boston, I carried a quiet belief that our challenges were unique to us. I left knowing better.

The program forced me to examine not just the business, but my own readiness as a next generation leader. What market presence am I building? Am I willing to ask for help?

And perhaps the question that hits closest to home: what does stewardship mean to me?

That is a question we do not ask enough in Nigerian family businesses. We are good at building. We are good at accumulating. But we do not talk nearly enough about what we are building for, and who we are building it for beyond ourselves. The most enduring family businesses are not just profit driven entities. They are vehicles for generational impact, and the leaders who run them carry a responsibility that extends far beyond the balance sheet.

In the Nigerian context, where family businesses are often the backbone of entire communities and extended households, this distinction matters enormously. The question is not only what we are building. It is what are we passing on, and are we being intentional enough about how we do it.

What separates thriving family businesses from struggling ones often has less to do with strategy and more to do with culture. The businesses that last are the ones where family members feel they have a choice in their involvement, where challenges are approached collectively rather than in silos, and where there is a genuine willingness to evolve. They stay curious. They do not assume they know it all.

And perhaps most importantly, they celebrate. In our part of the world, we do not say thank you enough to the people carrying these businesses forward. We expect sacrifice without acknowledgement. But appreciation is not weakness. In a family business, recognizing the people who show up every day may be one of the most strategic decisions a leader can make.

Where we go from here

The future of family business is already here, we are just not all paying attention to it. AI is changing how smart money moves. The families that will survive generational transition are the ones putting proper structures in place now, not later. And mental health, something we have historically swept under the rug in Nigerian business culture, is finally being recognized for what it is: a leadership issue, not a personal weakness.

And beneath all of it, the human questions remain. How do we preserve wealth without eroding purpose? How do we prepare the next generation without suffocating them? How do we hold a family together as it grows, diversifies, and changes?

I arrived at Harvard hoping to learn how other families were solving the legacy problem. I left realizing that the future of family business may depend less on strategy and more on our ability to navigate the human dynamics that exist behind every balance sheet.

I walked away from Boston with something no textbook could have given me. The most valuable thing in any family business was never on the balance sheet. It is the trust you protect, the relationships you invest in, and the clarity around why you started building in the first place.

That is what we are really protecting.

*. **Ezenna** is a business leader, psychology graduate student, and family enterprise advocate with a passion for the human side of leadership and legacy. Drawing on her experience in business and executive education, she explores the intersection of psychology, leadership, and family enterprise, with a particular interest in helping next-generation leaders build resilient organizations and enduring legacies.*

The facts, the fallacies and Pastor Adeboye on insecurity

DAVE BARO-THOMAS

For years, Nigeria's Pentecostal movement has been subjected to intense criticism, largely centred on two recurring themes—the doctrines of prosperity and tithing. While robust theological debate is healthy, much of the public discourse has degenerated into ridicule, with some portraying pastors as charlatans and dismissing prayer and fasting as a waste of productive time.

The criticism often extends beyond doctrine. Clergymen are blamed for converting abandoned factories into churches, as though they were responsible for the economic decline that forced those businesses to shut down.

Among the most frequent targets of these attacks is Pastor Enoch Adeboye, general overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Regardless of how measured or sincere his interventions may be, they are routinely interpreted through political, ethnic or partisan lenses.

His recent comments on Nigeria's worsening insecurity generated another wave of controversy. Critics accused him of shielding President Bola Ahmed Tinubu because they are both Yoruba, while others pointed to the fact that the First Lady, Oluremi Tinubu, is a pastor in the RCCG. To many detractors, these associations automatically invalidate his opinions.

That conclusion, however, ignores his long-established record.

During the administration of Goodluck Jonathan, when Boko Haram unleashed unprecedented bombings, mass killings, kidnappings and territorial occupation, Pastor Adeboye publicly urged the President to act decisively to restore security. Contrary to claims repeatedly circulated on social media, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) submitted a petition in 2010 to Jonathan over rising insecurity and threatened to stage a one-million-man protest, there is no credible evidence that march took place against that government, because it never did.

What he did was exactly what many Nigerians expected from influential national figures—he spoke against the bloodshed and urged the government to protect lives. Given that churches, pastors and worshippers were themselves victims of terrorist attacks, silence would have amounted to indifference.

Under President Muhammadu Buhari, insecurity evolved into a broader national crisis involving banditry, mass kidnappings and multiple insurgent groups. Pastor Adeboye again maintained the same position. He openly urged the President to replace security chiefs if they were unable to halt the killings. He also participated in nationwide prayer walks organised by the Christian Association of Nigeria in 2020, calling for urgent action to end the violence.

His message under President Tinubu has been remarkably consistent. He again urged the President to remove security chiefs if they fail to deliver results. Yet this identical position has been portrayed by some as evidence of bias simply because the current President shares his ethnic background.

The controversy largely stems from one aspect of his remarks. Pastor Adeboye observed that the President had issued directives and that the military and security agencies must now execute their constitutional responsibilities effectively. Critics interpreted this as absolving the President of responsibility. That interpretation overlooks an important distinction.

In a presidential system, ultimate responsibility for national security rests with the President. He appoints the service chiefs, determines strategic direction and bears the political consequences of success or failure. The buck ultimately stops at his desk.

However, operational military decisions are executed by professional commanders in the field, not by the President. No democratic leader—not even Donald Trump or any other head of government—personally commands battlefield operations. Presidents formulate policy, allocate resources and appoint competent leadership; military professionals prosecute the war. That is a fact that no unbiased critic can refute.

Recognising this operational reality does not diminish presidential accountability. Both propositions can be true simultaneously.

Throughout decades of escalating insecurity, Pastor Adeboye has remained largely consistent. He has repeatedly urged successive administrations, irrespective of political party or ethnicity, to fulfil their constitutional obligation to protect Nigerians. He has neither presented himself as a political activist nor sought to become one. He has never demanded any sitting president to resign because of the country's insecurity problem.

His calling is pastoral—to pray, counsel, admonish and speak truth to those in authority when circumstances demand and President Tinubu has not been an exception.

Criticism of public figures is legitimate in any democracy. But criticism should be anchored in facts rather than selective outrage or distorted narratives. Reducing every intervention to tribal loyalty or political calculation neither advances public debate nor strengthens democratic accountability.

Perhaps, the most ironic demand is that an 84-year-old clergyman should lead mass street protests because he once publicly challenged government over insecurity. In a nation of more than 200 million people, with millions of energetic youths, expecting an octogenarian pastor to become the face of political mobilisation says less about him than it does about our collective reluctance to shoulder civic responsibility ourselves.

Nigeria's insecurity crisis demands honest engagement, institutional reforms and sustained accountability—not selective memory or manufactured outrage. On that score, Pastor Adeboye's record deserves to be assessed on the evidence rather than on sentiment.

Perspective

Building a stronger footing for NYSC's ongoing reform agenda

YUSUF HASSAN WADA

Nigeria is not new to reforms. We have reformed our banks, pensions, telecoms, taxes, elections, petroleum pricing, public finance systems, and even parts of our health architecture.

Some reforms were carefully prepared; others were forced by crisis. Some survived because they created visible value; others collapsed because they were announced without enough trust, sequencing, protection, or ownership.

However, reforms cannot succeed on good intentions alone. They must be built on solid preparation, clear accountability, broad consultation, protection for those likely to be affected, and careful sequencing that allows people and institutions to adjust.

This is why the newly approved reform of the National Youth Service Corps matters. For the first time in its 53-year history, the NYSC is being subjected to a holistic reform. This decision signalled a shift from a scheme defined largely by mobilisation, camp, posting and passing-out parade, to one organised around skills, productivity, employability, youth empowerment and national development. For context, the NYSC was created by Decree No. 24 of 22 May 1973 in the aftermath of the civil war to rebuild common ties among Nigerian youths and promote national unity.

Its original mandate remains important. Nigeria still needs bridges across region, religion, ethnicity, class and language. But a country facing youth unemployment, insecurity, weak labour-market transitions, digital disruption, and rising frustration among graduates cannot continue to run a 1973 institution with mostly 1973 assumptions.

I was privileged to be invited into a series of carefully crafted NYSC reform conversations. The committee have worked for over two years with a lot of activities to kickstart the other external-facing processes. However, I have been involved in many policy and reform processes, but this stood out as one of the most deliberate and inclusive processes I have attended in a long time. The first thing that struck me about the policy and reform processes was the deliberate seriousness and inclusiveness, led by Hadiza Bala Usman and the Central Results Delivery Coordination Unit (CRDCU) team. It was not the usual Abuja ritual of gathering a few officials in a room. It was intentionally multi-stakeholder, with young people being central to all the discussions.

The process started with evidence. The NESG-supported NYSC Reform Survey dashboard provided a detailed report of their survey across Nigeria, using quantitative and qualitative questions to capture public sentiment, identify reform priorities, support an evidence-driven reform process, and align NYSC reform with youth employment and national development goals.

The presentation showed that 50.1percent of respondents considered NYSC "very relevant", 35.3percent "somewhat relevant", and only 14.6percent "not relevant". The evidence clearly showed that the country was not asking for NYSC to be discarded, but to be renewed.

Some of the findings were striking and were contrary to social media opinions. The survey presentation showed 61.3percent of respondents supported retaining the mandatory nature of NYSC, but with modernisation. More than 80percent supported either full or partial choice in state deployment, reflecting deep concern about fairness, transparency and safety in posting. Further, 41.9percent rated the current deployment system as needing major reform, while only 16percent considered it efficient.

A very important point was that 85.9percent supported specialised service tracks such as Digital Corps, Agro Corps, Health Corps and Education Corps. 62.5percent said the primary future purpose of NYSC should be youth employment and skills, while 30.4percent still prioritised nation-building. While most Nigerians want NYSC to remain a nation-building institution, they also want it to become a bridge into work, enterprise and productivity.

This is why the approved reform is significant. The proposed six-week orientation model is about changing what camp is for. The proposal is now to have the first two weeks focused on civic responsibility, national values and leadership development. The next two weeks will cover career mapping, basic accounting, financial literacy, business planning and access to finance. The final two weeks will introduce corps members to their chosen or assigned specialised stream, based on interest, academic background and skill profile. The proposed streams include agriculture, medical, education, technology and digital, legal, public service, infrastructure, green, enterprise, creative economy, and paramilitary/security corps. But for this to work, the reform must not stop at approval. The next task is to put the reform on a stronger footing.

The first footing is legal and institutional clarity. It is good that FEC has directed the amendment of the NYSC Act and regulations. A reform of this scale cannot depend only on speeches, circulars or administrative enthusiasm. It must be anchored in law, with clear roles for the Ministry of Youth Development, NYSC management, state governments, the private sector, security agencies, training institutions and employers. If NYSC is to become a graduate development programme, the law must say so.

The second footing is transparency in deployment. The survey and discussions at various meetings showed that deployment and posting are among the weakest points of public confidence in the scheme. The approved reform already speaks to a technology-driven call-up process, risk-sensitive deployment, and skills-based primary assignments aligned with academic background and career pathways. But the posting algorithm must be explainable, and corps members should know the factors considered. There should also be a grievance-redress mechanism, and no algorithm should become a new black box for old unfairness.

The third footing is camp reform. I remember the NYSC Director-General making a strong case that orientation camps remain important because they are one of the few spaces where young Nigerians from different backgrounds still live, eat, drill, argue, learn and bond together. That argument is valid. The reform proposed a national grading and certification system for camps, which is important. State governments should be given clear minimum standards, and camps that fail should be treated as implementation risks.

The fourth footing is employer linkage. Countries including Ghana's national service model have long recognised deployment into fields such as agriculture, education, health, local government and rural development. Kenya's National Youth Service explicitly combines paramilitary training, national service, technical and vocational training, and youth empowerment.

South Africa's Youth Employment Service is a private-sector-led programme designed to create work opportunities for unemployed youths, including structured 12-month work experience. This is something to be looked upon. Nigeria does not need to copy any of these models. But youth service must be connected to real opportunities. NYSC reform should build formal compacts with employers. And every specialised corps stream should have a clear career pathway for training, placement, mentorship, certification, portfolio, and possible transition into employment or enterprise.

The fifth footing is financing and traceability. If NYSC is now expected to train, certify, protect, deploy and support hundreds of thousands of young Nigerians annually, then the funding model must match the ambition. The government cannot announce a graduate development programme and fund it badly. There should be a clear, direct financing framework showing what the federal government will fund, what states will contribute, what the private sector can sponsor, and how development partners can support innovation. The survey process created a useful baseline. It should not be a one-off exercise. Annual NYSC reform scorecards should follow.

There will be debates about whether NYSC should remain mandatory or become voluntary and competitive. That debate should not be dismissed. A mandatory scheme gives scale, shared national experience and social mixing.

A voluntary scheme may improve motivation, reduce costs and allow better targeting. A sensible path may be to retain the one-year national service for now, while making specialised high-intensity tracks competitive, certified and linked to real opportunities. Over time, evidence can guide whether the country should move further toward a hybrid or voluntary model.

This reform is therefore not just about NYSC. It is about how Nigeria treats its young people at the most delicate point between education and adulthood. For many graduates, NYSC is their first structured encounter with the Nigerian state after school. It can either deepen their cynicism or enlarge their belief. It can either waste a year of their lives or open a door. It can also become a national platform for transition, contribution and possibility.

The process that produced this reform was unusually thoughtful. It listened. It used evidence. It brought young people and stakeholders into the room. It reflected public sentiment. It recognised that people still value NYSC but want it to work better. That is a good beginning. The task now is to move from approval to execution, from consultation to delivery, from reform language to reform benefits. The country has a rare opportunity to turn NYSC from a compulsory year of uncertainty into a structured year of purpose.

That will be the true test of this reform.

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ADEYEMI A. ADESOLA

Digital identity after NINAuth - Consent is the new perimeter

Nigeria's digital identity system is rapidly advancing. The introduction of NINAuth, the National Identity Management Commission's official app for identity verification, and NITDA's upcoming Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) standards have switched the focus from paperwork to real-time consent and auditability. In effect, this means that any time your National Identification Number (NIN) is used to open a bank account, obtain a new SIM card, or access a government function, it must be with your explicit agreement and is recorded for subsequent review. Consent becomes the new security barrier, replacing traditional checks and balances.

That's the theory, at least. In practice, inadequate identification checks and ambiguous consent trails can cause serious threat, not simply hypothetical problems. Consider SIM-swap fraud, for example. Criminals deceive or bribe telecom agents into transferring a victim's phone number to a new SIM. With the phone line hijacked, they receive all one-time passwords and login messages intended for the legitimate owner. They can reset bank passwords, empty savings accounts, and take over social media profiles in minutes without producing a valid identification document.

In an article I published on June 2, 2025, for BusinessDay titled "Why SIM Swap Scams Are Nigeria's Silent Cyber War", I described SIM swap fraud as a growing threat that continues to steal millions of naira from unsuspecting victims each year. Public reports and victim accounts highlight the scale of the problem: many people wake up to find their phone lines suddenly inactive, only to discover that criminals have taken control of their numbers and emptied their bank accounts through a scheme they never anticipated.

These identity theft techniques exploit the very gaps that NINAuth and the new standards seek to address. Until now, Nigeria's databases have been fragmented. Someone may open many bank accounts with minor differences in their information, or register multiple SIM cards under the same identity. Fragmented databases, poor verification systems, and weak enforcement make impersonation almost effortless for hackers. Worse, when data leaks occur, which they frequently do, criminals steal personal information (BVN, NIN, dates of birth) from one source and use it to avoid checks elsewhere. It's a simple fact: if consent and verification are not enforced throughout the process, you'll get fraudulent onboarding, unpaid loans, and accounts locked under pretenses.

The new DPI guidelines and NIMC reforms attempt to flip the script. Under the current drafted guidelines, every digital identification service, whether government or private, must meet security and quality standards. That includes strong encryption, biometric verification, and extensive logs for each identity check. NINAuth is designed to give citizens control: you use your phone to grant or revoke permission, so no one can see your profile until you say so. Consider it the digital equivalent of presenting your ID in person. If it works, no clerk can falsely sign you up for a service without your knowledge.

However, rules do not influence the outcome on their own. The weak point is enforcement. Consent is already embedded as a legal right under Nigeria's Data Protection Act and the NDPR; you must expressly consent to the use of your data and have the ability to revoke it. Unauthorized disclosure of identifying data is also illegal under the new NIMC Act.

However, those standards may be neglected in the absence of audits and careful supervision. What happens if someone secretly accesses your NINAuth app? What happens if a public organization discreetly searches people's profiles in bulk without logging requests? Who in the government observes anomalous increases in access or imposes sanctions when regulations are violated? The new perimeter is only as strong as the guards if systems aren't monitored.

The tools being developed must be used by regulators and policymakers. Performance benchmarks, accountability reports, and interoperable systems are specifically required by the draft DPI framework. That is encouraging since it implies that, in theory, identification checks should have metrics. Regulators might, for instance, search for organizations that neglect to log consent data or identify trends such as hundreds of verifications linked to a single phone number or email address in a brief period of time.

User response is equally vital. There needs to be a fast way for citizens to contest transactions when they say, "I didn't authorize this transaction." Data governance guidelines and clear audit trails are only beneficial if they are supported by action. Globally, standards are shifting in this direction. Accountability and user control are mandated by Europe's GDPR and data protection agencies. Nigeria is moving in the direction of a more secure model by incorporating consent in technology and legislation. However, it will only be successful if the entire system and procedure hold up.

Every NIN check in Nigeria today has a connection to actual money and real people. A mistake in verification could result in fake loans, stolen funds, or the wrong person receiving confidential information like a ID cards. It can also mean a deserving citizen is locked out when a system thinks they are someone else. Data protection is the cornerstone of trust in a digital economy, not just a catchphrase used by bureaucrats. The new rules and regulations promise to restore trust, but we must insist on them being followed. Consent can indeed serve as the security perimeter. But only if we build robust walls behind it, and never let the door be open to fraud.

*. **Adesola,** CISSP, Cybersecurity Professional*

Perspective

Local content must create value for Nigerians

OLU VERHEIJEN

For twenty-five years, NOG Energy Week has been one of the rooms where Nigeria tells the truth about energy: what we have promised, what we have postponed, what we have delivered, and what we must now become.

This year's theme speaks of ambition, competitiveness and resilience. I want to add a fourth word: proof.

Because in this season — when records are being tested, reforms are being debated, and the future of our economy is being contested — Nigeria does not need louder promises. Nigeria needs proof that courage works. Proof that discipline works. Proof that when government does what it says, capital responds, production rises, and national confidence returns.

Let us begin with the world as it is, not as we wish it to be.

The global energy map has changed. Capital is no longer sentimental. It is not moved by speeches, slogans or sympathy. Capital has no passport. It is rational. It prices risk. It follows credibility. It asks one question: can this country turn resources into bankable projects, and bankable projects into reliable returns?

For Africa, that question is urgent. And for Nigeria, the scale of the task is equally clear: to sustain the current base and grow toward our 2030 production target, analysis shows a financing gap of about US$38.3 billion. That gap cannot be closed by rhetoric, and it cannot be closed by Nigeria alone. And that capital — from Lagos, Johannesburg, London, Houston, Abu Dhabi or Beijing — is asking for the same thing: credible rules, bankable projects, competitive costs, predictable regulation and disciplined execution. That is a warning — and an opportunity.

So, the competition is no longer only geology against geology. It is government against government. It is rules against rules. It is delivery against delay.

And Nigeria has made a choice.

We have chosen not to be a warehouse of raw potential. We have chosen to become an engine of African industrialisation. We have chosen not merely to produce molecules, but to convert molecules into megawatts, fertiliser, petrochemicals, mobility, manufacturing, jobs and exports.

That is the real energy transition for Africa. Not transition as surrender. Transition as transformation.

Under the leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, this administration has done what many said was too difficult, too risky, too controversial, or too politically expensive. We began to remove the distortions that punished production and rewarded leakage. We took on reforms that had been discussed for years and delayed for decades.

We recalibrated fiscal terms, clarified regulation and streamlined oversight. We introduced targeted incentives and cut contracting timelines by more than half. And we made a clear statement to the world: Nigeria is no longer asking to be trusted; Nigeria is working to be bankable.

The results are not abstract.

We are targeting three million barrels per day and ten billion standard cubic feet of gas per day by the end of the decade. We now have more than 50 billion dollars of upstream projects in the visible pipeline. In the last three years, more than 10 billion dollars of long-awaited final investment decisions have come through.

Crude oil and condensate production has risen by about 400,000 barrels per day since 2023. Onshore production is at its strongest level in twenty years. Nigeria's share of Africa's upstream FIDs has risen dramatically — from the margins to leadership. External reserves have crossed 50 billion dollars. These are not talking points. They are signals. When the rules improve, capital moves.

And we are not only fixing oil and gas. We are resetting power.

For too long, the electricity market carried the weight of unpaid obligations, broken incentives and weak confidence. That is why the Presidential Power Sector Financial Reforms Programme is not merely a bond issue; it is a N4 trillion credibility programme. It is a negotiated reset of legacy obligations, payment discipline and market confidence across the generation, gas and financing chain.

It says to GenCos: produce with confidence. It says to gas suppliers: supply with confidence. It says to lenders and investors: Nigeria is rebuilding the bankability of the power value chain. And it says to Nigerians: the objective is not accounting elegance in Abuja; it is more reliable power for factories, SMEs, agro-processing, mining and homes.

And because power is only as viable as the fuel that feeds it, gas must move from aspiration to execution. Gas is not a slogan. Gas is Nigeria's industrial backbone: the fuel for power, the feedstock for fertiliser and petrochemicals, the bridge to CNG mobility, LNG exports, regional integration and cleaner kitchens.

But we must be honest: reform has been hard on households, and the recent spike in cooking-gas prices was a warning that domestic supply, logistics, affordability and market discipline must move together. A gas-rich nation cannot be comfortable when families are priced back to firewood, charcoal or kerosene. That is why we are acting on both supply and affordability. We are growing domestic LPG supply, rebuilding the import buffer where it is needed, strengthening market surveillance, and moving toward transparent pricing benchmarks so consumers, regulators and investors can see the market more clearly. The VAT Modification Order of 2024 zero-rates LPG and exempts the equipment and conversion chain — including cylinders, valves, regulators, conversion kits and installation services — from VAT.

Since January 2024, our office has supported Import Duty Exemption Certificates for LPG infrastructure worth about $92.6 million, including about $30.4 million this year alone. These incentives are not isolated measures; they align with the Decade of Gas, NNPC's gas strategy and the Presidential CNG Initiative. Together, they point in one direction: a Nigeria where gas powers industry, electricity becomes more reliable, cooking becomes cleaner and more affordable, and reform finally shows up in the daily life of the Nigerian family. And let us be very clear about Africa.

Africa does not need pity. Africa needs scale. The Dangote Refinery, at 650,000 barrels per day, is proof that African industrial scale is not aspirational; it is operational. Indigenous participation in gas has risen from 69 percent to 83 percent. Companies such as Seplat, Oando and Renaissance are not merely local players; they are continental energy actors. This is ownership. This is capability. This is the future taking institutional form.

But ownership must be matched with discipline. Local content must create value, not inflation. Regulation must accelerate, not obstruct. Policy must invite capital, not frighten it away. Every unnecessary delay is an export subsidy to another country. Every unclear approval is a tax on national ambition. Every project we fail to deliver becomes somebody else's refinery, somebody else's power plant, somebody else's jobs.

That is why reform is never neutral. Reform changes incentives. It changes habits. It changes the balance between those who benefited from complexity and those who deserve efficiency.

So, yes, reform will always meet resistance. Some of that resistance is sincere; change can be disruptive, and responsible leadership must listen. But some of it also comes from the comfort of old arrangements — from systems that worked well for a few, but not well enough for the country.

When we shorten approval timelines, we are not attacking anyone; we are defending national competitiveness. When we close revenue leakages, we are not settling scores; we are protecting the Nigerian people. When we insist on transparency, discipline and delivery, we are not being impatient; we are recognising that Nigeria has already waited too long.

And in moments of change, people will always find language to question the messenger. Too new. Too direct. Too ambitious. Too unconventional. But leadership is not validated by comfort. It is validated by results.

We welcome scrutiny. We welcome debate. We welcome honest criticism. But we will not apologise for reforming systems that must work better for Nigerians, for investors, and for the next generation. And I say 'we' deliberately.

This record belongs to a team: the President who set the direction; state governments, the Ministers, regulators, our national oil company, government agencies, operators, investors, civil servants and workers across the value chain. It belongs also to Nigerians, who have carried the burden of reform and have every right to demand that reform now produces relief, jobs and dignity.

We have not finished the work. No serious reformer says the job is done. Inflation, affordability, security, metering, infrastructure and execution still demand urgency. But let no one confuse unfinished work with failed work. Nations move when people decide that temporary discomfort is better than permanent decline.

This is campaign season. So, let the record be examined. Let the questions be asked. Let the debate be vigorous. But let it be honest.

Ask whether Nigeria is more credible today than yesterday. Ask whether investment is returning. Ask whether production is rising. Ask whether power-sector debt is finally being addressed. Ask whether gas is being treated as industrial infrastructure, not just export commodity. Ask whether the old excuses are still strong enough to defeat a new national ambition.

My answer is clear.

The age of Nigerian hesitation is ending. The age of Nigerian ambition has begun. Our task now is to turn reform into relief, capital into projects, projects into jobs, and energy into national greatness.

History will not ask whether we inherited oil, gas, sun, rivers and talent. History will ask whether we converted them into prosperity. Whether we left behind pipelines instead of promises. Power plants instead of press releases. Institutions instead of personalities. Jobs instead of slogans. Confidence instead of cynicism.

The first twenty-five years of NOG helped build consensus. The next twenty-five must build delivery.

Let it be said that when the world changed, Nigeria did not shrink. Let it be said that when capital demanded credibility, Nigeria built it. Let it be said that when the establishment defended delay, a new generation chose execution. Let it be said that we stopped celebrating potential and started delivering performance.

That is the work. That is the record. That is the legacy.

*-**Verheijen,** Special Adviser to the President on Oil and Gas delivered this address at the NOG Energy Week in Abuja*

Perspective

COLLINS NWEKE

Beyond fifty years of solidarity, the hard part is before you

.An Open Letter to the OACPS Council of Ministers

Your Excellencies

As you gather in Brussels for the 121st Session of the Council of Ministers, you do so at a defining moment in the history of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). This is more than another ministerial meeting. It is an opportunity to determine whether an organisation that has successfully navigated more than five decades of geopolitical change is prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

The timing of your meeting is particularly significant. Only days before this session, the Secretary-General, H.E. Moussa Saleh Batraki, received Nigeria's newly appointed Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium, H.E. Dr. Adeyemi Adebayo Emmanuel, at the OACPS Headquarters in Brussels. Their discussions reportedly covered implementation of the Malabo Declaration, institutional reform, financial sustainability, preparations for this very Council meeting, and progress towards establishing the OACPS African Diaspora Centre of Excellence in Nigeria. That meeting was more than diplomatic protocol. It quietly reflected both the promise and the unfinished business before your Organisation.

I write this letter not as a critic standing outside the institution, but as someone who believes deeply in the continuing necessity of principled multilateral cooperation. Throughout my professional life in public service, international trade, diaspora engagement and economic diplomacy, I have come to appreciate that institutions matter. They create continuity where politics changes. They preserve cooperation when national interests diverge. But institutions ultimately earn their legitimacy not by their history alone, but by their capacity to deliver results.

The OACPS deserves genuine recognition for what it has accomplished.

Few organisations have succeeded in maintaining meaningful cooperation among countries as geographically dispersed, culturally diverse and economically different as those of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. From its origins in the 1970s to its evolution into the present-day OACPS, the Organisation has provided an enduring platform for political dialogue, collective negotiation, development cooperation and South-South solidarity.

It has successfully navigated changing international orders, preserved a common diplomatic voice across three continents, supported vulnerable states in global negotiations on climate and sustainable development, and maintained institutional continuity through periods that have tested many multilateral organisations. These are not insignificant achievements.

Indeed, survival itself deserves respect. Yet survival cannot become the destination. The world in which the OACPS was created no longer exists. Today's global landscape is defined by shifting centres of economic power, strategic competition among major powers, artificial intelligence, digital commerce, climate finance, demographic transformation and increasingly influential diaspora communities. Institutions built for yesterday's realities cannot simply rely on yesterday's successes.

The challenge before you is therefore not whether the OACPS should continue. The challenge is whether it can transform. If I may respectfully suggest one simple test, every international organisation should ultimately answer three questions: First, can it convene? Second, can it deliver? Third, can it endure?

The OACPS has unquestionably demonstrated that it can convene. It has equally demonstrated remarkable institutional endurance. The question now is whether it can consistently deliver outcomes that are visible not merely to diplomats and ministers, but to entrepreneurs, researchers, investors, young people, innovators and ordinary citizens across its member states.

Here, I believe, lies the Organisation's greatest unfinished assignment. Too often, implementation has lagged behind aspiration. Declarations have outpaced delivery. Ministerial communiqués have not always translated into measurable improvements in trade, investment, innovation or institutional capacity. Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting the OACPS today is not one of ideas. It is one of execution. This is why I regard the proposed OACPS African Diaspora Centre in Nigeria as one of the most consequential institutional innovations ever undertaken by the Organisation.

Its significance extends far beyond establishing another office. If properly operationalised, the Centre could become the intellectual and practical hub through which the OACPS redefines diaspora engagement, not merely as a source of remittances, but as a strategic instrument for investment promotion, technology transfer, entrepreneurship, research collaboration, skills mobility, public policy innovation and economic diplomacy.

Few initiatives better capture what twenty-first century multilateral cooperation should look like. For this reason, I warmly welcome the Secretary-General's reaffirmation of the Secretariat's commitment to the Centre during his meeting with Nigeria's Ambassador.

Yet sincere encouragement must now be matched by decisive action. Respectfully, I ask: what remains outstanding? Is it governance? Is it financing? Is it institutional coordination? Is it political ownership? Is it staffing? Is it the absence of an agreed implementation timetable?

Whatever the obstacles may be, they deserve to be openly addressed. A Centre of Excellence cannot itself become an illustration of implementation delay. Every month that passes before it becomes operational is another month during which opportunities for investment, innovation, knowledge exchange and diaspora partnerships are postponed. The Centre should become the OACPS's flagship demonstration that this Organisation is capable of moving from vision to delivery.

Nigeria, for its part, carries a special responsibility. Not because it is the Organisation's largest African economy. Not even because it hosts the proposed Centre. Rather, because Nigeria possesses one of the world's most dynamic diasporas; a community whose influence spans business, academia, medicine, technology, public administration, finance and the creative industries. If effectively mobilised, that diaspora represents one of Nigeria's greatest instruments of economic diplomacy and one of the OACPS's greatest strategic assets.

Nigeria should therefore seize this moment. It should move urgently to operationalise the African Diaspora Centre. It should provide credible seed funding, establish transparent governance, appoint respected professional leadership, and develop partnerships with universities, the private sector, development finance institutions and diaspora organisations across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The Centre should belong to the entire OACPS family from its very inception.

Equally, the OACPS itself should embrace a renewed reform agenda. I respectfully encourage you to establish measurable implementation scorecards for ministerial decisions; publish an annual State of the OACPS Report; strengthen engagement with universities and research institutions; institutionalise dialogue with the private sector; create a permanent diaspora advisory mechanism; and position innovation, digital transformation and youth entrepreneurship at the centre of your strategic priorities. The future relevance of the Organisation will depend increasingly on its ability to become not merely a diplomatic platform but an engine of practical cooperation.

Your Excellencies, history has already been generous to the OACPS. It has given the Organisation longevity. It has given it legitimacy. It has given it a respected place within multilateral diplomacy. The next chapter, however, will not be written by history. It will be written by leadership.

As you deliberate in Brussels, I hope you will remember that future generations are unlikely to judge this Organisation by the number of communiqués it adopts or the frequency of its meetings. They will judge it by whether it transformed solidarity into shared prosperity. They will judge it by whether it converted declarations into delivery. They will judge it by whether institutions like the African Diaspora Centre became living platforms for cooperation rather than permanent promises awaiting fulfilment.

The first fifty years demonstrated that the OACPS could survive. The years ahead must demonstrate that it can lead.

With every good wish for a successful Council meeting.

.Nweke FCPM, DFRA, PhD (hc), FIMC, MCIoD is author of Economic Diplomacy of the Diaspora, Senior International Trade Consultant & Public Policy Commentator. He is also Councillor Emeritus, Ostend City Council Belgium.

ABDUL JAYU

Reviewing NAMA's impressive 2026 mid-year performance

Over the years, the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) has maintained a safe and stable air navigation environment.

The agency under the leadership of its Managing Director/Chief Executive, Farouk Ahmed Umar entered 2026 with the enormous responsibility of sustaining safe, efficient and reliable air navigation services amid rising aircraft movements, aging infrastructure, funding constraints and increasing demands for technological modernisation.

In keeping with its status as the nation's Air Navigation Service Provider (ANSP), NAMA has consistently remained central to the safety of Nigeria's aviation industry.

At the halfway point of 2026, the agency's performance presents a picture of measurable operational progress, improved safety oversight and renewed investment in critical infrastructure, although challenges relating to funding, equipment modernisation and manpower remain.

At the global level, NAMA has continued to provide uninterrupted air traffic management services across Nigeria's Flight Information Region (FIR), maintaining safe aircraft separation and ensuring the orderly movement of domestic and international flights.

At the domestic arena and despite increased traffic volumes on major routes such as Lagos-Abuja, Lagos-Port Harcourt and Lagos-Kano, there have been no major air traffic management failures attributable to the agency during the first half of the year.

This demonstrates the resilience of Nigeria's air navigation system and the professionalism of air traffic controllers and technical personnel.

The agency also sustained calibration and maintenance of navigational aids, communication facilities and surveillance equipment to ensure compliance with international operational standards.

Reports also indicate continued improvements in navigational infrastructure and operational safety systems under the administration of Engr Farouk.

Within the period under review, one of NAMA's major priorities has remained the modernisation of Communications, Navigation and Surveillance/Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) infrastructure.

Although significant investment is still required to replace aging facilities nationwide, the agency has continued rehabilitation and upgrading of critical navigation equipment to improve service reliability.

Moreover, the welfare of NAMA personnel has remained a critical component of the agency's 2026 mid-year performance, as the agency continues efforts to improve the working conditions, capacity development, and professional well-being of its workforce amid increasing demands on air navigation services.

As a professional who thoroughly passed through the system, Engr Umar understands that his agency relies heavily on the expertise of air traffic controllers, engineers, technicians, and other operational staff.

As a result staff welfare has become a major priority in sustaining safety standards and ensuring operational efficiency.

During the first half of 2026, attention was focused on improving staff motivation, enhancing professional development, and addressing workplace challenges that could affect productivity.

The agency maintained investments in training programmes, especially for technical personnel, to ensure employees remain compliant with evolving global aviation standards and technological requirements.

Notwithstanding NAMA's excellent contributions, industry stakeholders have consistently emphasised that additional investment in modern surveillance systems, communication networks, cybersecurity, backup power and calibration capability will be necessary if Nigeria is to keep pace with global air navigation developments.

On the ongoing debate over the proposed review of the sharing formula of the 5 per cent Ticket Sales Charge, these stakeholders have argued that, NAMA's present allocation is inadequate for an agency responsible for maintaining expensive, technology-driven infrastructure essential to flight safety.

Industry experts contend that increased funding would accelerate modernisation of navigation facilities, improve surveillance coverage, strengthen system redundancy, enhance cybersecurity and support staff training and retention.

So far, the second half of 2026 therefore, presents an opportunity for NAMA to consolidate its gains by accelerating technology upgrades, improving operational resilience and expanding surveillance capabilities.

If funding challenges are addressed as indicated by stakeholders, the agency will be better positioned to support Nigeria's ambition of becoming West Africa's leading aviation hub.

Overall Assessment

At mid-year, NAMA can be credited with maintaining a safe and stable air navigation environment despite significant financial and technological challenges.

By and large, the agency has demonstrated operational resilience, sustained safety standards and continued investment in technical capacity.

Nevertheless, long-term success will depend largely on accelerated infrastructure modernisation, sustainable funding mechanisms and continued investment in human capital.

Perspective

Viewpoint
With
Afo

AFOLABI ABIODUN
Entrepreneur | EdTech Professional | CISA-Certified Information Security Expert | PhD Candidate and Researcher

Everyone Assumes Going Digital Makes Nigeria a Target. My Research Says the Opposite

As AI-powered fraud dominates the headlines, the instinct is to fear the digital economy itself. My data says the fear is aimed at the wrong target — and the trilogy's final finding explains why.

Open any technology page in Nigeria this month and you will find the same anxiety, expressed in different words. Artificial intelligence has supercharged fraud — AI-written phishing that no longer carries the tell-tale errors, deepfaked executives authorising transfers, cloned voices, scam campaigns running at industrial scale. The Federal Government has ordered investigations into how global platforms handle Nigerian data. Regulators are debating whether to keep more of that data at home. And underneath all of it runs a single, rarely-stated assumption: That the more digital Nigeria becomes, the more exposed it is. That every new banking app, every new wallet, every newly-onboarded user is another open door. That if we could just slow the digital economy down, we would slow the crime down with it.

It is an intuitive belief. It is almost universally held — by policymakers, by commentators, by worried customers. But, according to my research, it is wrong.

Digital banking adoption did not significantly predict cyberattack outcomes in my study. Going digital is not what makes Nigeria a target. Something else does.

This is the third and final article in my series drawn from my doctoral research into what determines whether cyberattacks on Nigerian banks succeed. The first two carried difficult and then hopeful news: attacker sophistication significantly drives successful attacks (Part One), and cybersecurity measures significantly reduce them (Part Two). This final finding is the one that surprised me most — and the one with the greatest consequence for national policy. It tells us the thing almost everyone fears is not the thing we should be spending our fear on.

THE ASSUMPTION	THE DATA
"Going digital makes Nigeria a bigger target. Every new app, every new user, another open door." — a belief almost everyone holds	$p = .330$ No significant link between digital adoption and attack success. The myth, measured — and busted

THE MYTH ON TRIAL: "The more Nigeria banks on its phones, the more it exposes itself. Every new app, every new wallet, every new digital user is another door for the fraudster. Slow down the digital economy and you slow down the crime." — A belief almost everyone holds. My data says it is wrong.

What the Data Showed — The Dog That Didn't Bark

I tested whether the level of digital banking adoption across Nigerian financial institutions was associated with the cyberattack outcomes those institutions experienced. If the popular assumption were correct, the relationship would have been strong and positive: more adoption, more successful attacks. It was not. The relationship was not statistically significant ($p = .330$). In the language of research, I could not reject the null hypothesis — which, in plain terms, means the data gave me no evidence that digital adoption itself predicts whether attacks succeed.

In research, a null finding is often treated as a disappointment — the dog that didn't bark. But sometimes the silence is the discovery. Here, the absence of a relationship is precisely the point. It directly contradicts one of the most influential assumptions shaping how Nigeria talks about, and legislates around, its digital economy.

It is not how much Nigeria banks digitally that determines whether the attacker wins. It is how sophisticated the attacker is, and how capable the defence is. Adoption is a bystander that keeps getting blamed for the crime.

Put the trilogy's three findings side by side and the picture resolves. Attacker sophistication: significant predictor (Part One). Cybersecurity measures: significant predictor, in the protective direction (Part Two). Digital banking adoption: not a significant predictor (this finding). Two of the three factors move the outcome. The third — the one that dominates the public conversation — does not.

$r = .269$	PART ONE Attacker sophistication → MORE successful attacks
$r = -.258$	PART TWO Cybersecurity measures → FEWER successful attacks
$p = .330$	PART THREE Digital banking adoption → NO significant link

Two of three factors move the outcome. The third — the one that dominates the conversation — does not.

Why the Myth Survives — And Why It Is Dangerous

If the data is this clear, why does the belief persist? Because it is intuitive, and because correlation is easy to mistake for cause. Nigeria's digital economy has grown rapidly, and cyber fraud has grown alongside it. To the eye, they rise together. But rising together is not the same as one causing the other. Fraud has grown because the attacker has professionalised — the AI tools, the dark-web kits, the cross-border syndicates documented in Part One. It would have grown regardless of how many Nigerians opened a banking app, because the driver is the offender's capability, not the victim pool's size.

The myth is not merely inaccurate. It is expensive. Every policy instinct that treats digital adoption as the hazard — friction at onboarding, caution about financial inclusion, restrictions framed as "reducing exposure" — spends effort and political capital on a variable my data says does not move the outcome. Worse, friction has a perverse effect: it pushes users towards informal, unmonitored, less-secure channels. The attempt to reduce exposure by slowing adoption can increase real-world risk while leaving the actual driver — attacker sophistication — entirely untouched.

So, Who Should Own This? The Wrong Question, and the Right One

Whenever cyber fraud surges, the national reflex is to ask a single question: is the EFCC capable of stopping it? It is an understandable question, and I want to gently suggest it is the wrong one — not because the EFCC's capability does not matter, but because framing the entire problem as one agency's competence misunderstands the shape of the threat.

AI-era financial cybercrime does not sit inside any single mandate. Prosecution of financial crime is the EFCC's domain. Banking-sector security standards belong to the CBN. Data protection sits with NITDA and the Nigeria Data Protection Commission. Cyber-offence investigation runs through the Police cybercrime units and, at the national-security level, the office of the National Security Adviser. A deepfake-enabled business email compromise that drains a corporate account touches every one of those mandates at once. Asking whether one of them is "sophisticated enough" is like asking whether the goalkeeper is fast enough to win a football match. The right question is whether the team is coordinated.

We keep asking whether the EFCC is sophisticated enough to stop cybercrime. My research says we are asking the wrong question. The gap is not any single agency's competence. It is the coordination between all of them — and the capability underneath all of them.

This is where the trilogy's findings converge into a single recommendation. If adoption is not the driver (this finding), and sophistication and defence are (Parts One and Two), then the national response should be built around a coordinated capability that raises the cost of sophistication and the quality of defence — across agencies, not within one. That is a structural fix, not an accusation aimed at any institution.

What To Do With This Finding — Three Redirections

A null finding does not produce a to-do list of new controls the way the first two articles did. It does something arguably more valuable: it tells the country where to STOP spending its fear, and where to redirect it. Three redirections follow.

01 Fund defence and threat intelligence — not friction against adoption

Stop treating digital adoption as the risk to be managed, and start treating attacker sophistication and defensive capability as the variables that actually move the outcome. This is not a semantic point — it changes where the money goes. Every naira spent slowing, taxing, or over-restricting digital financial services in the name of "reducing exposure" is a naira misdirected, because my data shows adoption does not drive attack success. That same naira, spent on threat intelligence, monitoring, and defensive capability (the factors that DO predict outcomes), buys measurable risk reduction. The CBN, in its Payments System Vision 2028, has set a target of reducing electronic fraud to below 0.001% of transaction volume. That target will not be met by slowing adoption. It will be met by out-defending the attacker — which the evidence says is achievable.

CBN, NITDA, and the banks   CBN Payments System Vision 2028 (sub-0.001% fraud target)   Reallocate in the next budget and policy cycle

02 Aim the national response at attacker sophistication, not at digital growth

Redirect the fear. The public conversation — amplified by every AI-fraud headline — pushes policymakers towards instinctive caution about digital growth. But caution aimed at adoption is aimed at the wrong target. The genuinely rising threat is attacker sophistication: AI-generated phishing, deepfake executives, voice cloning, automated scam campaigns. These are advancing whether Nigeria's digital adoption grows or not. A national response should therefore fund the things that blunt sophistication — sector-wide threat intelligence sharing, AI-assisted anomaly detection, and continuous adversarial training — rather than measures that make digital services harder to use in the mistaken belief that friction equals safety. Friction drives users to informal, less-secure channels. It does not reduce crime; it relocates it.

Office of the NSA, EFCC, CBN, NITDA — coordinated   US FS-ISAC threat-sharing + inter-agency fusion   Establish coordination mechanism within 12 months

03 Secure the on-ramp — expand inclusion, harden the doorway

Protect the on-ramp, not just the vault. If adoption itself is not the danger, then the priority for every new digital-banking user is not to discourage them from joining — it is to ensure the point at which they join is secure. That means identity assurance at onboarding (the layer raised repeatedly by practitioners responding to this series), fraud education delivered at the moment of account creation, and default-on security settings rather than opt-in ones. Nigeria should be expanding digital financial inclusion aggressively — the developmental case is overwhelming — while hardening the entry points through which new users and their money flow. Grow the digital economy. Secure the doorway. The two are not in tension; the belief that they are is precisely the myth this research retires.

Banks and fintechs; CBN sets the standard   Identity-assurance-at-onboarding (India, Kenya models)   Default-on security for new accounts within 12 months

The Bottom Line — And the End of the Equation

Across three articles, I have tried to replace assumption with evidence. The equation Nigeria has been carrying in its head — more digital equals more danger — does not survive contact with the data. Here is the equation my research supports instead. Cyberattack success rises with attacker sophistication. It falls with genuine cybersecurity measures. And it is not, in any statistically meaningful way, a function of how digital the country becomes.

That should be liberating. It means Nigeria does not face a tragic trade-off between the digital economy it needs and the security it deserves. It can pursue financial inclusion, digital payments, and a modern economy at full speed — provided it funds the defence and confronts the attacker with the seriousness both require. The fear of going digital is a tax the country has been paying on a risk that the evidence does not support.

Stop fearing the digital economy. Fear the unpreparedness. And build — across every agency, every bank, and every new user's first login — the coordinated capability that the evidence, not the anxiety, says will actually keep Nigeria's money safe.

Going digital was never the danger. Going digital while unprepared is. Nigeria can fix the second without surrendering the first.

THAT COMPLETES "NIGERIA'S CYBERCRIME EQUATION."

Part One: the attacker is winning. · Part Two: defence works. · Part Three: adoption is not the risk.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This article concludes a three-part series drawn from the author's doctoral research, *Cybercriminal Sophistication, Cybersecurity Measures, and Digital Banking Adoption: Implications for Cyberattack Outcomes in Nigerian Financial Institutions*, currently in advanced candidacy at the University of the Cumberlands, with committee approval secured and the defence forthcoming. The study surveyed 78 Nigerian banking and cybersecurity professionals using a Routine Activity Theory framework. The author is a Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA).

Focus

Nigeria's 50% mining GDP ambition hit by insecurity, weak data and illegal mining

LADI PATRICK-OKWOLI

NIGERIA'S AMBITIOUS plan to raise mining contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) to 50 percent is being challenged by harsh realities, as insecurity, inadequate geological data, illegal mining, underinvestment and structural bottlenecks continue to constrain growth, BusinessDay investigations reveal.

The target, championed by Dele Alake, minister of Solid Minerals Development, reflects the Federal Government's determination to transform the mining industry into a major pillar of economic diversification and reduce dependence on oil revenues. However, industry experts and operators say the goal remains far from reach under current conditions, saying that the sector requires a far deeper structural transformation than current reforms have delivered.

Official data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) show that mining and quarrying contributed 4.23 percent to GDP in the first quarter of 2026, slightly lower than the 4.38 percent recorded in the corresponding period of 2025, though significantly higher than the 2.15 percent contribution recorded in the fourth quarter of 2025. While the figures point to progress, they also underscore the enormous gap between current realities and the government's long-term aspirations.

For Shekwonyadu Iyakwari, professor of Applied Mineralogy and Exploration Geology at the Federal University of Lafia, the 50 percent target is unrealistic under prevailing circumstances.

"For the sector to move from about 0.1 percent historically to where it is today, the progress is commendable. But looking at what is required for mining to contribute 50 percent to GDP, we are nowhere near that," he told BusinessDay.

According to him, insecurity remains the single biggest obstacle standing in the way of meaningful expansion. Large stretches of Nigeria's mineral-rich belts continue to grapple with banditry, kidnapping and illegal mining activities, making exploration and commercial operations increasingly difficult.

"Wherever large-scale illegal mining occurs, insecurity follows. Regulatory agencies cannot even access these areas to assess activity," he said, noting that many operators now spend heavily on private security arrangements and local vigilante groups simply to remain operational.

The scale of the challenge extends beyond artisanal operators. Industry stakeholders say illegal mining has evolved into a sophisticated network involving both small-scale diggers and larger operators with access to heavy equipment.

"Big companies with excavators and heavy equipment also engage in illegal mining. Illegal mining is not just about people digging with shovels," an industry stakeholder familiar with operations across several mining belts said.

The persistence of illegal mining continues to undermine the government's ability to accurately measure production volumes, revenue generation and mineral reserves. Analysts say this weakens regulatory oversight and contributes to significant revenue leakages.

Experts argue that alongside enforcement efforts, authorities must tackle the broader ecosystem enabling illegal mining. Recommendations include the creation of specialised mining police units in conflict-prone areas, deployment of digital licensing systems, stricter monitoring of mineral exports, stronger border controls and disruption of illicit financial networks linked to mineral smuggling.

Beyond insecurity, stakeholders identify the lack of credible geological data as one of the most significant impediments to attracting large-scale investment into the sector. Despite frequent claims about Nigeria's vast mineral wealth, investors continue to complain about inadequate exploration data and the absence of internationally verifiable reserve estimates.

"Apart from insecurity, the issue of geological data is critical. We can say we have minerals, but can we quantify them properly? Investors want verifiable data," Iyakwari said.

He noted that countries such as South Africa and Botswana built globally competitive mining industries through decades of systematic exploration and the development of reliable geological databases, significantly reducing investment risks and uncertainty.

The professor also challenged recurring claims by public officials regarding the scale of Nigeria's mineral deposits, arguing that such assertions often lack the scientific data required to convince serious investors.

"We keep making claims about the resources we have, but investors want figures backed by data. They want evidence of reserves, not estimates. Without that information, attracting major mining investments becomes difficult," he said.

> "
> **The laws are in place. The regulations exist. What is missing is implementation**

Despite these concerns, analysts acknowledge that reforms introduced by the Ministry of Solid Minerals Development have begun yielding measurable results.

Olatunji Akinade, chairman of the SOMEA 2026 Jury, described the minister's targets as aspirational benchmarks designed to drive momentum within the sector.

"Inspirations drive focus. They help create a sense of direction and urgency. If reforms are sustained and continuously improved, the sector can achieve significant growth, but transformation does not happen overnight," he said.

According to Akinade, one of the most significant shifts under the current administration is the push towards local value addition rather than the export of raw minerals. He noted that increased domestic processing would create jobs, generate higher revenues and retain more economic value within the country.

"When you process minerals locally, you create jobs, increase earnings and ensure that more of the value remains within the Nigerian economy. That is where the real gains lie," he said.

The ministry recently disclosed that more than 300 illegal miners had been arrested over the past two years, with over 100 already prosecuted. While experts describe the development as a positive step, they insist enforcement alone will not solve the problem.

"I think it is a step in the right direction. But government must also formalise artisanal mining through cooperatives so that operators can be monitored and regulated effectively," Iyakwari said.

Stakeholders further warn that Nigeria faces growing competition from other resource-rich countries seeking to attract the same pool of mining capital. While government officials have embarked on investment roadshows and engagements with foreign investors, experts say Nigeria must create a more competitive operating environment if it hopes to secure substantial inflows.

Akinade noted that exploration remains one of the most underfunded segments of the industry despite its critical role in unlocking future investments.

"The exploration we are benefiting from in some countries today was carried out many years ago. Exploration is expensive, but without it, you cannot generate the data investors need. The sector requires significant funding if it is to realise its potential," he said.

Industry operators argue that future growth will depend less on ambitious GDP projections and more on the implementation of practical reforms. They point to increased exploration spending, improved reserve estimation, stronger security architecture, expanded local processing capacity and stricter enforcement against illegal mining as more meaningful indicators of progress over the next three to five years.

For many observers, the challenge is no longer the absence of policies or legislation. Rather, it is the gap between policy formulation and implementation.

"The laws are in place. The regulations exist. What is missing is implementation," an industry expert said.

Until insecurity is brought under control, exploration activity expands significantly and investment conditions become more competitive, experts say Nigeria's ambition of making mining a dominant contributor to GDP may remain more aspirational than achievable.

Focus

When insecurity meets investment: Can Nasarawa sustain its economic promise?

BATURE BENJAMIN, Lafia

For years, Nasarawa State has been projected as one of Nigeria's fastest-growing investment destinations. Its fertile agricultural land, rich deposits of lithium, baryte, limestone, tin and gold, and its proximity to the Federal Capital Territory have made it attractive to investors.

Yet, despite these enormous advantages, insecurity has emerged as the state's greatest economic obstacle, slowing investment, disrupting farming, shrinking businesses and threatening thousands of livelihoods.

Across farming communities in Doma, Keana, Awe, Obi, Toto and parts of Lafia Local Government Areas, fear has replaced optimism. Farmers who once cultivated hectares of maize, rice, yam and sesame now abandon their farmlands after repeated attacks by armed groups, kidnappers and violent clashes. The result is declining agricultural production, rising food prices and reduced household incomes.

"I cultivated only half of my farmland this year because we are afraid," said Musa Ibrahim, a farmer in Doma. "Many of us cannot risk going deep into our farms anymore. If farming stops, our families have nothing to survive on."

Agriculture remains the backbone of Nasarawa's economy, employing the majority of its population. Every planting season lost to insecurity translates into lower harvests, reduced market supplies and declining earnings for farmers,

HIS EXCELLENCY
ENGR. ABDULLAHI A. SULE
EXECUTIVE GOVERNOR, NASARAWA STATE

traders, transporters and agro-processing businesses. Economists warn that these disruptions weaken the state's internally generated revenue while increasing dependence on food imports from neighbouring states.

The impact extends beyond agriculture. Nasarawa's vast mineral wealth has attracted interest from both local and international investors seeking opportunities in Nigeria's growing mining industry. However, insecurity around some mining communities and the activities of illegal miners have discouraged legitimate investors who require a stable operating environment before committing substantial capital.

Commercial activities have also slowed. In Lafia, Keffi and Akwanga, transport operators say passenger numbers have dropped on some routes because travellers fear kidnapping. Hotels, restaurants and roadside businesses equally report fewer customers, especially in areas perceived to be unsafe.

For small business owners, insecurity has become an additional operating cost. Many now spend scarce resources on private security, limit business hours or avoid transporting goods after dark. These expenses reduce profits and discourage expansion, making it harder for businesses to employ more workers.

Security experts argue that investors are often guided by one fundamental consideration before committing funds—safety. Where lives, property and investments cannot be guaranteed, businesses naturally relocate to more secure environments. This reality poses a significant challenge to Nasarawa's ambition of becoming an industrial and agricultural hub in North-Central Nigeria.

The tourism sector has equally suffered. Attractions such as the Farin Ruwa Waterfalls and other scenic locations possess enormous potential to generate revenue, create employment and attract both domestic and international visitors. However, concerns over safety continue to limit tourist arrivals, leaving much of the state's tourism potential untapped.

Development economists note that insecurity also forces governments to divert resources from development projects to security operations. Money that could have been invested in roads, schools, healthcare facilities, irrigation systems and rural electrification is increasingly channelled towards maintaining peace, responding to emergencies and supporting displaced communities.

Despite these challenges, the Nasarawa State Government continues to pursue programmes aimed at attracting investment, improving infrastructure and expanding agricultural production. Security agencies have intensified operations against criminal elements, while traditional rulers and community leaders are strengthening local intelligence to complement government efforts.

Analysts, however, insist that sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved without lasting peace. They argue that security is the foundation upon which agriculture, mining, commerce and industrialisation flourish. Without adequate protection for farmers, businesses and investors, the state's abundant natural resources may remain underutilised.

For many residents, the solution goes beyond military operations. They advocate improved intelligence gathering, stronger community policing, youth employment programmes, better rural infrastructure and closer collaboration among government, security agencies and local communities.

As Nigeria's states compete to attract investment and create jobs, Nasarawa stands at a crossroads. Its natural endowments offer enormous economic promise, but unless insecurity is decisively addressed, that promise may continue to fade. Restoring confidence among farmers, entrepreneurs and investors may ultimately prove to be the state's most important investment in its economic future.

The missing middle of electrification: Why Africa's off-grid solar boom is rewriting the rules of energy access

CHIDI NWAFOR

One Nigerian village without a grid enjoys electricity every night. Another, officially connected to the national grid, does not.

It is a paradox that would have been almost inconceivable a generation ago. Yet as dusk settles across rural Nigeria, it is becoming increasingly common. In one community, children complete their homework beneath the steady glow of LED lights powered by a modest solar home system. A tailor runs an electric sewing machine long after sunset. A small shopkeeper keeps drinks cold and mobile phones charging. A few kilometres away, households connected to the national grid wait in darkness, hoping electricity will return before morning.

For decades, electrification was measured by a simple metric: how many kilometres of transmission line had been built and how many homes had been connected to the grid. Governments planned around it. Development finance institutions invested in it. Utilities were judged by it. That assumption shaped more than infrastructure. It shaped how the world understood development itself.

Today, that assumption is quietly breaking down.

The most consequential electrification story of this decade is not the expansion of national grids. It is the emergence of decentralized energy systems capable of delivering reliable electricity to places where conventional grids cannot do so economically, or sometimes, reliably. Across Africa, off-grid solar, mini-grids and distributed energy systems are not merely compensating for weak utilities. They are redefining what electrification means.

Nigeria's remarkable growth in off-grid solar adoption is often presented as another symptom of a struggling electricity sector. That interpretation is understandable, but incomplete. What we are witnessing is not simply a response to grid failure. It is the early architecture of a different electricity future.

The world continues to debate generation capacity, transmission expansion and utility reform. Those conversations remain important. Yet they overlook a more profound transition already unfolding across emerging markets. The future of electrification may not depend on building larger grids alone. It may depend on building smarter systems capable of delivering electricity wherever people live, work and create value.

That distinction reveals what I describe as "The Missing Middle of Electrification".

More than a century of electricity planning has conditioned us to believe that electrification is fundamentally an engineering challenge. Build more power plants. Extend more transmission lines. Connect more customers.

History suggests otherwise.

Electrification has never been purely an engineering problem. It has always been a systems problem. Technology generates electricity. Systems deliver it.

This difference may appear subtle, but it has become one of the defining questions of the global energy transition.

For much of the twentieth century, centralized electricity systems transformed industrial economies. Large power stations generated electricity, transmission networks carried it across vast distances, while distribution companies delivered power to consumers. It was an extraordinarily successful model for countries whose population density, institutional capacity and economic structures made nationwide grids commercially viable.

The twenty-first century presents different realities.

Rapid urbanization, dispersed rural settlements, climate pressures, digital technologies, declining renewable energy costs and changing consumer expectations have fundamentally altered the economics of electricity delivery. Extending conventional grids into every community is no longer the only path to universal energy access. In many places, it is no longer the most efficient one.

Around the world, distributed energy is increasingly becoming a permanent component of modern electricity systems rather than a temporary substitute for them. Nowhere is this transformation more visible than in Africa.

The continent has become the global epicentre of off-grid solar deployment, accounting for the overwhelming majority of global off-grid solar sales. Nigeria's rapidly expanding market reflects growing investor confidence, technological maturity and increasing consumer acceptance of decentralized energy solutions.

Continue online

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Issue

Human capital over protectionism: Why restricting educational access undermines national development

COLLINS NWEKE

Few questions in emerging economies touch history, identity, and democracy as deeply as access to education. In both Belgium and Nigeria, educational infrastructure sits at the very heart of how we cultivate citizens, build communities, and shape national belonging across generations. Yet, when demand for quality education outstrips supply, governments face a critical crossroads: do they ration opportunity through protectionist policies, or do they expand capacity to build a more competitive workforce?

The debate witnessed this week in Belgium over restricting access to Dutch-language education in Brussels offers a profound, cautionary lesson for African policymakers, particularly in Nigeria. When public policy seeks to guard educational resources for a specific group rather than scaling them up for the collective good, it treats development as a zero-sum game. True economic diplomacy and sustainable growth dictate the opposite: success should invite expansion, not restriction.

The traps of rationing opportunity

In Brussels, a proposal to reserve a greater proportion of school places exclusively for native Dutch-speaking families stems from a defensive reflex to protect cultural institutions. Acknowledging the historical struggle behind that identity is important, but we must ask a more vital public policy question: Is restricting access ever the wisest way to strengthen an educational system?

The answer is an emphatic no. The overwhelming demand for these schools from non-native, international, and francophone families is not a threat; it is a resounding validation of public policy success.

As a Nigeria-qualified teacher who later served as a Belgian municipal policymaker for almost two decades, the last six years of which was in social affairs, I have viewed this dynamic from multiple vantage points. My children passed through this system. Today, my grandson is being raised at home bilingually in Dutch and English. These experiences have long convinced me that inclusive, multilingual education is a quiet engine of economic competitiveness.

Decades ago, some naturalised African diaspora friends of mine relocated from Belgium to the United Kingdom, convinced that an English-only education would better prepare their children. Those of us who stayed, including those whose kids were born outside Belgium, saw our children gain native proficiency in Dutch, functional French, and a working knowledge of German, all while maintaining English at home. Today, in the global labour market, that linguistic dexterity is a massive competitive asset.

The Nigerian parallel: Education as an economic engine

This lesson hits incredibly close to home for Nigeria and the wider African continent. As we navigate the complexities of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and seek to position our youth for global relevance, our educational policies must move away from the management of scarcity.

Whenever public demand exceeds available supply, the traditional bureaucratic response is to ration. We see this in Nigeria's hyper-competitive tertiary admission systems and the structural bottlenecks facing primary and secondary schooling. But history judges the alternative option much more kindly: investing in capacity.

If an educational pathway, be it specialised technical schooling, language immersion, or digital literacy programs, is yielding high-quality graduates, the appropriate response is to aggressively invest in more classrooms, better teacher welfare, stronger infrastructure, and expanded access. Narrowing the circle of beneficiaries only chokes off human capital development.

Furthermore, there is an undeniable economic dimension. Just as Brussels' labour market rewards multilingualism, the modern African economy rewards adaptability, cross-border communication, and technical excellence. Why would any forward-thinking nation intentionally reduce access to its greatest competitive advantages?

A shared project of scale

Good public policy enlarges opportunity rather than redistributing scarcity. Protectionism and promoting excellence are not competing objectives; they reinforce one another. A balanced, growth-oriented policy matrix must pursue both simultaneously: Guarantee meaningful institutional standards. Expand educational infrastructure aggressively to match demographic realities. Encourage cross-cultural and technical excellence as a defining national strength, rather than treating diversity or migration as a zero-sum competition.

Our educational policies should never simply be about deciding who to keep out of our classrooms. They must be about ensuring that everyone who leaves them is fully equipped to understand their neighbours, navigate global markets, contribute to their communities, and strengthen the economy they share.

Schools do far more than teach curriculum or languages. They cultivate the very citizens who will drive tomorrow's economic diplomacy. It is time our investment strategies reflected that truth.

Nigeria's creators are tired of selling YOUR Dream. Now they're selling theirs

CHASTE INEGBEDION

Forget the days of creators posing with products they don't even use. Nigeria's biggest stars are quietly ditching brand deals for something way more interesting: owning the business. Case in point: Nasboi recently pulled up on Sheyman, owner of Secret Palace, trying to sell him a "How to Become a Billionaire" book. Bold move, using the moment to hand the mic to his friend. But the real plot twist belonged to Sheyman. He used the video to rebrand himself in real time, from music star to hospitality king, dropping names like Secret Palace, Glass House, and Folixx Bukka like a man building an empire one viral clip at a time. That's not content. That's a business plan with good lighting.

BellaNaija saw the writing on the wall too. Their Next Gen Creator House wasn't just a networking mixer, it was a bet. A bet that creators aren't just influencers anymore, they're investors in waiting. BellaNaija's Chief of Staff and Head of Strategy, Mary Edoro, who served as Programme Director of the Next Gen Creator House, put it best: "Next Gen Creator House is BellaNaija's answer to a question we've been asking ourselves throughout our 20th anniversary year: what does it mean to genuinely invest in the next generation, not just talk about them? This wasn't just a conference about young creators. It is a space we have intentionally built for them, with the tools, mentorship, and access to actually build something real for Africa's future." Picture it: the same audience that made you laugh on Instagram could one day fund the next big idea. Ife Durosinmi Etti transformed the community into capital through Herconomy, proof that creator buzz is turning into real capital. Attention isn't just currency anymore. It's due diligence.

Miss Techy's now legendary VFX video on Instagram did something rare: it turned a bureaucratic headache into shareable, useful content, and reminded brands that creators who solve real problems build trust no ad campaign can buy. Meanwhile, VeryDarkMan has shown that influence doesn't have to be curated or comfortable; his online police accountability activism has made him one of the most consequential voices in Nigerian digital culture, proof that creators can hold power accountable, not just partner with it.

Then there's Tomike Adeoye, who has made a career out of taking Nigerian brands global, openly advocating for the fashion houses she wears and the household names she champions, from Nestlé to Maltina. Her ability to secure activations and travel with these brands raises the obvious question every rising creator is asking: how did she build that kind of access?

On the media side, One54 Africa, hosted by Godfrey and Akbar, has quietly become appointment listening for anyone tracking the continent's biggest stories. Their June 2026 episode, featuring legendary music producer Lebo M unpacking the viral $27 million Lion King narrative alongside actor David Oyelowo, is the clearest sign yet that African hosted platforms can command global caliber conversations. Afropolitan Podcast, helmed by Chika Uwazie and Eche Emole, is building that same trust with the diaspora audience.

And here's a thought that should make somebody cry happy tears: what if Esi Aga Productions and Adeoluwa Prince Enioluwa teamed up to turn one couple's wedding fantasy into reality, brands lining up just to be part of someone's "YES I DO"? Now that's love AND leverage.

Funke Akindele called this years ago. Jenifa, Battle on Buka Street, A Tribe Called Judah, Behind The Scenes, building an empire scene by scene while everyone else was still asking for permission. Now an entire generation is following her lead.

Feature

Blood beneath the soil in Nigeria's hidden war for mineral wealth

BLAISE UDUNZE




On a daily basis, the world watches Nigeria through a familiar lens in what appears to be a gory situation. Especially in cases when the news headlines tell stories of farmer-herder clashes, bandit attacks, kidnappings, villages reduced to ashes or deserted by the dwellers, as thousands of Nigerians have been displaced across states such as Zamfara, Plateau, Benue, Niger, Kaduna and Nasarawa. Subliminally, this is about to become a similarly ugly occurrence in Southwestern Nigeria, which is fast becoming obvious if not nipped in the bud quickly.

Recorded data have shown that bandits, Boko Haram, others killed over 190,000 Nigerians in 17 years and displaced 3.7 million people.

A human rights organisation, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety), in its fearful revelation has said that no fewer than 190,150 Nigerians have been killed by bandits, Boko Haram insurgents, and suspected armed herdsmen between July 2009 and March 19, 2026 as this call for concern.

The dominant explanations often point to ethnic tensions, religious divisions, climate change, shrinking grazing routes or weak security institutions. No doubt, those factors are certainly part of Nigeria's complex security crisis. Yet another question deserves serious examination.

What if, in some locations, the violence is also serving another purpose? What if some of the territories experiencing repeated displacement are the same places sitting atop some of Nigeria's most valuable mineral deposits? More importantly, if such a pattern exists, who benefits when communities disappear?

Of a truth, these questions are uncomfortable, but undeniably they deserve careful investigation rather than dismissal.

For ages, Nigeria has been naturally endowed and it is estimated to be rich in enormous significant reserves of gold, lithium, uranium, tin, columbite and other strategic minerals increasingly sought after in the global transition to clean energy technologies. As international demand for battery minerals continues to rise, these resources have become far more valuable than they were only a decade ago.

If one overlays publicly available geological information with maps showing persistent violence, some observers argue that striking geographical overlaps appear in several regions. Such overlaps alone cannot establish causation. Correlation is not proof of conspiracy. However, they raise questions worthy of independent scrutiny.

One issue attracting increasing attention and adequately yearns for answer is whether prolonged insecurity may inadvertently or deliberately create conditions that make mineral extraction easier.

Under Nigeria's Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act 2007, mineral resources belong to the Federal Government, while mining rights are granted through licences and leases. Community engagement and land access are expected to form part of the licensing process, although implementation varies depending on circumstances. This raises an important policy question.

What happens when the communities expected to participate in those processes have already fled because of violence?

Displacement changes the dynamics of land ownership, consent and access. While no evidence automatically proves that attacks are orchestrated to facilitate mining, the sequence of violence followed by renewed commercial activity in some locations deserves closer examination by regulators, lawmakers and investigative journalists.

In conflict studies, researchers have long observed that wars often generate economic winners alongside humanitarian losers. Could elements of Nigeria's insecurity also be producing economic beneficiaries?


Reports over the years have documented concerns about illegal mining operations across parts of northern Nigeria. Government agencies themselves have repeatedly acknowledged that criminal networks profit from the country's vast mineral wealth. The unresolved question is whether isolated criminality has, in some instances, evolved into more sophisticated alliances involving political influence, financial interests and international supply chains. If so, the implications extend far beyond Nigeria.

Invariably, it is clearly known that lithium has become one of the world's most strategic commodities, powering electric vehicle batteries and renewable energy storage systems. Gold has always remained one of the safest global investment assets during periods of uncertainty. Meanwhile, it is well confirmed that the global appetite for these minerals creates enormous financial incentives.

Suppose violent displacement reduces resistance to extraction. Suppose shell companies subsequently acquire mining interests. Suppose minerals then leave Nigeria through legitimate-looking export documentation while their true value remains understated.

These scenarios remain allegations unless supported by verifiable evidence. Yet they outline a framework that investigators may wish to test rather than ignore. Financial crime experts frequently identify trade mis-invoicing as one of the most common methods of illicit financial flows worldwide.

Could Nigeria's solid minerals sector be vulnerable to similar practices? If valuable lithium ore is deliberately but inaccurately described as lower-value material on export documents, substantial wealth could potentially leave the country without reflecting its true market value. Likewise, if unrefined gold exits through privileged channels with limited scrutiny, questions naturally arise about oversight, transparency and accountability over criminal activities which have continued to stunted and disrupt the country's socio-economic growth and at the same time cause carnage.

Such possibilities are not accusations against any particular institution or company. Rather, they illustrate why stronger monitoring systems are increasingly essential. Another question concerns logistics.

With the high level of criminal activities, industrial mining requires heavy machinery, diesel supplies, transportation networks and specialised personnel. These are not operations that can remain invisible indefinitely.

If certain territories are genuinely too dangerous for security agencies, how do industrial-scale extraction activities reportedly continue in some remote locations? If they do, who protects those operations? Who authorises their movement? Who verifies what is extracted? Who ensures royalties and export revenues reach public coffers? These are governance questions that demand institutional answers.

Equally important is the international dimension. Minerals extracted in Nigeria ultimately enter global supply chains. Gold may pass through international refining hubs before entering financial markets. Lithium may become part of battery manufacturing destined for electric vehicles, which are facts as they are sold across Europe, North America and Asia.

One known fact is that consumers purchasing products containing these minerals rarely know the full story of where they originated.

Increasingly, however, investors and governments are demanding ethical sourcing standards that trace minerals from extraction to final manufacture.

A critical factor that must be taken into cognizance is that if insecurity is creating opportunities for illegal or unethical extraction anywhere in the world, multinational companies have responsibilities alongside national governments, of which the onus falls on the Nigerian government.

Transparency cannot stop at the mine gate. Nor should accountability end at national borders. Another issue requiring attention concerns beneficial ownership.

Across many jurisdictions, shell companies can obscure the identities of individuals ultimately controlling commercial assets. If politically exposed persons or powerful business interests are hidden behind complex corporate structures registered offshore, identifying beneficiaries becomes significantly more difficult. This challenge is hardly unique to Nigeria.

Findings showed that from Latin America to Central Africa and Southeast Asia, resistant corporate networks have frequently complicated efforts to combat corruption and illicit resource extraction. That is precisely why open corporate registries, beneficial ownership databases and transparent mining licence disclosures are becoming global governance priorities. For Nigeria, the stakes could hardly be higher.

The country stands at the centre of the world's emerging critical minerals economy. The Nigerian government can't feign ignorance of the fact that, when handled transparently, these resources could finance infrastructure, education, healthcare, and industrial development for generations.

In no way would the government claim not knowing that when handled poorly, they risk becoming another chapter in the well-documented "resource curse," where extraordinary natural wealth coincides with persistent poverty, insecurity and institutional weakness.

The ultimate challenge, therefore, is not simply about mining. It is about governance. It is about whether public institutions possess both the independence and capacity to ensure that natural resources benefit citizens rather than narrow interests. It is about whether conflict zones receive genuine peacebuilding efforts instead of becoming forgotten frontiers. And it is about whether international markets demand accountability with the same enthusiasm they demand raw materials.

None of these questions should be answered through speculation. They require rigorous investigations, forensic financial analysis, satellite imagery, mining license audits, customs records, beneficial ownership disclosures and courageous journalism.

They require governments willing to open their books. They require international cooperation capable of tracing money across borders. Most importantly, they require asking questions that have too often remained unasked.

Perhaps Nigeria's security crisis is exactly what it appears to be: a tragic convergence of historical grievances, weak institutions, criminality and environmental pressures. Or perhaps, in some places, another layer of economic incentive deserves closer scrutiny.

Until those questions are thoroughly investigated, one possibility will continue to linger. Maybe the world's attention has been fixed on the blood spilled above ground, while too little attention has been paid to the extraordinary wealth lying beneath it.

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Feature

Beyond affiliation: How UNILORIN is raising academic standards across 21 partner institutions

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

In an era where the quality of higher education is increasingly measured by academic integrity, institutional accountability and the competence of graduates, the University of Ilorin is taking deliberate steps to ensure that its affiliated institutions are not left behind.

From strengthening examination processes to expanding academic programmes and deepening quality assurance systems, the institution is positioning its network of affiliated colleges as partners in delivering globally competitive tertiary education.

This commitment came into sharp focus during a three-day capacity-building workshop organised by the University's Centre for Affiliated Institutions, where administrators, academics and examination officers from affiliated institutions converged on the University of Ilorin to review existing practices, share experiences and acquire new skills for improving institutional performance.

Held at the University Auditorium Basement, the workshop featured paper presentations, interactive sessions, deliberations and practical engagements on issues ranging from examination moderation and result processing to institutional management and compliance with affiliation requirements.

For the University, the workshop represented more than another annual gathering, it reflected a growing recognition that sustaining academic excellence across affiliated institutions requires continuous training, effective supervision and a shared commitment to quality assurance.

Welcoming participants, Yahya Oyewole Imam, Professor of Islamic Studies who is the Director of the Centre for Affiliated Institutions, described capacity building as an indispensable ingredient for institutional growth and long-term sustainability.

According to him, investment in human capacity strengthens institutional resilience by improving leadership confidence, enhancing coordination and workflow, promoting a culture of continuous learning and ultimately delivering better educational outcomes.

He explained that the workshop was carefully designed to address practical challenges encountered in administering affiliated institutions through presentations delivered by experienced academics and administrators actively involved in affiliation exercises.

The sessions covered teaching quality, examination moderation, preparation of marking guides, assessment of examination scripts, result processing and other operational responsibilities critical to maintaining academic standards.

Imam urged participants to contribute actively by sharing experiences from their respective institutions while seeking clarification on issues relating to the Centre's core responsibilities.

Participants at the UNILORIN event

Growing network, expanding opportunities

Beyond improving operational efficiency, the workshop also highlighted the steady expansion of the University's affiliation network.

Imam disclosed that the number of affiliated institutions had risen from 17 to 21 within the past year, reflecting growing confidence in the University's affiliation system.

The newly affiliated institutions include Ansar-Ud-Deen College of Education, Isolo; The Polytechnic, Aran-Orin; Daaru'l Khayr College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Ibadan; and Omo Hiya College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Ilorin.

The expansion has also been accompanied by the approval of additional academic programmes for existing affiliates.

Haruna Rasheed Centre for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Ilorin, has received approval to commence a Diploma in Common and Islamic Law alongside its existing Diploma in Arabic and Islamic Studies.

Similarly, Imam Malik College, Ibadan, has been approved to introduce a Bachelor of Arts degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies in addition to its diploma programme.

The University Senate has equally approved nine new undergraduate programmes for Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, complementing its existing Diploma in Islamic Law and Common Law.

While celebrating these milestones, the Director reminded affiliated institutions that affiliation is a privilege that must be sustained through strict adherence to approved academic standards.

He urged institutions to remain committed to quality delivery while avoiding practices capable of undermining the integrity of the affiliation arrangement.

He also appealed for the speedy resolution of pending regulatory matters affecting some institutions.

According to him, Imam Malik College, Ibadan, and Ansar-Ud-Deen College of Education, Isolo, are yet to receive bills for resource verification from the National Universities Commission (NUC), despite having secured programme approvals and signed Memoranda of Understanding with the University.

He expressed confidence that participants would maximise the knowledge gained during the workshop to strengthen their respective institutions.

The Director also appreciated the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, Wahab Olasupo Egbewole (SAN), Professor of International Law for his continued support for the Centre, while commending facilitators, organisers and participants for their dedication.

Examination moderation: Protecting academic integrity

A major highlight of the workshop was a presentation by Ayodele Fajonyomi a Professor - of the Department of Adult and Primary Education, University of Ilorin, who examined the role of examination moderation in safeguarding academic standards.

Presenting a paper titled 'Quality Assurance in Examination Moderation: Expectations from Internal Examiners in Affiliated Institution Colleges,' Fajonyomi observed that assessment remains one of the most critical responsibilities of every higher education institution because it provides evidence that students have acquired the knowledge, skills, competencies and values required by their programmes.

He noted that although teaching and internal assessment take place within affiliated colleges, the responsibility for maintaining uniform academic standards ultimately rests with the parent university.

According to him, examination moderation is therefore not merely an administrative requirement but an essential quality assurance mechanism.

Fajonyomi identified poorly constructed examination questions, weak marking schemes and inadequate documentation among the recurring deficiencies observed during moderation exercises.

He explained that these shortcomings often arise not from a lack of subject knowledge but from insufficient adherence to established quality assurance procedures.

To strengthen examination quality, he recommended that affiliated institutions institutionalise internal moderation before forwarding examination materials for external review.

He also advocated regular training for internal examiners, heads of departments and examination officers to keep them abreast of evolving quality assurance standards.

Other recommendations included the adoption of modern information technology to minimise computational errors during result processing, improved archiving of examination records to strengthen transparency and accountability, and embedding examination quality assurance as a continuous institutional culture rather than an occasional administrative exercise.

Fajonyomi stressed that every internal examiner should regard moderation as a professional obligation aimed at preserving academic integrity and producing graduates capable of competing nationally and globally.

Building institutions, not just partnerships

As universities increasingly rely on affiliation arrangements to widen access to higher education, the effectiveness of those partnerships depends largely on maintaining common academic standards.

The University of Ilorin's approach suggests that affiliation is not simply about extending institutional reach but about building the capacity of partner institutions to deliver quality education that reflects the University's academic reputation.

Through continuous training, expanded academic opportunities and a firm commitment to quality assurance, the institution is reinforcing the principle that excellence in higher education is sustained not only by infrastructure and curriculum, but also by competent personnel, robust systems and an unwavering culture of accountability.

UNILORIN

Analysis

Meta, AI image rights and the urgent case for African AI sovereignty

OJO EMMANUEL ADEMOLA

The controversy surrounding Meta's newly launched Muse Image platform is not merely a technology story. It is a defining governance story of the artificial intelligence age. Meta's decision to allow AI-generated images to incorporate publicly available Instagram profile photographs has reignited global concerns about consent, identity, data ownership and digital rights. Critics argue that millions of users may not fully understand that their publicly visible images can become raw material for AI-generated content. For Africa, this debate reaches far beyond privacy. It touches the heart of AI sovereignty, economic independence, cultural preservation and the future of work.

A New Digital Colonialism in the Making

The central question is simple: who owns the data that powers artificial intelligence? For decades, Africa's natural resources fuelled industrial revolutions elsewhere. Today, personal data, behavioural patterns, images, languages and cultural artefacts have become the new strategic resources of the digital economy. If African data is harvested, processed and monetised outside the continent without equitable value creation, a new form of digital colonialism will emerge.

Meta's Muse Image feature demonstrates how quickly personal content can be transformed into AI assets. While public social media content may be legally accessible under platform terms, legality does not automatically translate into ethical legitimacy. Africans must therefore ask whether individuals truly understand how their images, voices and online activities may contribute to training commercial AI systems valued in billions of pounds.

Why Africa Must Demand AI Sovereignty

AI sovereignty refers to a nation or continent's ability to govern its own data, digital infrastructure, AI models and technological destiny. The issue is becoming increasingly urgent. According to GSMA, mobile technologies contributed approximately 240 billion US dollars to Africa's economy in 2025, representing 7.8 per cent of GDP, while the sector supported about 13 million jobs. GSMA also reports that around 80 per cent of Africa's population had access to mobile internet coverage in 2025, creating an enormous stream of digital data capable of powering future AI systems.

Yet the greatest economic value from African-generated data is still largely captured outside Africa. The continent produces growing volumes of digital information, but ownership of hyperscale cloud infrastructure, advanced computing resources and frontier AI models remains concentrated among a handful of global technology firms.

Negotiating AI Image Rights and Continental Sovereignty

Across the continent, Africa stands at a decisive moment in the global struggle over AI image rights, data ownership, and digital sovereignty. Nigeria's recent engagements — including the FCCPC's strategic consultations under the leadership of its Executive Vice Chairman, Mr. Tunji Bello, the affirmative support of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who directed the FCCPC to commence a formal investigation, and Leadership Newspaper's Editor-in-Chief Azubuike Ishiekwene's BBC interview on the NPO petition — mirror a wider continental awakening.

Africa must no longer serve as an unpriced reservoir of cultural, biometric, and media data for global platforms. Instead, the continent must articulate a sovereign negotiation framework that affirms African ownership of its digital assets and protects the economic and cultural value embedded in African imagery, journalism, and creative output. International precedents such as Australia's bargaining code, and Canada's Online News Act demonstrate that nations can compel Big Tech to negotiate fairly when regulatory architecture is bold, coherent, and rooted in national interest.

Africa must now craft its own continental model — one that welcomes responsible use of African data and imagery, yet insists on structured, transparent, and equitable terms that secure fair value for creators, institutions, and sovereign states. This moment demands technical clarity, diplomatic firmness, and a unified continental commitment to African AI sovereignty.

Data Ownership Must Become a Strategic National Asset

Data should no longer be viewed merely as information. It is economic capital. Every uploaded photograph, social media interaction, GPS signal, digital payment and healthcare record contributes to datasets that fuel machine learning systems. UNCTAD estimates that artificial intelligence could reach a market value of approximately 4.8 trillion US dollars by 2033. The nations that control data, computing power and AI ecosystems will capture the largest share of that value.

African governments should therefore treat data governance with the same seriousness applied to oil reserves, mineral wealth and strategic infrastructure. Strong data protection laws are essential, but protection alone is insufficient. Africa requires frameworks for data portability, data interoperability, local AI innovation and equitable data monetisation.

The Future of Work Will Be Won by AI Creators, Not AI Consumers

The debate surrounding Meta's image-generation capabilities also highlights a broader labour market transformation. AI is already reshaping journalism, design, customer service, software development, education, healthcare administration and financial services. Jobs built around routine cognitive tasks face growing automation pressures.

Africa's competitive advantage will not come from consuming AI products developed elsewhere. It will come from developing local AI solutions capable of solving African challenges in agriculture, education, healthcare, cybersecurity, governance and financial inclusion. The continent's youthful demographic profile provides a significant opportunity. Instead of exporting raw data and importing finished AI products, Africa must cultivate data scientists, AI engineers, AI ethicists, robotics specialists and digital entrepreneurs.

Africa's strategic response must therefore move beyond defensive regulation and embrace a continental industrial policy for AI. This requires coordinated investment in data infrastructure, sovereign cloud environments, high-performance computing, and indigenous research ecosystems capable of producing foundational models trained on African languages, cultures, environments and problem-sets. Without such structural commitments, Africa risks becoming permanently dependent on external AI systems whose design logic, value priorities and economic benefits lie outside the continent.

A sovereign African AI future demands that governments, universities, private innovators and regional bodies such as the AU and AfCFTA work in concert to build an integrated pipeline — from STEM education and research funding to startup incubation and continental AI standards. Only through such deliberate architecture can Africa convert its demographic strength, cultural richness and data abundance into genuine technological power, ensuring that AI becomes a tool of liberation rather than another frontier of extraction.

Language Sovereignty and Cultural Protection

Africa is home to more than 2,000 languages, yet many remain significantly underrepresented in global AI models. When AI systems do not understand African languages, they cannot fully serve African realities. The result is technological exclusion and cultural marginalisation. AI sovereignty therefore includes linguistic sovereignty. African datasets, indigenous knowledge systems and local cultural contexts must be intentionally incorporated into future AI development.

Africa's linguistic diversity is not merely a cultural asset; it is a strategic resource in the emerging AI economy. Yet without deliberate investment, this richness risks becoming a digital liability. The continent must therefore prioritise the creation of high-quality, ethically sourced datasets for African languages, including those with limited written corpora. This involves mobilising universities, cultural institutions, media organisations and community archives to preserve oral traditions, document indigenous knowledge systems and digitise local content at scale.

By embedding African semantic structures, idioms, worldviews and epistemologies into AI models, the continent can ensure that future technologies recognise, respect and accurately interpret African realities. Linguistic sovereignty is thus inseparable from technological sovereignty — and both are essential if Africa is to shape AI systems that serve its people rather than distort or erase their identities.

A Call for Responsible Innovation

The criticism aimed at Meta should not be interpreted as opposition to innovation. Innovation remains essential for economic growth and social advancement. However, innovation without informed consent, transparency and accountability risks eroding public trust. Citizens deserve clarity regarding how their images, voices and personal information are collected, reused and monetised by AI systems.

Africa must not merely react to global AI developments. It must actively shape them. The conversation triggered by Meta's Muse Image should become a catalyst for a continental strategy that prioritises African data ownership, AI sovereignty, digital infrastructure, workforce transformation and ethical governance. The future belongs not to those who generate the most data, but to those who govern, protect and strategically leverage it. Africa's AI future must be built in Africa, governed by Africa and designed primarily for African prosperity.

•**Ademola**, first African Professor of Cybersecurity and Information Technology Management, Global Education Advocate, Chartered Manager, UK Digital Journalist, Strategic Advisor & Prophetic Mobiliser for National Transformation, public intellectual, and African governance thinker and General Evangelist of CAC Nigeria and Overseas

News Feature

Education: The missing link to solving Nigeria's governance and economic crisis

NKECHINYERE OGINYI, Abakaliki

As Nigeria continues to grapple with rising unemployment, economic hardship, poor governance and declining educational standards, stakeholders are increasingly pointing to one common solution: quality education.

For many experts, the country's persistent socio-economic challenges are symptoms of years of underinvestment in education, leaving millions of young people without the knowledge, skills and opportunities needed to drive national development.

This concern took centre stage at the grand finale of Spark Nation 3.0, organised by One Youth Global at the permanent site of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. More than a competition, the event became a platform for renewed conversations on how education can reshape leadership, strengthen the economy and empower Africa's next generation.

Uchechukwu Agbo, president of One Youth Global, argued that education remains the strongest weapon against poverty, unemployment and poor governance.

According to him, countries that prioritise education consistently record stronger economies, better institutions and more responsible leadership, while nations that neglect learning continue to battle insecurity, corruption and economic instability.

"Education is the foundation of everything we hope to build. The more we invest in the minds of our young people, the stronger and more productive our nations become," he said.

The missing link

Agbo maintained that Africa cannot achieve meaningful development if classrooms remain neglected.

"We cannot talk about development while the classroom is neglected. Almost every challenge we face, whether in leadership, the economy or our communities, can be traced back to the kind of education we give our children," he added.

His remarks resonate with the realities confronting Nigeria today, where thousands of graduates enter the labour market annually with limited practical skills, while employers complain about a shortage of qualified manpower. The result is a widening unemployment gap that continues to fuel poverty, migration and social unrest.

Recognising that financial constraints remain one of the biggest barriers to education, One Youth Global used the event to award full university scholarships to more than 43 outstanding students from different African countries.

The scholarships emerged from a competition that attracted participants from no fewer than 192 schools across the continent, rewarding excellence in academics, leadership, debates and problem-solving.

For Agbo, the initiative represents more than financial assistance.

"It is painful to watch a gifted child give up on education because of money. These scholarships are our way of saying that no dream should die because a family is poor," he said.

Beyond scholarships, the organisation challenged governments, corporate organisations and development partners to increase investments in education through improved infrastructure, mentorship programmes and policies that make learning more accessible.

Agbo also emphasised the direct relationship between education and economic growth, insisting that productive economies are built on knowledgeable citizens.

"The economy is about the exchange of value, and value begins with knowledge. We need to raise a new generation of productive young people who understand that leadership is about responsibility, not position," he noted.

He advocated reforms that would make African education more practical, innovative and entrepreneurship-driven, enabling graduates to create jobs instead of waiting endlessly for employment opportunities.

Also speaking, the Director of Programmes and Boot Camp at One Youth Global, Samson Amulu, explained that Spark Nation 3.0 was intentionally designed to produce solution-oriented young leaders.

Participants were grouped into five sectors covering education, governance, security, the economy and community development, where they identified societal problems and developed practical solutions.

According to him, the programme seeks to cultivate critical thinking, innovation and leadership among young Africans, equipping them with the confidence to influence positive change in their communities.

Technology expert and Garage Company lead, Raymond Onwu, alongside Eliezer Ajah, commended the initiative for exposing young people to opportunities that extend beyond the classroom and prepare them for future leadership roles.

For the scholarship beneficiaries, the impact is already life-changing.

Speaking on behalf of the winners, Chukwuemeka Prosper of Saint Nicholas Comprehensive Secondary School and Alum Kelyn of White Cloud School, Abakaliki, described the scholarship as a life-changing opportunity and appealed to African leaders to invest more heavily in education.

According to them, every child deserves access to quality learning regardless of financial background, noting that education remains the surest path to personal and national transformation.

Their message echoed a broader truth: nations rise when they educate their citizens.

As Nigeria searches for lasting solutions to unemployment, weak institutions and economic stagnation, the conversations at Spark Nation 3.0 offer an important reminder that sustainable development begins not with political rhetoric but with deliberate investment in education.

For One Youth Global, the mission is clear: build better classrooms today, and Africa will produce better leaders, stronger economies and more prosperous societies tomorrow.

How passion, partnerships and data are changing the fight against Gender-Based Violence in Ebonyi

NKECHINYERE OGINYI, Abakaliki

For years, gender-based violence (GBV) in Ebonyi State remained largely hidden. Survivors suffered in silence, cases went unreported, and the absence of reliable data made it difficult for government agencies and development partners to understand the true magnitude of the problem.

Today, the story is gradually changing.

Behind the transformation is a combination of committed individuals, strong institutional collaboration, improved data collection and sustained advocacy that stakeholders say has made Ebonyi a model for GBV response in Nigeria's South-East.

At a recent quarterly coordination meeting of the Ebonyi State Gender-Based Violence Task Force, stakeholders reflected on how the state has moved from having little or no coordinated response to becoming an example that neighbouring states are beginning to emulate.

From silence to structured response

Ibina Maccillina, former director of Women Affairs in Ebonyi State ministry of women affairs and retired Gender-Based Violence desk officer, believes one of the greatest achievements of the task force is its ability to sustain momentum years after it was established.

She expressed satisfaction that the task force has remained active despite changes in leadership within government institutions.

According to her, one of the biggest obstacles in the past was the absence of credible data.

"Before now, we were working without data," she recalled. "Without data, you cannot effectively address GBV because you need evidence and a baseline to measure progress."

She noted that the task force now produces data showing the prevalence of different forms of violence, including sexual assault and female genital mutilation (FGM), making planning and intervention more evidence-based.

For her, the progress is the product of collaboration among the Ministry of Women Affairs, civil society organisations and development partners working with a shared vision such as Jhpiego.

"We never had it so good," she said. "The progress may be gradual, but it is real. Everybody is moving forward in the fight against gender-based violence."

The spotlight initiative that sparked change

Ikechukwu Nwogu, Executive Director of the Economic and Social Empowerment of Rural Communities (ESAC), , traced the state's progress to the implementation of the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative between 2019 and 2023.

Governor Nwifuru

According to him, ESAC played a key role in officially launching the Ebonyi State GBV Task Force in 2021 after it had been established under the Integrated Health Programme (IHP).

That launch, he explained, gave the task force visibility and strengthened coordinated GBV response across the state.

Before then, he said, many incidents of violence were never reported because survivors lacked confidence in the system.

"GBV response in Ebonyi State was nothing to write home about," he said. "There were many cases, but people hardly reported them."

The extensive awareness campaigns carried out during the Spotlight Initiative changed the narrative by encouraging survivors and community members to report cases with the assurance that action would be taken.

Today, he said, both survivors and perpetrators understand that gender-based violence is no longer treated as a private matter.

"When cases are reported now, there is a response," Nwogu explained. "Perpetrators know that it is no longer business as usual because the law can catch up with them."

Beyond donor funding

While acknowledging the contribution of international partners and donor agencies, Nwogu insisted that financial support alone cannot sustain a social movement.

According to him, what has kept the Ebonyi GBV Task Force alive years after donor-funded projects ended is the commitment of individuals who continue to volunteer their time and energy.

"A donor may provide funding, organise meetings and trainings, but after that people can simply go home," he said.

"What has made the difference in Ebonyi is that we have people who are passionate about ending gender-based violence. They are willing to make sacrifices to ensure that the work continues."

He also credited effective leadership for keeping stakeholders united around a common objective.

Ebonyi model inspires other states

The success recorded in Ebonyi is now extending beyond the state's borders.

According to Nwogu, the Ebonyi GBV Task Force has inspired the establishment of a similar task force in Enugu State, using what stakeholders now describe as the "Ebonyi Model."

NEWS FEATURE

Chamberlain Peterside, economist and financial strategist, to create new breed of chartered directors in S/South, S/East

- Chartered directors to use corporate governance system to end collapse of corporations and institutions
- 'CIoD Tower' to spring up in Garden City to create resource centre for efficient corporate governance capabilities

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

The Chartered Institute of Directors (CIoD) Tower is to be built in Port Harcourt to form a resource centre for management and corporate governance capability and development.

This is as senior public servants in the south-south and south-east are to be encouraged into the CIoD to create a new body of chartered directors that would acquire the capacity and competence to manage any public or private revenue making organization. This is to end the era of collapse of companies and organisations that sustain the economy.

In doing this, the CIoD in the zone would be answering a call by the national CIoD which has mandated all chartered directors in Nigeria to step up and sanitize Nigeria's economic climate. The aim is to build a strong muscle for companies and economic organisations to end crashes due to mismanagement, poor governance structure, etc. The man now mandated to lead the charge in the SS/SE zone is Chamberlain Peterside, who was crowned by investiture as new (5th) chairman of the CIoD South-South and South-East. Peterside PhD, whose prowess in financial strategy management and public finance administration plus investment expertise is famed around Nigeria and beyond is the pioneer Director-General of the Rivers State Investment Promotion Agency (RSIPA). He was once the Commissioner of Finance in Rivers State who led the economy of the state to over three global ratings, after laying the economic plan of the state as a key member of the Rivers State Economic Advisory Council of the era.

Chamberlain Peterside, new chairman, CIoD, South-South/South-East

Now as the new Chairman of the CIoD in the two zones (SS/SE), Peterside has unveiled the plans to create new economic ninjas in the region.

Speaking after his investiture, the Opobo-born economic strategist said one of the key objectives of his administration would be to elevate the status of the institute in the zone by developing a distinguished 'CIoD House' in Port Harcourt.

"This will enhance our current operational infrastructure. A state-of-the-art CIoD House in Port Harcourt will not only serve as our administrative hub but also become a repository of corporate knowledge and the focal point for our activities. It will be an edifice we can all take pride in, capable of hosting corporate events, welcoming our members, and the general public to enjoy its modern facilities."

He seems to be counting on the Rivers State government for the project, being a man who enjoys the ears of the state governor, Sim Fubara.

Reflecting on the CIoD, Peterside stated that his journey began nearly a decade ago. "I was already aware of the Institute of Directors as a global beacon of professionalism in corporate governance, engaging the Nigerian corporate community. I realized that joining the institute would offer me opportunities to learn more, engage with my peers, and enhance my understanding of the corporate environment, ultimately adding value to both the corporate space and society at large."

He said he has actually experienced an exciting and very fulfilling journey. "The institute has truly lived up to its reputation. The quality of content, the interactions clearly demonstrate the value that this organization brings to the corporate world, at both national and state levels."

As he takes over, he says the calendar of the institute is packed with schemes such as the executive training sessions, sectoral engagements, facility tours, social outings, and high-level government interactions.

He said the institute remains a leading advocate for upholding the ethics of sound corporate governance in Nigeria. "I am, therefore, proud to accept this leadership role and the challenges that come with it. I am committed to promoting the values and principles that the institute holds dear, both in our region and across the country."

During his tenure, he said, "My team and I will work together assiduously to rally our existing members and attract new ones to expand our activities. A special focus will be on attracting members from the senior civil service and public service ranks to embrace good governance principles in the public sector, just like Barrister George had mentioned."

He seems to be banking on the head of service of the various states especially the one in Rivers State. "Our focus during my service year will be encapsulated by the acronym 'VMM' which was invented by my able Vice President, Mrs.

CIoD topnotchers at the investiture in PH

Theodora Leo Edochie. And this VMM stands for Visibility, Membership, and Mentorship. We aim to increase the institute's visibility in the region and expand its presence, promote the vision and philosophy of the national body, mentor and groom the next generation of corporate leaders from amongst young professionals.

> Reflecting on the CIoD, Peterside stated that his journey began nearly a decade ago. "I was already aware of the Institute of Directors as a global beacon of professionalism in corporate governance, engaging the Nigerian corporate community

The new chairman mentioned upcoming activities to hit the ground running as educational sessions, professional development webinars, physical activities and social mixers, golf outings, social engagements, and events focused on youth and women.

"These are all thoughtfully designed for maximum impact. I encourage you all here who are members to elevate your engagement, and for those who are intending members, we would welcome you with open arms. Strengthening the institute and establishing more branch networks in our region and zone will be of primary focus over the next few years. I invite you all, therefore, to join us in making our branch stand out and our tenure remarkable."

Adetunji Oyebanji gives more charge:

Adetunji Oyebanji, president of CIoD, who charged chartered directors all over Nigeria to step up and change Nigeria's economic climate, further charged them to rise up and rescue the Nigerian Economy.

Oyebanji, who crowned Peterside, said the chartered directors have the training and capacity to create certified and reliable corporate governance structure that can guarantee the survival of corporations.

He said the CIoD experts have the capacity to draw up codes that must be followed by any chartered director in both private and public corporations so that incorporated organisations would no longer fail.

The CIoD President said there is need for the members to become very active and build a canopy of strength on corporate governance that would boost the private sector and promote the economy.

He said he wants to see quality programmes, growth, and the development of the members to be trusted with leadership of both the private and public institutions, saying the landscape of corporate governance is always growing.

Calling for a new surge of advocacy, Oyebanji said he expects programmes that would give maximum impact on members and their businesses such as breakfast forums, roundtables, etc. He harped on training, saying this should be so intensified that chartered directors would acquire a new level in competence and character.

He urged them to push for young directors programmes that would develop them into strong directors and business managers. "Today, we are investing on a new chairman, and we expect outcomes through partnerships, mentorship, strengthening of corporate governance strategies, etc.

"The CIoD has built stronger branches. They are beginning to bubble. We urge you to build on the successes of your predecessors."

Oyebanji said what took place in Port Harcourt was more than an inauguration but a step in boosting corporate governance.

In his welcome remarks, John Mbata, chairman of the occasion and President-General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide, said strong institutions inspire confidence, attract investment, protect the rule of law, create opportunities, and endure beyond political cycles and individual tenures.

He however said behind every strong institution are competent, ethical, courageous, and visionary directors.

He expressed confidence in the new chairman, saying "From the vision he has articulated to me previously and other situations that we have operated, it is evident that this administration seeks to build not merely a successful tenure, but a lasting legacy."

Top guests at the CIoD investiture in PH

Adetunji Oyebanji, CIoD President in PH, gives fresh charge to chartered directors to create new economic climate

He reminded the members that a director must demonstrate integrity. "A director must exercise sound judgment. A director must ask difficult questions. A director must always place the long-term interest of the institution above personal interests.

"Nigeria needs more directors who are guided by principle rather than convenience. Chartered Institute of Nigeria must continue to lead this transformation. The South-South and South-East regions possess extraordinary human and economic potential. We are blessed with entrepreneurs, professionals, innovators, with abundant intellectual resources.

"Our challenge is not a lack of potential, but ensuring that our institutions are governed with vision, discipline, transparency, and accountability."

> Our challenge is not a lack of potential, but ensuring that our institutions are governed with vision, discipline, transparency, and accountability

George Etomi, keynote speaker, who is indicated as one of Nigeria's foremost commercial and transaction lawyers who said his firm worked for the Nigeria's defunct airways, poured lamentations over poor governance structures.

He named five examples of major collapses with the Nigerian Airways and Ajaokuta as heartbreaking. He said the Nigeria Airways had 36 aircraft whereas Emirates airline had six, but today, the reverse worse than the case with Nigeria Airways nowhere to be seen, while Emirates is everywhere in the sky.

He revealed that one single decision made by a newly appointed Managing Director of the Nigeria Airways in the days caused big crash that cost the country.

He said the well trained pilots that left Nigeria became the pillar that built airlines in the middle east, saying Nigeria bought the last copy of DC 10 produced by the makers and that Nigerian pilots made waves driving the biggest planes in the middle east.

He called for a gathering of chartered directors to plot a blue print and framework for corporate governance that must be enforced. He offered to play any role allotted to him in seeing this comes to fruition, saying it is the only way to save the Nigerian economy.

Continues on page 63

New framework emerges in oil region to manage host community development and funds

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Stakeholders including players in the oil and gas industry with some officials of the regulatory bodies have put out ways the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) should operate as it relates to host communities to bring to an end conflicts and crisis at the bottom level of the hydrocarbon industry.

The exercise is said to be to deepen understanding and collaboration at the host community level by making the Host Community Development Trust (HCDT) system viable and seamless. The forum held in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State capital, some few weeks ago and came up out with recommendations to the various levels of interest and participation.

A strong and propelling voice come as opening remarks from Ademola Adeyemi-Bero, the Managing Director of First E & P, who was represented by Ayebatonye Benjamin-Basuo.

The Yenago event was under the auspices of the KEFFESO HCDT (KHCDT) which is the summation of 11 communities under the MPL 53 and 54 including koluama 1, Koluama 2, Ekeni, Fishertown, Foropa, Ezetu 1, Ezetu 2, Sangana, Ogonibiri, Opu-Okunbiri, and Okunbiribeleu. It was held at the Nigerian Content Tower, Oxbow Lake Road, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

The communique at the end of the forum said the second edition (2026) successfully convened key stakeholders, including host community leaders, government regulators, operators, and development partners to deepen engagement and strengthen collaboration toward sustainable host community development.

The organisers said building on the foundation established at the inaugural 2025 Forum, the 2026 engagement focused on strengthening leadership capacity, enhancing collaboration, and promoting inclusive participation across KEFFESO communities.

Apparently finding the outcome very useful in terms of the communities embracing the modalities, the stakeholders adopted a resolution to make the template a uniform blueprint for all oil communities.

The Forum was said to have featured two structured workshops, a documentary on KEFFESO's journey to date, and a plenary session, all designed to move beyond dialogue toward practical and actionable outcomes.

Participants were said to have been engaged meaningfully across sessions, resulting in stronger alignment, clearer priorities, and renewed commitment to advancing development across host communities.

Key outcomes included improved stakeholder alignment, identification of priority development areas, and agreement on actionable next steps to guide post-Forum implementation.

The key recommendations targeted the HCDT leadership which was asked to strengthen visioning and strategic planning; and enhance leadership coordination.

The stakeholders urged the oil companies to deepen collaboration with communities; and support capacity development initiatives. To the regulators, the stakeholders urged them to continue providing guidance and oversight, and to support institutional strengthening.

The communities were asked to promote unity and collaboration as well as increase participation and ownership.

Action plan was developed whereby the HCDTs should all have a properly articulated 'Vision Framework.' Stakeholder's across all levels were urged to ensure that engagement structures were strengthened; and that there should also be deliberate interventions and activities to promote inclusive participation.

The 'KEFFESO Stakeholder Forum 2026' which represents a significant step forward in strengthening collaboration and advancing sustainable development across host communities was mandated to create feedback system.

The managers of the forum monitored the feedback and said it indicated a highly positive reception of the KEFFESO KHCDT Stakeholder Forum.

The importance of the exercise was underlined by very strategic and sensitive groups that participated and gave goodwill messages.

Opening remarks were given by First E & P's Adeyemi-Bero (as represented by Benjamin-Basuo, who emphasised that legislation alone does not guarantee development, and that achieving meaningful outcomes required strong leadership and institutional capacity; clear alignment of stakeholder expectations; and commitment to accountability and inclusive participation.

The formal session commenced with a welcome address by Moses Theophilus, king and chairman of the KEFFESO HCDT Board of Trustees. He underscored the importance of vision-driven leadership, stakeholder alignment, and deliberate action in achieving sustainable development outcomes.

He highlighted that while the PIA provides a robust framework, implementation gaps remain, particularly in areas of community participation, employment generation, and capacity development.

Goodwill messages and keynote addresses from stakeholders came from the Bayelsa State Government, NCDMB, NMDPRA, NUPRC. These reaffirmed a shared commitment to structured, predictable, and sustainable development, with emphasis on local content and participation, enterprise development, and job creation and economic inclusion.

Stakeholders at the event in Yenagoa setting model for host communities

The plenary session provided a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue, bringing together regulators, operators, development partners, and community representatives.

A report by the organisers said overall, respondents rated the experience as excellent or good with the majority confirming that the event met or exceeded their expectations.

It stated: "Participants also affirmed that the theme of the forum was highly relevant to their communities, reflecting strong alignment with current development needs within the HCDT ecosystem.

"The workshops were widely described as very impactful, with participants highlighting the quality of discussions, presentations, and facilitation."

Key takeaways from the forum were said to centre on the importance of collaboration and partnerships for sustainable development, inclusive governance involving women, youth, and persons with disabilities, and the need for strong leadership, accountability, and effective communication.

In terms of outcomes, the report said most participants reported feeling better equipped to contribute to leadership, accountability, and inclusive development, with intended actions including strengthened stakeholder engagement, improved collaboration, community inclusion initiatives, and expanded advocacy efforts across platforms.

Areas identified for improvement included were said to be better time management, increased interaction during sessions, sustained post-forum engagement, and greater inclusivity and participation from wider stakeholders, including settlors.

"Participants also recommended incorporating more interactive formats such as syndicate or breakout sessions to enhance cross-learning.

Overall, the forum was regarded as a highly impactful and well-structured engagement platform that strengthened stakeholder understanding, promoted inclusive development, and reinforced the importance of collaboration for sustainable community growth.

The major outcome was the call by the stakeholders for strategic partnerships between host communities, oil and gas companies, regulators, and government, saying it is crucial for the effective implementation of the PIA.

A peep into the background showed that the establishment of the KEFFESO Host Communities' Development Trust (HCDT) under the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) provides a structured framework for community-led development within the NNPC–First E&P Joint Venture operational areas.

Following the success of the 2025 Stakeholder Forum, which created a platform for dialogue and engagement, the 2026 Forum was designed to deepen these conversations and address identified gaps, particularly in visioning, leadership alignment, and collaboration.

The Forum is said to reflect KEFFESO's continued commitment to strengthening its institutional capacity and fostering partnerships that drive sustainable development outcomes.

The objectives of the Forum were said to be to strengthen leadership capacity within HCDTs, promote collaboration among stakeholders, enhance inclusive participation across communities, align stakeholders on sustainable development priorities, and identify practical actions and pathways for implementation.

Participation was said to be topclass. The Governor of Bayelsa State was represented by the Commissioner of Mineral Resources; the KEFFESO HCDT Board of Trustees and Management were present; paramount rulers were on hand; representatives from host communities were present; NNPC–FIRST E&P Joint Venture (Settlor) showed powerful presence; regulatory bodies (NUPRC, NMDPRA, NCDMB) were at hand; development partners and NGOs (PIND, NNF and others) were present; while community leaders, youth, and women representatives were not left out. Thus, the event was indicated to have recorded strong participation and active engagement across all sessions, with a total of 270 delegates in attendance.

The Forum was said to have been structured to encourage both strategic alignment and inclusive participation through with two parallel workshops focusing on leadership and community engagement (held before the official opening ceremony); opening ceremony and keynote addresses; a plenary session bringing together all stakeholders; a closing session highlighting key outcomes and next steps.

At the end of the various workshop sessions, visioning, strategic leadership & collaboration overviews, actions were agreed to. These included development of a structured vision framework; strengthening collaboration across KEFFESO communities; and improved alignment between leadership and stakeholders

The workshops treated strengthening participation, inclusion, and community engagement with discussion points as importance of inclusive participation, community engagement and ownership, strengthening trust through improved communication Key Insights, inclusion of youth and women is critical to sustainable development, how community ownership enhances project sustainability, and how engagement builds trust and cooperation.

Decision-makers at the KEFFESO stakeholders forum in Yenagoa

Top guests at the event

> "Participants also recommended incorporating more interactive formats such as syndicate or breakout sessions to enhance cross-learning

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Personality

Captain August Okpe: Last surviving most senior pioneer pilot of Nigerian Air Force (2)

CHIGACHI EKE

What is the connection between Captain August Okpe, the last surviving most senior pioneer pilot of Nigerian Air Force and Ms. Annabel? This is not a trick question; so, stay with me and let's unravel the conundrum. Did you know that African civilization did not begin with Egypt alone? Africa has always possessed ingenuity from the beginning of time.

In aviation, there is a story many have never heard. During the devastating Nigeria/Biafra War, 1967-1970, deep in the core heart of Africa, there existed the most clandestine airport. It was one of two busiest air corridors in the world. The O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, Illinois, USA, was the busiest. And hidden in the very innards of Biafran jungle was Uli Airport, the second busiest, codenamed ANNABEL.

Annabel Airport was unlike any other since it operated surreptitiously in the dense tropical jungle but hidden almost in plain sight. Runway lights remained off for camouflage but momentarily switched on in a blink for an airplane to land and quickly switched off immediately thereafter. Equipped with advanced radio navigation aids, as well as updated Low Visibility Procedures (LVP), which were interfaced in tandem synchronization with the Non-Directional Beacons (NDBs) for orientation and guidance to ensure optimum safety in the approach and landing phases of the aircraft.

Flights from multiple countries landed there night after night. It was virtually an all-weather night operations airport. The air traffic was so dense that most times, several aircraft were stacked up in the holding pattern while quite a few were already lined up in the approach sequence consistent with their approved arrival slots. Yet despite the air traffic congestion, accidents were remarkably rare. How was that possible?

The engineers, as well as pilots who made worthy inputs in the design and construction of Annabel, did something extraordinary. They crafted a synergistic system- an algorithm of flight operations that ensured unassailable safety, coordination of personnel, aircraft maintenance and logistics. An entire aviation ecosystem functioned under extreme pressure in humid tropical ambience under discrete lighting system. Thousands of people worked there. Families lived around it. Fuel was transported, aircraft repaired and cargoes unloaded in minutes. And then, the aircraft disappeared again into the thick night.

Was the relationship between the last surviving most senior pioneer pilot of Nigerian Air Force and Annabel ever consummated? Yes, indeed. After the construction of Annabel, the pilot who flight-tested it was Captain August Okpe. The flight was sine qua non to ascertain the operational functionality and viability of the facility. Annabel passed the flight test with flying colours and this was important as it was built as Joint User Airport System catering for both military and civil operations. Almost immediately, large scale operations started. Aircraft brought in the much-needed goods. Food and Medicine arrived. Supplies arrived. All these took place at night under random bombardments from enemy aircraft circling high above it.

In many ways, the aviation effort very easily exceeded other remarkable chapters in global aviation history. But this time, it was happening in Africa- a wholly African effort of an African story of ingenuity. Ground crews worked silently on the apron. Aircraft maintenance engineers kept aging planes airworthy against all odds. Air Traffic Control Officers coordinated and precision-guided inbound and outbound air traffic. Loadmasters balanced cargoes down to the last kilogram while ordnance specialists handled explosives with precision and care. There were no second chances. Any mistake could be fatal.

Central to all these activities were the pilots- Captain August Okpe and his Squadron of Biafran pilots affectionately called the "Darlings of Annabel;" not because it was easy but for the very reason they made the impossible look routine. Among them were the late Captains Frank Osakwe, Elendu Ukeje, "Bad Weather Bomber;" Nnachi O. Nnachi, "Seasoned Statesman of the Skies" and John Chukwu (Distinguished Service Cross) "Officer and Gentleman."

Others were the late Captains Emeka Obinwa (Military Cross), Adindu Njoku, Alex Agbafuna, Essien, Emma Ngwu, Squadron Leader Ernest Ike, Inyang; John Obianyor, "Don't Let the Flower Jam You;" Gp. Capt. Monday Ikpeazu, "Papa;" Captain Gabriel Ebube, "Republic of Benin;" Wing Cmd Uwem Iyoho, "Westland Wessex;" Captain Akahara; Group Captain Osmond Oga, "Nchichi;" Lanky Ogbolu, George Egbuonu, "Georgio;" Oyii, Omene; Oraeki, "Adonis," et al. My God, so many of our pilots died. May they continue to rest in peace. Amen.

By Divine Grace, these few redoubtable and very valiant Captains survived, viz: Captains Willy Murray-Bruce, "Local Mercenary;" Jimmy Yeates, "Tall & Handsome;" Alfred Anowai, "Lockheed," et al. They, the living and the dead, were not just pilots; they were part of a highly motivated tactically coordinated air warfare combatants operating under extremely unimaginable and insufferable conditions. Captain Bara Allwell-Brown, alive and well today, and his kid brother, the late Captain Ibikare Allwell-Brown. The intrepid formidable brothers of the skies, needless say, subdued the stratosphere and beyond.

Pilots from different parts of the world arrived; mostly driven by humanitarian conviction inspired by organizations like the Joint Church Aid, Caritas, the Red Cross and the World Council of Churches. Images of starving Biafran children became an unbearable summon for them to take to the skies. Swooping down into Biafra to save lives, they sometimes flew back into contested airspace and uncharted territories. Annabel was so effective that Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister, resolutely declared, "Annabel must be destroyed."

But the honour of the beautiful bride was well defended by Captain August Okpe and his Tactical Air Command. The exploits of the ace pilots in the various theatres of war were nothing short of legendary. Captain August Okpe and the combat pilots under his command won world-wide acclaim in their attempt to tip the balance in the war, which the Biafran forces, unfortunately, could not sustain for too long. For that and other meritorious services in the course of his prosecution of the air-war through unconventional military aviation tactics, Captain August Okpe was honoured by Biafra with all the national awards possible at the time including the prestigious Military Cross.

But the end, inexorably, came for the beautiful Annabel on 11th January 1970. That was the day the victorious Nigerian Army violated her. The beguiling, capricious and indomitable Annabel was not playing hard to get. She was hard to get and had given the Nigerian, Russian, British and Egyptian pilots a run for their money. When, eventually, Nigerian soldiers breached her defences, they carried on with that much pent-up frustration-induced venom that found expression in unprecedented mayhem of vengeance. They dug up, gutted and mutilated her tarmac and long runway surface to guarantee no airplane ever landed on her again. Then the soldiers procedurally pillaged and vandalized all airplanes and vehicles at the airport. It was only as an after-thought that whatever was left of a couple of Biafran planes and others were retrieved from the marauding federal troops and later taken to Biafran War Museum in Umuahia for posterity.

The brave Captain August Okpe deemed it unnecessary flying out with his family as it would have been the easiest thing for him to do as Biafran Chief Pilot. He remained behind following which he dutifully reported to the Nigerian 3rd Marine Commando under Colonel Olusegun Obasanjo. He was, thereafter, flown to Lagos through the Port Harcourt Airport to face a menacing Military Tribunal set up by the Federal Military Government under General Yakubu Gowon.

Perhaps, because of his spectacular aerial campaigns and punitive missions (economic damage and strategic bombings of military installations against Nigeria) the Military Tribunal did not recommend him to be reabsorbed into Nigerians Air Force; unlike some of his peers who were recalled. However, President Olusegun Obasanjo granted him a Presidential Pardon vide Government Notice Gazette No. 40 Vol. 90 of 18th May 2006; whereupon his dismissal from the Armed Forces of Nigeria got commuted to retirement with full benefits, rights and privileges with effect from 29th May 2000.

Following his dismissal by the Military Tribunal, Captain August Okpe left for the UK and thence to the US where he obtained his Airline Transport Certification at the Acme School of Aeronautics, Fort Worth, Texas, US. That made him the first Nigerian Pilot to hold both the Military Pilot Licence concurrently with the civil US Airline Transport Pilot Licence. The Licence of Switzerland will later be added to his portfolio. He also attended Cranfield University, Bedfordshire, UK: before returning home to fly planes for Nigeria Airways.

So, when people say Africa had no history of innovation, remember Annabel Airport. Remember Uli. Remember the pilots who landed planes in almost total darkness to defend you. And remember to pray for Captain August Okpe, the last surviving most senior pioneer Pilot of Nigerian Air Force. History is not only what is written in books; it is also what we choose to remember. Kudos to our African brothers who are mostly unsung heroes but deftly resurrected on the pages of Captain August Okpe's "The Last Flight." And remember the large number of our Pilots, on both sides of the conflict, who paid the supreme price. Know your history.

*. **Being** Part 2 of Series Honouring Captain August Okpe on his Forthcoming Birthday on August 18, 2026. Eke, Phone: +234 81 3515 9313; Email: chigachieke@yahoo.co.uk; writes from Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.*

Real Estate Market Updates

with CHUKA UROKO

A Diary of Developments, Transactions, Appointments

Lekki Phase 1 leads residential rental market growth as yearly rent hits N10m

Lekki Phase 1, one of the highbrow island locations in Lagos, Nigeria, now leads other locations within the region in residential rental market growth, recording an average rent of N10 million per annum for a two-bedroom apartment, which is the highest in five years.

The area, which has recorded approximately 36 percent compound annual growth rate over the last five years, also leads the region's market demand for apartments, even though it is a destination with a mix of commercial and residential properties.

Analysts posit that this area presents a good case for investment in apartment buildings, explaining that investors will gain from its strategic location, strong rental demand, and modern developments.

The area is well-equipped with top-tier amenities, including reputable international schools, advanced healthcare facilities, and diverse shopping and dining options. It is a growing hub for businesses, startups, and professionals and is supported by ongoing infrastructure development.

A recent Lagos Island Residential Market Report 2026 by Lagos Realty, which tracked residential rental prices, sales values and land costs across Ikoyi, Victoria Island, Lekki Phase 1 and Ikate between 2022 and 2026, ranked Lekki Phase 1 as the strongest-performing rental market.

The report shows that as against this area's five-year compound average growth rate (CAGR) of 35.9 percent, Victoria Island has 33.5 percent, ahead of Ikate's 29.6 percent and Ikoyi's 22.6 percent.

It shows further that, while Ikoyi remained Lagos Island's premium residential market by rental, home sale and land values, Lekki Phase 1 recorded the strongest rental growth over the five-year period, highlighting sustained demand for residential properties in the neighbourhood.

The report notes that, despite the stronger growth, Ikoyi remained the most expensive rental market, with the average annual rent for a two-bedroom apartment at N17.25 million, followed by Victoria Island, N15 million, Lekki Phase 1, N10 million, and Ikate, N8.5 million.

For investors, this area is an irresistible destination as it has Lagos Island's most liquid rental market, supported by the broadest renter base and highest transaction volumes.

In the last five years, average annual rents for one-bedroom apartments have risen from N2.5 million in 2022 to N7.5 million in 2026. Two-bedroom rents increased from N4 million to N10 million, while three-bedroom apartments climbed from N5 million to N15.5 million, representing a five-year CAGR of 32.7 percent.

Four-bedroom apartment rents rose from N5.5 million to N21.5 million, while five-bedroom units increased from N6.5 million to N25.7 million.

The report notes that actual rents vary by project type, unit size, specifications and amenities, with premium gated communities, serviced residences and waterfront developments typically commanding higher prices.

Over all, rent in Lagos has seen outrageous increases such that in the last 24 months, the rental market has recorded 50-200 percent increase, mostly in the residential market, which has been blamed chiefly on inflation and building materials costs which have pushed up construction costs.

Cement, for instance, has seen unimaginable price increase in the last 12 months, rising from between N7,700 and N9,000 for a 50kg bag by the second quarter of 2025 to its current retail price of between N12,500 and N15,000 in markets across Lagos, Abuja, and Abia, depending on location.

Close market watchers are worried that, even though Nigeria produces a surplus of 25–30 million tonnes of cement annually, local prices are nearly double the African average, questioning why its costs have remained aggressively high despite stabilization in other macroeconomic factors.

A recent report by Fortren & Company found that Nigeria's construction costs rose by 20 percent between December 2025 and May 2026 due to higher material and energy prices.

The report added that, besides inflation and other macroeconomic factors, rising freight costs linked to the Iran-Israel conflict pushed up the prices of cement, steel and finishing materials, forcing some developers to delay projects, renegotiate contracts or scale back project specifications.

Data shows 6% decline in UK property offers as buyers become selective

In what seems a sharp contrast to property market situation in Nigeria, where buyers have no choice, the UK market is not only experiencing a decline in offers, but also sees buyers become selective.

Data from Connells Group shows that the proportion of properties securing offers in UK within six months has fallen by 6 percentage points compared to the same period last year. The Connells Group is the largest integrated property services provider and estate agency network in the UK.

The data notes that, in January 2026, 52 percent of homes listed on the market received an offer within six months, down from 58 percent in January 2025. The share of properties receiving offers within the first month also declined from 42 percent to 38 percent year-on-year.

Two and three-bedroom homes continue to attract the strongest buyer interest, with 55 percent and 53 percent respectively securing offers. These property types typically appeal to first-time buyers and growing families whose purchasing decisions are often driven by necessity rather than discretionary choice.

In contrast, five-bedroom properties have experienced a sharper decline, with the share receiving offers dropping from 59 percent in January 2025 to 41 percent this year. The slowdown in the upper end of the market reflects the impact of elevated mortgage costs on buyers requiring larger loans.

The data shows further that the market has seen regional variations emerging such that eight of the 10 fastest-moving local housing markets are located in the Midlands and North, with Bury recording the quickest transaction times. Scotland remains the fastest regional market, with 68 percent of homes launched in January securing an offer within six months.

Lagos in aggressive push to deliver 636 houses in Egan by year-end

…Estate to provide homes for about 3,180 persons

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

The Lagos State government has said it is committed to completing and commissioning a 636-unit housing estate in Egan community before the end of 2026, adding that it is banking on public-private partnerships (PPPs) to expand housing supply and reduce the its housing deficit.

This means that the same number of home-seeking families in the will be taken off the housing market, and given an average of five persons per family, about 3,180 persons will have places they can call their homes.

Moruf Akinderu-Fatai, the state's commissioner for housing, disclosed this on Wednesday during an inspection tour of the Egan-Igando Mixed Housing Scheme, the Joint Venture (JV) Housing Scheme in Ipaja and the Lagos State Workers' Village at Command Road, Ipaja.

He said the state was combining direct government investment with private sector participation to increase the delivery of affordable homes despite rising construction costs and inflationary pressures.

"This is government intervention. Government cannot build for everybody," Akinderu-Fatai said. "What we are doing is encouraging the private sector to come into building for low-income earners," the commissioner said.

He noted that the PPP model has become increasingly important in bridging the housing gap, citing the housing development in Ipaja being executed through a joint venture arrangement, which he said is nearing completion.

According to him, the Egan-Igando Mixed Housing Scheme, which consists of 636 two- and three-bedroom apartments, has reached about 85 percent completion and remains on track for commissioning before year-end despite delays by one contractor.

"We are here to assess the progress of work and identify areas requiring urgent attention. We have a contractor who is far behind schedule, and that is one of the major challenges we are addressing. However, that will not stop us from moving ahead with our plans to complete these projects," he said.

Firm sees next wave of real estate growth shifting to Lagos-Ogun corridor

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

Frontier Commercial Services Limited (Frontier Homes) says the next wave of real estate growth in Lagos is shifting from the Island to the Lagos-Ogun corridor, as rising land prices in established premium locations make the Mainland a more attractive destination for investors.

The company disclosed this on Monday while announcing plans for the maiden edition of the Mainland Housing Summit 2026, scheduled for July 25 at The Mainland Heritage, Ikola, Lagos. The support is aimed to spotlight investment opportunities in the Lagos and Ogun corridor.

Olalekan Oseni, managing director of Frontier Commercial Services Limited, said the era when Lagos real estate investment was almost exclusively centred on Lekki, Victoria Island and Ikoyi is gradually giving way to new opportunities on the Mainland.

"For years, the conversation about real estate investment in Lagos has been almost exclusively focused on the Island— Lekki, Victoria Island and Ikoyi. And for good reason, these markets delivered," Oseni said.

"But that window is closing gradually. Prices on the Island have moved to a point where the entry cost for a new investor is at the peak and the margin for meaningful return is increasingly getting thin," he added.

According to him, investors are increasingly turning their attention to the Lagos-Ogun growth corridor because the conditions that fuelled the rapid expansion of the Island two decades ago are now emerging across the Mainland.

Oseni said Frontier Homes, which has operated in the corridor for more than six years, decided to organise the summit to educate investors and provide market intelligence before property values rise further.

He described the event as more than a conventional property exhibition, saying it would bring together investors, developers, policymakers and professionals in the built environment to discuss where growth is occurring and how investors can take advantage of emerging opportunities.

Tolulope Adekunle, executive director of Frontier Commercial Services Limited, unveiled the company's Mainland Real Estate Growth Report 2026, which he said provides data on land price trends and investment opportunities across the Lagos-Ogun corridor.

According to Adekunle, land prices in Lekki have increased from as low as N15,000 per square metre in 2010 to as much as N600,000 per square metre today, representing a return of more than 1,900 percent.

He added that land within the Lagos-Ogun corridor currently sells for between N18,000 and N105,000 per square metre, making it significantly cheaper than comparable locations on the Island.

Adekunle said Nigeria's estimated housing deficit of 28 million units presents a major opportunity for future residential developments on the Mainland.

"That gap will not close on its own. It will be filled. And it will be filled here, on the Mainland," he said. "The Mainland emerging corridors are not just growing. They are growing the right way. New roads. More people moving in. More business activity. This is not a quick spike that will crash. This is steady, lasting growth," he said.

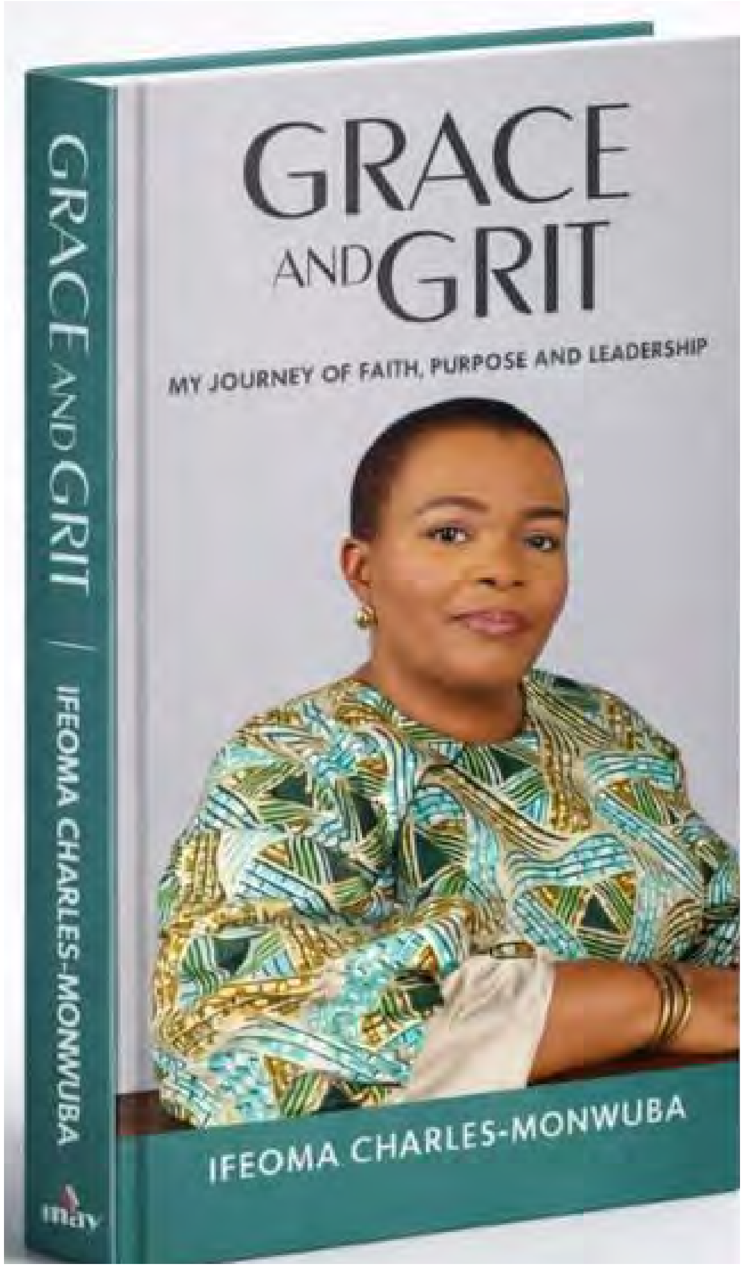
BOOK REVIEW

A Testament to Purpose Forged Through Faith and Resilience

Ifeoma Charles-Monwuba (2026), Grace and Grit: My Journey of Faith, Purpose and Leadership. May Publishing Limited, Lagos.

Grace and Grit: My Journey of Faith, Purpose and Leadership is a powerful and deeply moving memoir that stands as both a personal testament and a beacon of inspiration for women navigating ambition, faith, and leadership in challenging contexts.

In the book's closing affirmations, Charles-Monwuba captures the essence of her journey: finding the delicate rhythm between *grace* and *grit*—where strength is not the absence of fear but the resolve to press forward, faith is a deliberate choice rather than a fleeting emotion, and leadership is revealed not as a crown but as a humble calling rooted in service to people and purpose. These profound reflections in the Epilogue, titled "A Letter to the Young Woman I Once Was: Embracing Your Becoming," are so resonant that readers may benefit from encountering them early and revisiting them at the close.



The book Grace and Grit arrives at a critical moment, when African women's voices in international development, diplomacy, and leadership remain underrepresented. Far from a polished hagiography, this memoir offers raw candour and emotional honesty. Charles-Monwuba openly shares vulnerabilities—academic struggles (particularly in Mathematics and Igbo), family financial hardship, the devastating loss of a child, health crises, workplace harassment, and the constant tension of balancing career ambition with cultural and familial expectations—rendering her story profoundly relatable and human.

Synopsis

Structured around a Preface, a Prologue ("The Becoming"), and eleven chapters—including "The Roots That Grounded Me," "My Father's Lessons," "Choosing My Path," "Finding My Voice," "Purpose in Profession," "Leading Beyond Borders," "From Internal Reforms to Regional Influence," "On the Frontlines of Leadership," "Love and Life," "Reflections and Legacy," and the Epilogue—the narrative traces Charles-Monwuba's extraordinary arc from her birth in Nnewi during the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War to her rise as a prominent figure in international development and diplomacy.

Raised as the eldest of ten children by parents of modest means but remarkable character, her father—a mechanic and Biafran Corps of Engineers veteran—emerges as the emotional and moral anchor of the story. His steadfast belief in girls' education, refusal to compromise her future for business gain, and disciplined yet loving parenting provide the foundation for her resilience.

The memoir follows her educational challenges, unexpected entry into Mass Communication (with aspirations toward Law), and a versatile career spanning advertising at Sunrise, public health communication at the Society for Family Health (SFH), advanced training at the University of Washington, leadership roles at WaterAid and ActionAid (including transformative work in Haiti and Senegal), and eventually as Sub-Regional Director for an international organization covering West Africa.

Interwoven are intimate family portraits: the pain of losing her twin daughter, near-death experiences in childbirth, the joys and strains of motherhood alongside a demanding international career, and the unwavering support of her husband and siblings. Throughout, Charles-Monwuba underscores the moral imperative of girl-child education and protection, framing it as a lived reality rather than abstract advocacy.

Strengths

Compelling Father-Daughter Dynamic: Sir J.O.S. Ufondu is one of the memoir's most memorable figures. His famous declaration that "education is the only inheritance no one can take from you," coupled with tender-yet-firm moments (such as shaving her head for relaxed hair, only to reconcile with suya), beautifully illustrates compassionate, principled leadership.

- Thematic Depth and Framework: The dual motif of *Grace* (divine sustenance) and *Grit* (human resolve) provides elegant conceptual unity. Faith is portrayed as an active decision, while reflections on integrity, culturally rooted leadership, and the psychological dimensions of Africa's challenges add intellectual weight.

- Candid Critique and Practical Wisdom: Charles-Monwuba offers experiential insights into the contradictions of international aid, maintaining integrity in flawed systems, and the personal costs of leadership (family separation, health struggles, emotional toll). Lessons in diplomacy, mentorship, team-building, and safe workplaces emerge organically through stories rather than didactic lists.

- Lived Feminism: Her advocacy for women's economic independence, land rights, and against practices like domestic violence and the "superwoman" myth is practical, contextually grounded in Nigerian and West African realities, and refreshingly non-strident.

-Narrative Style: The chronological flow, interspersed with reflective pauses and family photos, balances vivid childhood warmth with insider perspectives on Nigeria's development sector and global NGOs. It is inspirational without clichés, acknowledging doubts and failures with grace.

Areas for Improvement

The book's length and occasional repetition of core themes (discipline, faith, paternal influence) could benefit from tighter editing for sharper pacing. Some later professional sections feel understandably abstracted due to confidentiality constraints, contrasting with the intimacy of earlier chapters. Prose is consistently clear and conversational, though varied sentence rhythm in denser reflective passages would further elevate readability.

Final Assessment

**Grace and Giory is a significant and timely contribution to African women's memoirs, faith-informed leadership literature, and the discourse on international development. Ifeoma Charles-Monwuba demonstrates that professional success need not require compromising values, family, or faith. Her story challenges readers—particularly young women—to embrace their "becoming," trusting that grace sustains the grit required for purposeful lives.

Highly recommended for anyone interested in resilient life stories, women's leadership in Africa, public health and development ethics, or contemporary Nigerian social history. This is not mere triumph but authentic testimony—an offering of hope and practical wisdom to those still forging their paths.

The Sunday Stew
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The Sundiata Post Model (2): Historical and Intellectual Foundations

Every institutional framework has a history, even when it introduces something new. Ideas rarely emerge in complete isolation; they arise from deep, structural conversations that began long before us, evolving across generations as societies confront new realities, systemic shocks, and unanswered questions.

The Sundiata Post Model is no exception. Although formally introduced in the previous essay as an institutional framework for media-based knowledge production, its intellectual roots extend much further back. They lie within a long tradition of journalism's engagement with ideas and society, while simultaneously responding to a distinctly twenty-first-century challenge: the transformation of the newsroom in the age of artificial intelligence, digital knowledge architectures, and global scholarly networks.

The question at the heart of this essay is therefore not whether journalism has ever produced ideas—history provides an unequivocal answer to that. The more critical question is whether the modern newsroom can become an institution deliberately organised to generate original analytical constructs that contribute simultaneously to journalism, deep scholarship, and public policy. That is a different, more demanding question altogether.

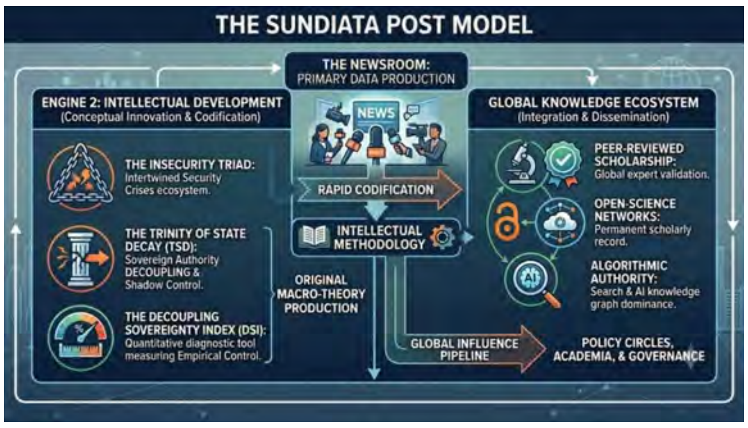
Nigeria's Tradition of the Newspaper as an Intellectual Institution

Long before the emergence of today's hyper-accelerated digital media, some of Nigeria's most influential newspapers were already serving purposes far beyond the passive reporting of daily events.

The press architectures established by pioneers like Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo—both of whom I previously discussed, alongside Chinweizu, as members of Nigeria's rare tradition of framework builders—became foundational vehicles through which sophisticated ideas about nationalism, constitutional development, socio-economic planning, democracy, and self-government entered the public consciousness. Their publications did not merely describe political transformation; they actively generated the conceptual architecture that shaped it.

Crucially, they achieved this by building powerful media infrastructures designed to carry these ideas at scale. Azikiwe did not just publish in Lagos; he deployed a sweeping, cross-regional syndicate anchored by the West African Pilot alongside a network of provincial pillars including the Eastern Guardian in Port Harcourt, the Nigerian Spokesman in Onitsha, and the Southern Nigeria Defender in Warri. Similarly, Awolowo founded the Nigerian Tribune in 1949 as a highly structured institutional vehicle to systematically articulate socio-political theory and regional constitutional destiny.

In his seminal work, Renascent Africa (1937), Azikiwe laid out a broad intellectual and ideological vision that extended far beyond the immediate horizon of standard journalism, charting a course for mental emancipation and African self-determination. A decade later, Awolowo's Path to Nigerian Freedom (1947) demonstrated how a publisher and institutional thinker could



systematically articulate a rigorous, structured constitutional vision for a developing nation.

This historical experience reminds us that journalism in Nigeria has never been confined solely to stenography. At critical turning points in the nation's history, newspapers operated as the primary intellectual laboratories through which society debated its structural future.

This tradition of intellectual leadership through journalism is not merely of historical interest. In The Sunday Stew essay mentioned earlier, 'The Insecurity Triad: Azikiwe, Awolowo, and Chinweizu — Nigeria's Elite Class of Framework Builders', I argued that Nigeria has, on rare occasions, produced public intellectuals who moved beyond commentary to construct enduring analytical frameworks. Azikiwe and Awolowo exemplified that earlier tradition, while Chinweizu demonstrated that independent conceptual innovation could continue outside formal state institutions and conventional academic structures. The present essay extends that argument by asking a different question: can the contemporary newsroom itself become an institution deliberately organised for systematic framework building and knowledge production?

Yet, an important distinction must be recognised between that era and our contemporary challenge:

The Nationalist Press primarily advanced political ideas, anti-colonial mobilisation, and national aspirations.

The Sundiata Post Model represents a shift from ideological mobilisation to systematic institutional knowledge production. It asks whether an independent newsroom can generate original analytical constructs capable of standing up to the rigorous validation of the global academic ecosystem while serving active policy discourse.

The distinction is subtle, but fundamental. It marks the evolution from political journalism to scholar-journalism.

Journalism and the Life of Ideas

The structural relationship between journalism and ideas extends well beyond regional borders. To understand the global intellectual foundations of this model, we must reconcile two complementary traditions of public thought—both of which proved invaluable in shaping the conceptual foundations of my Trinity of State Decay (TSD) theory.

In framing the mind dimension of the Money–Land–Mind dynamic of the TSD, I found the works of Walter Lippmann and Hannah Arendt particularly illuminating, insightful, and enriching. Few journalists have shaped modern thinking about public communication as profoundly as Lippmann. Throughout his six-decade career in American journalism, he demonstrated that journalism could become far more than a chronicle of events; it could serve as an instrument for decoding how societies acquire knowledge, construct public opinion, and navigate increasingly complex realities.

In his foundational classic, Public Opinion (1922), Lippmann demonstrated that journalism could contribute not merely rapid information, but macro-level interpretation, permanently altering how we view the relationship between media, knowledge, and public policy. It is this Lippmannesque understanding on how information is filtered, misperceived, and understood that informs the epistemic foundations of the TSD.

From a different, deeply philosophical tradition, Hannah Arendt, a political theorist and independent scholar whose ideas reached wide audiences through public intellectual magazines and cultural journals, devoted her life's work to understanding the structural anatomy of politics, authority, institutional decay, and the conditions that make collective civic life possible.

In The Human Condition (1958), Arendt examined human action, public space, and the enduring value of disciplined conceptual inquiry in explaining political reality far beyond the fleeting nature of immediate headlines. Her profound insights into the erosion of institutional authority and the fragility of the public realm provide an important philosophical foundation for understanding the Trinity of State Decay's vectors of systemic fragility.

Although operating within vastly different institutional environments, Lippmann and Arendt represented complementary pillars of intellectual rigor:

One demonstrated journalism's unmatched capacity to shape and democratise public understanding.

The other demonstrated the enduring value of rigorous, uncompromised conceptual thinking regarding public life and the human world.

Together, they illuminate an important institutional possibility. If journalism can generate immediate public understanding, and disciplined inquiry can generate enduring concepts—as demonstrated by their influence on the conceptual foundations of the Trinity of State Decay—might there exist an institutional framework capable of integrating both traditions within a single, independent newsroom?

That synthesis is the exact intellectual domain of the Sundiata Post Model.

An Abuja Newsroom and a Contemporary Question

The Sundiata Post Model emerged not from an insular academic department, a government research institute, or a foreign-funded policy think tank, but from an independent newsroom in Abuja. That geographical and operational fact is highly significant.

The framework did not begin as an abstract theory searching for practical application. It emerged from journalism itself—from the lived, daily experience of reporting, investigating, analysing, and reflecting on the severe structural forces shaping Nigeria and the wider Global South.

Over time, The Sunday Stew gradually evolved beyond a weekly opinion column into a platform for systematic, empirical inquiry. Through that deliberate evolution emerged a succession of original analytical frameworks:

- The Insecurity Triad: A conceptual framework explaining how kidnapping (Money), banditry (Land), and terrorism (Mind) function as mutually reinforcing dimensions of contemporary insecurity, generating parallel systems of violence, governance, and authority;
- The Trinity of State Decay (TSD): A macro-theoretical formulation explaining how the interaction between the Institutional Mirage, the Shadow Order, and the Money–Land–Mind dynamic drives the decoupling of formal sovereignty from effective state authority, and
- The Decoupling Sovereignty Index (DSI): An indigenous, multidimensional measurement framework designed to quantify the extent to which effective sovereignty has decoupled from formal state authority across subnational territories.

What gradually became apparent was that these were not isolated intellectual exercises. They were the deliberate products of an emerging institutional philosophy developed through the Sundiata Post Intelligence Unit (SPIU).

More importantly, these constructs did not emerge as a single research project conceived in advance. They appeared sequentially, each responding to new empirical observations while simultaneously expanding the analytical capacity of the newsroom itself. The Insecurity Triad provided a structured lens for understanding the interconnected dimensions of insecurity. The TSD extended that inquiry into a broader theory of institutional authority and governance. The DSI subsequently translated those theoretical insights into an operational framework capable of empirical assessment. Viewed together, this progression revealed something larger than the individual frameworks themselves. It demonstrated that the newsroom had begun to develop an internal capacity for cumulative knowledge production, with each construct building upon and extending the intellectual foundations laid by its predecessor.

The fundamental question therefore shifted from "What new framework has been developed?" to "What kind of newsroom structure makes the systematic development of such frameworks possible?" The answer is the Sundiata Post Model.

A New Institutional Proposition

The Sundiata Post Model does not argue that journalism should become academia, nor does it suggest that scholarly research should migrate from the university to the newsroom. Instead, it advances a new institutional proposition:

The Core Proposition: An independent media institution can systematically integrate high-velocity journalism, original qualitative research, conceptual innovation, and global scholarly dissemination within a single institutional framework, contributing simultaneously to informed public discourse and the international knowledge ecosystem. The Sundiata Post experience demonstrates the practical viability of this proposition.

This proposition reflects neither a rejection of journalism's traditional role nor an attempt to merely imitate academic institutions. Rather, it represents a strategic institutional adaptation to the changing architecture of knowledge itself.

In an era when global digital repositories, artificial intelligence discovery layers, academic networks, and news organisations increasingly intersect, the traditional boundaries separating journalism from formal knowledge production have become entirely permeable. The Sundiata Post Model seeks to explore what becomes possible when those boundaries are approached not as rigid barriers, but as unprecedented opportunities for intellectual sovereignty.

The historical journey from Azikiwe and Awolowo to Lippmann and Arendt reveals a long-standing, symbiotic relationship between journalism and ideas. The Sundiata Post Model does not seek to replicate any of those legacy traditions perfectly. It seeks to answer a contemporary institutional question:

What becomes possible when an independent newsroom deliberately organises itself as a primary knowledge-producing institution?

The answer begins with philosophy. The next essay examines structure.

Trust is sacred. Stay seasoned

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WordMatters with CHRIS AGBEDO

Why language matters in driving human society in the Digital Age

When discussions turn to the digital revolution, the conversation is almost always dominated by technology. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become the new gospel of development. We celebrate artificial intelligence, broadband expansion, automation, big data, digital finance, blockchain, and smart cities. Across Africa, governments are racing to establish innovation hubs, digitise public services, expand broadband infrastructure, and embrace the promises of machine learning, automation, and data-driven governance. They proudly announce substantial investments in fibre-optic infrastructure and digital economies. Development agencies measure progress by internet penetration and digital connectivity. International development partners celebrate digital inclusion as the next frontier of economic transformation, while policymakers increasingly equate technological advancement with national progress.

In many respects, this enthusiasm is justified. The digital revolution has opened unprecedented opportunities for commerce, education, healthcare, agriculture, financial inclusion, and civic participation. Still, beneath this technological optimism lies a deeper question that developing countries can no longer afford to ignore: Can technology, by itself, drive development? This question formed the intellectual core of the lead paper I presented at the 2nd Interdisciplinary Conference of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, held under the theme: "Driving Human Society in a Digital Era: Opportunities for the Developing World."

My argument departed from the conventional narrative. Human society is not driven by technology alone. Rather, it is driven by the continuous interaction of language, mind, and machine. Technology provides the infrastructure, but language constructs meaning, the human mind interprets that meaning, and digital algorithms determine how widely it circulates. Development in the digital era is therefore not merely a technological undertaking; it is fundamentally a communicative, cognitive, and social process. This perspective challenges what scholars describe as technological determinism; that is, the belief that technological advancement automatically produces social progress. History suggests otherwise. Societies do not change simply because new technologies emerge. They change because people communicate differently, think differently, organise differently, and act differently. Technology may accelerate these processes, but it does not replace them.

To explain this relationship, I proposed a conceptual framework called the Language–Mind–Code (LMC) Nexus. The model argues that every digital interaction involves three inseparable dimensions. The first is Language. Every digital platform, whether X, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, or emerging AI applications, is sustained by communication.

•Prof Chris Agbedo

News reports, political speeches, hashtags, memes, emojis, podcasts, videos, and comments are all linguistic resources through which people construct reality. Language is not merely a vehicle for conveying information; it shapes identities, influences beliefs, mobilises communities, and contests power.

The second dimension is the Mind. Every digital message must pass through human cognition before it acquires meaning. Individuals interpret the same information differently according to their experiences, education, emotions, cultural backgrounds, and political orientations. In an age of information overload, people increasingly rely on cognitive shortcuts, making them vulnerable to misinformation, emotional manipulation, and confirmation bias. The digital revolution is therefore as much a cognitive revolution as it is a technological one.

The third dimension is Code. Increasingly, invisible algorithms determine what we read, watch, share, and even believe. Digital platforms decide which stories trend, which videos go viral, which opinions gain prominence, and which voices remain invisible. Algorithms have become powerful gatekeepers of public discourse. They do not merely distribute information; they shape public attention and influence public opinion.

These three forces, i.e., language, mind, and code operate recursively rather than sequentially. A message generates interpretations; those interpretations produce reactions; the reactions create behavioural data; algorithms process that data and amplify selected content; the amplified content then generates fresh interpretations and new communication. Meaning is therefore never fixed. It is continually produced, contested, and reconstructed. Nigeria itself offers numerous illustrations of these dynamics. Contemporary public controversies often unfold simultaneously in traditional media and digital platforms, where official statements, counter-statements, citizen reactions, and algorithmic amplification combine to shape public perception. Whether the issue concerns elections, economic reforms, insecurity, or governance, public understanding is increasingly produced through recursive interactions between language, cognition, and digital technologies.

A recent Nigerian controversy vividly illustrates this recursive process. The Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council (PFIPC) scandal reportedly began when an alleged fictitious government agency was discovered operating with forged appointment letters, counterfeit State House documents, and the appearance of official legitimacy. When the Presidency publicly disclaimed the organisation and criminal proceedings were initiated against its alleged promoter, the story might ordinarily have ended there. Instead, it entered a new communicative cycle. The accused responded with allegations implicating senior public officials, while the Presidency firmly rejected those claims as false and self-serving. As the competing narratives spread across television, newspapers, online news platforms, YouTube, X, Facebook, and WhatsApp, millions of Nigerians interpreted, debated, reposted, and reframed the controversy according to their own experiences and political dispositions.

The episode illustrates the Language–Mind–Code Nexus in action. Language produced competing narratives through allegations, rebuttals, media reports, and public commentary. The Mind interpreted these narratives differently, leading citizens to contrasting conclusions shaped by prior beliefs, ideological commitments, and cognitive biases. Code, the algorithms governing digital platforms, amplified highly engaging content, increasing its visibility and expanding public debate. As online engagement intensified, political pressure mounted, eventually prompting President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to direct the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the origins of the alleged ghost agency and any possible official collaborators.

Whatever the eventual findings of that investigation, the controversy demonstrates that technology did not create the issue; it shaped how the issue was communicated, interpreted, amplified, and translated into institutional action. This 'phantom' agency controversy demonstrates that technology alone neither creates nor resolves social problems; rather, it amplifies existing communicative and cognitive processes. Meaning travelled in a recursive loop rather than a straight line. This insight is particularly significant for the Global South.

Many developing countries continue to define digital development primarily in terms of infrastructure. We celebrate internet penetration rates, smartphone adoption, digital payment systems, innovation hubs, and artificial intelligence initiatives. These investments are necessary, but they are not sufficient. Digital infrastructure without communicative capacity, critical thinking, and ethical governance cannot produce sustainable development. The real digital divide is no longer simply between those who have internet access and those who do not. It increasingly separates those who can shape digital meaning from those who merely consume it. This distinction has profound implications for Africa and other developing regions.

First, language matters. Millions of Africans remain digitally marginalised because much online content, software, and artificial intelligence systems privilege dominant global languages while neglecting indigenous African languages. Digital inclusion therefore requires investment in multilingual technologies, language documentation, machine translation, speech recognition, and locally relevant digital content. A society cannot claim digital inclusion if large segments of its population remain linguistically excluded.

Second, cognitive empowerment matters. The greatest challenge confronting contemporary societies may not be information scarcity but information excess. Every day, citizens encounter an avalanche of news, rumours, political propaganda, manipulated images, and AI-generated content. Without critical digital literacy, individuals become vulnerable to deception and manipulation. Educational institutions must therefore prioritise analytical reasoning, media literacy, verification skills, and critical thinking.

Third, algorithmic accountability matters. Digital platforms increasingly shape democratic participation, public debate, and economic opportunity. However, the algorithms that govern these platforms remain largely opaque. Developing countries cannot afford to remain passive consumers of technologies designed elsewhere without interrogating how these systems affect local languages, cultures, economies, and political processes. Ethical governance of artificial intelligence and digital platforms must become an integral component of national development strategies.

The opportunities, nonetheless, are enormous. Digital technologies provide unprecedented possibilities for preserving endangered languages, expanding educational access, strengthening civic participation, promoting entrepreneurship, and connecting local communities to global knowledge networks. African creators now reach international audiences directly. Researchers collaborate across continents in real time. Indigenous cultures find new digital expressions. Small businesses access global markets with fewer barriers than ever before.

The question, therefore, is not whether the Global South should embrace digital transformation. It must. The more important question is how. My answer is that digital transformation must become human-centred rather than technology-centred. Governments should pursue integrated policies that combine technological investment with linguistic inclusion, cognitive empowerment, and ethical digital governance. Universities, particularly faculties of social sciences and humanities, have a pivotal role in producing interdisciplinary research on how language, cognition, culture, and technology interact in shaping development. Digital transformation cannot be left exclusively to engineers and computer scientists. Linguists, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, legal scholars, communication experts, and educators all have indispensable roles to play.

Ultimately, the future of the Global South will depend less on the technologies it imports than on the meanings it creates. Societies that merely consume digital technologies will remain dependent on those who design them. Societies that shape digital discourse, cultivate critical minds, and build transparent technological systems will become active participants in defining the future. The digital age has not diminished the importance of language; it has elevated it. Every innovation, every algorithm, every artificial intelligence system, and every digital platform ultimately depends on communication. Whoever shapes communication influences thought. Whoever influences thought shapes collective action. And whoever shapes collective action determines the trajectory of development.

That is why the greatest opportunity before the Global South is not simply to become more connected, but to become more communicatively empowered, cognitively resilient, and technologically sovereign. Technology may accelerate development, but it is language that gives development meaning, the human mind that gives it purpose, and ethical governance that ensures it serves humanity. If we truly seek to drive human society in the digital era, we must begin not with machines, but with meaning.

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Health and Living

Huge gains of President Tinubu's healthcare reforms

OKEY AKPA

Few aspects of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's reform programme have attracted more public attention than the economy. Debate has centred on fiscal policy, exchange-rate reforms, inflation, taxation, investment and the cost of living. These are the measures by which governments are usually judged because they shape economic confidence and influence the daily lives of citizens.

Healthcare has occupied a different place in that conversation. Discussion has focused on access to care, the condition of public hospitals, maternal and child health, health insurance, the availability of medicines and the performance of primary healthcare. Those remain the principal measures by which the success of health sector reforms should be judged.

They are not, however, the only ones. Some of the most significant effects of the reforms are unfolding beyond hospitals and clinics. As access to healthcare improves, the sector is also attracting investment, expanding domestic manufacturing, strengthening scientific capability, developing skilled human capital and creating new opportunities for enterprise.

A sector long regarded primarily as a consumer of public expenditure is becoming a productive sector capable of generating investment, innovation, industrial growth and skilled employment.

That wider economic significance has received far less attention than it deserves. Yet it may ultimately prove to be one of the administration's most consequential achievements.

The reform that changed the market

The changes across Nigeria's health sector are the product of a reform programme designed not simply to improve individual initiatives, but to reorganise the sector itself. That process began on 12 December 2023, when President Bola Ahmed Tinubu launched the Nigeria Health Sector Renewal Investment Initiative (NHSRII) under the Renewed Hope Agenda and secured the endorsement of the Health Renewal Compact by the Federal Government, the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory, together with development partners. Implemented through the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp), the initiative replaced fragmented interventions with a common plan, shared priorities, coordinated execution and a stronger framework for accountability. Under the leadership of the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Professor Muhammad Ali Pate, that framework has been pursued with sustained discipline and consistency, translating presidential direction into coordinated action across the health sector.

The significance of that reform extended well beyond governance. Markets become investable when demand is organised, financing is predictable and institutions inspire confidence. Fragmented systems rarely create those conditions. Coherent systems do.

The effects are already evident. Since 2023, more than six million Nigerians have entered organised health insurance, expanding the market for healthcare services and essential commodities. More than 4,100 primary healthcare centres are under revitalisation, with over 3,100 already completed, while reforms to the Basic Healthcare Provision Fund are making frontline financing more reliable. Investments in the health workforce and specialist care are expanding the system's capacity as utilisation of essential health services continues to rise.

Taken together, these reforms are creating something larger than a better organised health system. They are creating a health economy that is larger, more predictable and increasingly attractive to long-term investment. That transformation provides the foundation upon which the wider economic consequences of the reforms are beginning to unfold.

Capital Follows Confidence

Markets expand as demand grows. They attract investment when confidence grows with it.

That is precisely what is now happening in Nigeria's health sector. For decades, unmet healthcare needs alone were insufficient to attract sustained investment because demand was fragmented, financing uncertain and long-term production commercially risky. The reforms are changing those fundamentals by creating a larger, more organised and more predictable market.

The Presidential Initiative to Unlock the Healthcare Value Chain (PVAC) has become the principal instrument for translating that confidence into investment. Together with the Presidential Executive Order on local manufacturing and related reforms to procurement, regulation and market shaping, it has lowered many of the structural barriers that once discouraged long-term investment while signalling a growing recognition that healthcare is not only a social sector but also a productive sector of the economy.

The response has been substantial. More than ninety investment projects, representing a pipeline valued at over US$5 billion, are under development across pharmaceuticals, vaccines, diagnostics, medical oxygen, medical devices and related industries. Afreximbank's US$1 billion financing platform, alongside additional financing involving the European Investment Bank, the Bank of Industry and other partners, is widening access to long-term capital, while collaboration between Nigerian and international manufacturers are expanding domestic production, accelerating technology transfer and strengthening industrial capability.

The significance of these developments extends beyond the value of the investments announced. They demonstrate that investors respond when policy is credible, institutions are strengthening and markets offer the prospect of sustained growth. The growing flow of capital into Nigeria's health sector therefore reflects confidence not only in individual projects, but in the direction and durability of the reform programme itself.

That confidence is already beginning to influence the wider economy. New investment is strengthening manufacturing, expanding domestic supply chains, supporting research, encouraging innovation and creating opportunities for Nigerian enterprise. A sector once regarded largely as a destination for public expenditure is steadily becoming a platform for productive investment, industrial expansion and long-term economic growth.

Making more at home

Every economy reaches a point at which it must decide whether to remain principally a consumer of other countries' production or become a producer in its own right. For many years, Nigeria's health sector belonged firmly in the former category. Medicines, vaccines, diagnostics, medical devices and other essential health commodities were largely imported, leaving the country exposed to external supply disruptions while much of the economic value created by domestic demand accrued elsewhere.

The current reforms are beginning to change that equation.

The ambition extends beyond producing more medicines locally. It is to build an integrated healthcare manufacturing ecosystem capable of serving a growing domestic market while positioning Nigerian firms to compete across regional and global value chains. The Presidential Executive Order on local manufacturing, market-shaping interventions, pooled procurement through Medipool and strategic partnerships with Nigerian and international manufacturers are all directed towards that objective

The results are already evident. Investment is expanding pharmaceutical manufacturing, oxygen production, diagnostics, rapid diagnostic tests, treated bed nets and medical technologies. Companies that once viewed Nigeria primarily as a destination for imported products are increasingly investing in local production, assembly and technology partnerships, while established manufacturers are expanding operations in response to a market whose long-term direction has become clearer.

The implications extend well beyond the factory floor. Every additional stage of production retained within Nigeria strengthens domestic value chains, supports local enterprise, creates skilled employment and retains more economic value within the national economy. It also strengthens the productive base by reinforcing the network of suppliers, technical services, logistics, quality systems and specialised skills upon which competitive manufacturing depends.

This is ultimately about more than import substitution. A stronger manufacturing base, more capable regulatory institutions, expanding clinical research and a growing pool of skilled professionals are positioning Nigeria to participate more competitively in regional and global value chains. The opportunity is not simply to produce more for domestic consumption, but to build industries capable of supplying wider markets while contributing to Africa's growing role in the development, manufacture and distribution of health products.

Seen in that light, the reforms are strengthening more than the health sector. They are reinforcing Nigeria's industrial base and creating conditions in which healthcare can become an increasingly important driver of manufacturing, innovation, investment and long-term economic growth.

Human capital as economic capital

No industry outperforms the quality of the people who sustain it. Manufacturing depends on skilled technicians and engineers. Research depends on scientists. Strong health systems depend on doctors, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory scientists and thousands of other professionals whose knowledge determines the quality of care, the pace of innovation and the competitiveness of the industries that depend upon them.

Investment in health workers is therefore more than a social obligation. It is an investment in productive capacity.

That understanding has become one of the defining features of the current reforms. Alongside investments in infrastructure, manufacturing and service delivery, equal emphasis has been placed on expanding Nigeria's human resources for health. More than 78,000 frontline health workers have already been retrained, with a target of 120,000. Recruitment has expanded across federal tertiary health institutions, while the National Health Fellowship is preparing a new generation of public sector leaders drawn from all 774 local government areas.

The same long-term thinking is evident in the approach to health workforce mobility. Rather than treating international migration solely as a retention challenge, the reforms recognise it as a structural feature of an increasingly interconnected labour market. The policy response has therefore focused on expanding the pipeline of skilled professionals, improving working conditions, strengthening career pathways and promoting ethical international recruitment.

The economic implications extend well beyond healthcare. A larger and better-trained workforce strengthens productivity, supports scientific research, reinforces domestic manufacturing and expands the technical capabilities upon which higher-value industries depend. It also strengthens Nigeria's ability to participate more competitively in regional and global markets for health services, research and innovation.

Viewed in that light, investment in health workers is simultaneously an investment in healthcare, education, industrial capability and long-term economic growth. Human capital is not simply an outcome of development. It is one of the principal means by which development is achieved.

Building capability for the long term

Industrial development ultimately depends on more than investment. It depends on the capabilities that allow an economy to design, test, regulate, manufacture and continuously improve what it produces. Countries that lead in healthcare do so not simply because they manufacture more products, but because they have built the scientific, regulatory and institutional capacity that sustains innovation over time.

That is where the reforms are now placing greater emphasis.

Domestic manufacturing alone is not enough. Equal emphasis has been placed on strengthening the scientific, regulatory and institutional capabilities that underpin a competitive health industry. Clinical trial capacity is expanding, positioning Nigeria to play a larger role in the development and evaluation of new medicines, vaccines and medical technologies. Investments in genomics are strengthening disease surveillance, while broadening the country's scientific capabilities. At the same time, regulatory reforms are reinforcing confidence in the quality, safety and integrity of Nigerian health products.

The reforms are also strengthening collaboration among universities, research institutions, industry and government. Those partnerships shorten the distance between scientific discovery and commercial application, encourage technology transfer and expand the innovation ecosystem upon which advanced manufacturing increasingly depends. The objective is not merely to adopt technologies developed elsewhere, but steadily to build the capacity to generate, adapt and commercialise knowledge within Nigeria.

These investments will yield their greatest returns over time. As manufacturing expands, the countries that capture the greatest economic value will be those able to innovate, meet international standards and compete in higher-value segments of global production. The capabilities now being built are therefore investments not only in today's health sector, but in Nigeria's future competitiveness.

For that reason, the reforms are creating assets whose significance extends well beyond healthcare. Stronger institutions, better science and more effective regulation will increasingly shape Nigeria's ability to compete in knowledge-intensive industries, deepen industrialisation and sustain long-term economic growth.

Conclusion

Healthcare reforms will always be judged first by their impact on people's lives. Better access to care, stronger primary healthcare, lower maternal and child mortality, improved financial protection and greater public confidence remain the standards against which any health system should ultimately be assessed.

The experience of the past three years suggests, however, that reforms on this scale can achieve more than better health outcomes. By creating a more coherent health system, attracting investment, expanding domestic manufacturing, strengthening human capital and building scientific and institutional capability, they are also contributing to the foundations of long-term economic growth.

That is an important lesson for a country pursuing the ambition of building a one-trillion-dollar economy. Economic transformation depends not only on sound macroeconomic management, but also on the strength of the productive sectors that underpin it. Increasingly, healthcare is demonstrating that it can be one of those sectors.

That may prove to be one of the least anticipated consequences of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's healthcare reforms. Conceived to improve the health of Nigerians, they are also beginning to reshape the productive capacity of the economy itself. Those are the collateral consequences of reform—and they deserve to be recognised as part of its enduring legacy.

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Health and Living

Li-CCARE, FTH Lokoja hold 6th prostate cancer support group meeting, push back against stigma, depression

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

The Inclusive Cancer Care Research Equity (i-CCaRE) Consortium for Black Men in collaboration with the Urology Unit of the Federal Teaching Hospital (FTH) Lokoja, has held its sixth monthly support group meeting for prostate cancer patients.

The monthly initiative forms part of a research programme supported by iCCaRE for Black Men and the Cancer of the Prostate Transatlantic Consortium (CaPTC) — both bodies established by Folakemi Odedina, a hemato-oncology professor at the Mayo Clinic in the United States.

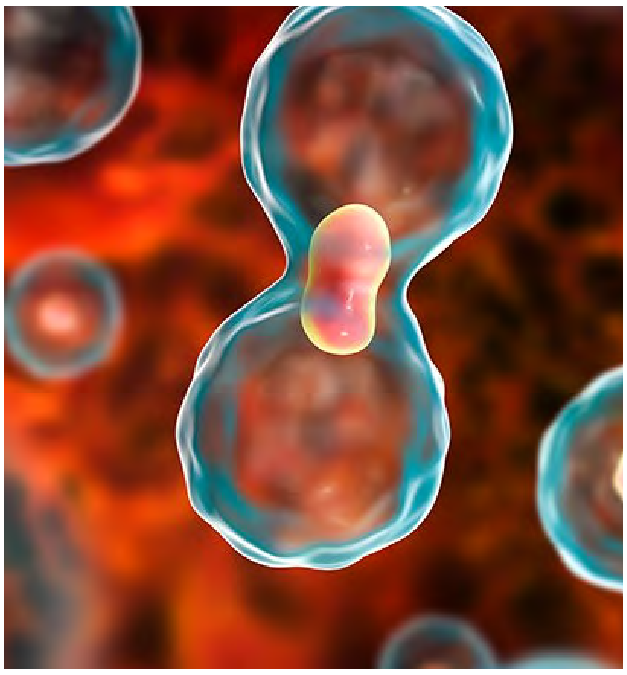
The work is designed to assess how support groups influence quality of life and help lower anxiety, depression, and dropout rates among prostate cancer patients receiving treatment.

During the gathering, participants recited their rallying slogan: "United Together! We Stand Strong, We Support Each Other! Together in the Fight, Together in Life."

As a highlight of the day's session, members who had shown consistent attendance at previous meetings were rewarded with free T-shirts.

Ayodeji Ogunmola, Team Leader and Principal Investigator of i-CCARE at FTH Lokoja, said the initiative was making a real difference for patients confronting the disease , noting that the programme has grown steadily since its inaugural session in February 2026, with patients now attending on their own initiative rather than needing reminders — a sign, he said, that the stigma and silence long associated with the illness are gradually breaking down.

"We are combating misinformation and overcoming stigma. Many men do not want



people to know what they are going through," he said.

Ogunmola encouraged men aged 45 and above to go for routine PSA testing and those with abnormal values should see their doctors, just as he described prostate cancer as the most commonly diagnosed cancer among men and the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in that group, stressing that early diagnosis remains life -saving.

He acknowledged that some patients make financial sacrifices just to attend the sessions each month and appealed for support for those struggling economically, expressing appreciation to the FTH Lokoja management, ably led by Abdulrahman Shehu, for providing an enabling environment to hold monthly meetings and for allowing research activities to flourish in the hospital.

He encouraged cancer patients to take part in the Social Determinants of Health program of the National Cancer Care Programme (NCCP) currently been run by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in which Odedina is also playing an active role.

Abimbola Adesanya, a consultant public health physician, gave a talk titled: "Strengthening Social Connections and Networks During Prostate Cancer Treatment," highlighting family, friends, religious institutions, community networks, and healthcare workers as essential pillars of support, noting that

such groups allow patients to move past stigma, exchange useful information, and maintain a positive outlook, adding that participants have reported a stronger grasp of their condition and better social connections as a result.

Patients at the meeting praised the organisers, saying the sessions have expanded their understanding of the disease and helped them manage their health more effectively, just as they noted that their diagnosis and ongoing treatment have not held them back from staying active, and that they look forward eagerly to each subsequent meeting.

Over 800 benefit from free medical outreach at 2026 Nigerian Army Day Celebration in Ibadan

REMI FEYISIPO

No fewer than 800 residents of Ojoo community, Akinyele Local Government Area in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, have benefited from a free medical outreach organised by the Nigerian Army as part of activities marking the 2026 Nigerian Army Day Celebration (NADCEL).

The free services provided included health consultations, medications and treatment, provision of eyeglasses, dental care, and other essential medical services to residents at the one-day event.

Chinedu Nnebeife, a major general and general officer commanding (GOC), 2 Division, who represented by Modupe Falana, a brigadier general and chief of staff, 2 Division Nigerian Army, speaking during the outreach said that this year's celebration, themed "Protecting the Nation and Serving the People: A Way Forward for the Nigerian Army," underscores the Army's commitment to fostering stronger partnerships with communities while sustaining its constitutional responsibility of defending Nigeria's sovereignty and supporting national development.

She noted that the initiative was designed to appreciate the support and cooperation the Army enjoys from host communities, noted that the Nigerian Army remains committed not only to protecting the nation's territorial integrity but also to promoting the welfare of citizens through humanitarian interventions.

"As you are aware, the Nigerian Army is 163 years old, and we are marking that anniversary. This medical outreach is one of the programmes organised for the Nigerian Army Day Celebration. It is our way of giving back to society," she said.

"The Ojoo community is selected as a beneficiary to demonstrate the Army's appreciation for public support. We felt it was important to appreciate the people by bringing this intervention to the Ojoo community in Ibadan, It is a demonstration of our gratitude for the support we receive from members of the public and another opportunity to strengthen the cordial relationship between the Nigerian Army and the civilian population."

He posited that sustainable security can only be achieved through mutual trust and collaboration between security agencies and the people stated that community support remained indispensable to the Army's operational success, Moses Azuorut, a brigadier general and commander, 2 Division Medical Services and Hospital, on his part, noted that the initiative reflects the Nigerian Army's belief that national security goes beyond military operations to include the health and wellbeing of citizens.

The outreach, he pointed out, was designed to improve access to quality healthcare for residents of neighbouring communities adding that a team of doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory scientists and other healthcare professionals was deployed to provide comprehensive medical services free of charge.

"As part of the Nigerian Army Day Celebration, we have packaged this medical outreach for our neighbouring civilian communities. Many of them do not have easy access to healthcare, so we came here today to provide the medical intervention they need. Today, we have enough medical personnel and equipment to provide consultations, dental care and several other healthcare services. We believe the outcome of this intervention will positively impact many residents of the Ojoo community."

He said that the outreach would further strengthen civil-military relations and deepen public confidence in the Armed Forces.

Beneficiaries of the outreach however commended the Nigerian Army for the initiative, describing it as timely, particularly in view of the rising cost of healthcare, which brought much-needed relief to many families.

St. Ives to bridge Nigeria's healthcare delivery with urgent care clinics

JOHN SALAU

St. Ives Multi-Specialist Hospital has unveiled urgent care clinics, an innovative initiative aimed at bridging Nigeria's healthcare delivery as part of its 30th anniversary celebration.

The initiative is expected to give Nigerians quick and quality healthcare services that cuts waiting time for patients even without doctor's appointments.

"Our fertility clinic has become one of the most trusted in Nigeria, and over the years, our IVF programme has given many couples who struggled to conceive the chance to become parents," Babatunde Okewale, founder and chief medical director, St. Ives Specialist Hospital, said during a media parley to mark the hospital's 30th anniversary in Lagos.

According to Okewale, over 4000 IVF babies have been born in St Ives Specialist Hospital since its inception, with several other normal deliveries recorded in the last 30 years.

"We are proud of every family that has grown because of the work done in our fertility units, alongside the care we provide across pregnancy, childbirth, and childhood," he said.

Speaking on the hospital's 30th anniversary, Okewale said that the board has approved plans to add three more branches as part of its anniversary celebration to increase its total branches to eight before the end of 2026.

"Thirty years ago, on the 10th of July, 1996, St. Ives Hospital opened its doors at 34 Aromire Avenue, Adeniyi Jones. We started with a clear purpose: to serve women, children, and families with healthcare they could rely on.

"Our early years took us from Aromire Avenue to 90 Opebi Road. From there, we began to acquire our own properties and expand deliberately. St. Ives is today a multi-specialist hospital dedicated to women's health, paediatrics, family health, and fertility," Okewale said.

Busola Ajibola, the chief operating officer, St. Ives Hospital, said after 30 years of business, the hospital is restrategising to focus on legacy initiatives. She added that the urgent care clinics will open in Eko Atlantic, Ikeja, and Abeokuta as part of St. Ives' legacy in the healthcare sector to provide walk-in medical treatment for immediate, non-life-threatening health concerns.

Ajibola, also revealed that the health facility organised sporting activity, a luncheon, and a gala night held on Friday to celebrates the hospital 30th anniversary.

"Today, we celebrate not just the passage of time, but a legacy of excellence, compassion, and innovation in healthcare delivery," Ajibola said.

Health and Living

Minister Salako pledges resilient healthcare system at NHEA awards

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Minister of State for Health and Social Welfare, Iziaq Adekunle Salako, has reiterated Federal Government 's pledge to building a stronger, more resilient and accessible healthcare system.

The Minister stated this while speaking at the Nigerian Health Excellence Awards (NHEA) 2026 in Lagos, where outstanding institutions, professionals and innovators driving excellence across Nigerian healthcare value chain were honoured.

He cheered all the award winners and nominees for their outstanding contributions to healthcare delivery in Nigeria, describing them as critical partners in the nation's journey towards building a stronger and more resilient healthcare system.

The minister also commended the organisers of the Nigerian Healthcare Excellence Awards for sustaining a credible platform that recognises and rewards excellence in the healthcare sector, noting that such recognition encourages healthy competition, innovation and continuous quality improvement.

L-R: Wale Alabi, NHEA Project director; Iziaq Adekunle Salako, minister of State for Health & Social Welfare; Ike Onyechi, founder, Alpha Pharmacy and recipient of Lifetime Achievement Award; Chinelo Onyechi, NHEA Advisory Board chairman; Anthony Omolola, NHEA director of Marketing, Communication, & Strategy and, Moses Braimah at the event.

Speaking earlier, Chairman of the NHEA Advisory Board, Anthony Omolola, described the awards as more than a ceremony, but a celebration of the remarkable institutions and individuals whose dedication continues to strengthen Nigeria's healthcare system despite prevailing challenges.

Omolola noted that the awards have, for over a decade, promoted transparency, accountability and excellence through a rigorous evaluation process involving public nominations, voting, independent verification, industry research and assessments by an independent Jury and Advisory Board.

This year's edition, themed 'Innovation, Local Manufacturing and Digital Transformation,' recognised excellence across healthcare delivery, pharmaceuticals, biomedical technology, health insurance, diagnostics, media, and public health, with winners emerging after months of public nominations, voting, independent verification, auditing, industry performance assessments and extensive research.

Among the highlights of the evening were the presentation of Lifetime Achievement Awards to Ladi Awosika, Ike Onyechi, and Samuel Chukwunonyerem Ohaegbulam, in recognition of their exceptional contributions to healthcare development, medical practice, pharmacy, healthcare financing and leadership in Nigeria.

The event also honoured Kingsley Ekwueme with the Diaspora Excellence Award for pioneering leadership in robotic and minimally invasive surgery, while Mildred Edet John received the Special Recognition Award for Excellence in Nursing Leadership, Education and Professional Development.

The event also saw outstanding organisations recognised across more than thirty competitive categories. Notable winners included FCMB as Outstanding Healthcare Financial Institution of the Year, Lagos State Health Management Agency (LASHMA) as State Government Health Insurance Agency of the Year, University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital as Public Tertiary Healthcare Facility of the Year, Iwosan Lagoon Hospitals as Private Tertiary Healthcare Facility of the Year, Leadway Health Limited as Health Maintenance Organisation of the Year, Gabbi Health as Innovative Healthcare Service Provider of the Year, Fidson Healthcare Plc as Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Company of the Year, and Codix Pharma Limited as Technology-Driven Pharmaceutical Distributor of the Year, among other deserving winners.

Special recognition was also accorded to outstanding achievements in laboratory medicine and biomedical technology, including the DCL-NHEA Laboratory Innovation and Quality Improvement Award presented to Mecure Healthcare Limited, while Vitus Nnaemeka of Echolab Services Ltd. emerged as DCL-NHEA Laboratory Professional of the Year.

Enugu lauds UNICEF's support as consultations begin on 2028–2032 country programme

REGIS ANUKWUOJI

The Enugu State Economic Planning Commission has commended the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for its sustained support in improving the lives of children and women in Enugu State and across Nigeria.

Nnanyelugo Dan Onyishi, executive secretary of the Commission, represented by Nzekwe Herriattta, HoD, Donor/M&E Department, gave the commendation during a one-day consultation meeting on the development of UNICEF Nigeria's 2028–2032 Country Programme Document (CPD), organized in collaboration with the Ministry for Communication, Advocacy and Partnerships (CAP) section in Enugu.

Onyishi described the consultation as an important opportunity for stakeholders to assess progress made in advancing children's welfare, identify persistent challenges affecting children and communities, and jointly define practical, evidence-based priorities for the next programme cycle.

He said that the proposed programme would focus on transformative strategies capable of delivering sustainable results through policy advocacy, systems strengthening and multi-sectoral partnerships, while remaining flexible enough to respond to emerging challenges.

According to him, the Enugu State Economic Planning Commission, as the coordinating institution for development planning in the state, recognises that sustainable development can only be achieved through strong partnerships, inclusive dialogue and evidence-based decision-making.

He urged participants to remain committed to the shared goal of ensuring that every child survives, thrives and achieves his or her full potential.

"The outcome of this consultation should not only inform UNICEF's programme but also strengthen our collective efforts to achieve inclusive and sustainable development," he added.

Onyishi also stressed the need for governments at all levels to increase domestic funding for child-focused interventions instead of relying heavily on development partners.

"As we identify the challenges across our various sectors, we must also begin to make provisions for them in our state budgets. We should not continue to depend solely on development partners.

These priorities must become part of our own development planning and budgeting process," he said.

Maureen Zubie Okolo, planning and monitoring specialist at UNICEF's Enugu Field Office, while speaking at the event, said the Country Programme Document serves as the strategic framework guiding UNICEF's support to the Government of Nigeria in promoting the rights and well-being of children and women.

> **We are currently in the Evidence Synthesis and Theory of Change phase, with consultations taking place at the national and sub-national levels**

She explained that UNICEF is currently developing the 2028–2032 CPD through consultations with stakeholders at both national and sub-national levels to ensure alignment with government priorities and global development frameworks.

According to Okolo, the new programme will align with the African Agenda, the UNICEF Strategic Plan (2026–2029), and Nigeria's National Development Plan.

She said that the planning process comprises four key phases: Evidence Synthesis, Prioritisation, Theory of Change (ToC), and the Results and Resources Plan.

"We are currently in the Evidence Synthesis and Theory of Change phase, with consultations taking place at the national and sub-national levels. The process builds on lessons from the 2023–2027 programme cycle and is guided by updated evidence and extensive stakeholder engagement," she said.

Okolo noted that the 2028–2032 Country Programme would reflect emerging realities, including changes in financing and institutional reforms, while prioritising high-impact interventions through policy advocacy, systems strengthening and multi-sectoral collaboration.

She added that UNICEF's Enugu Field Office is engaging stakeholders from priority states to review evidence, identify the most critical deprivations and rights violations affecting children, analyse barriers and bottlenecks, and recommend solutions capable of delivering impact at scale.

According to her, technical sessions were held by the Health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Nutrition, Education, Child Protection, Social Policy, Social and Behaviour Change (SBC), and Communication, Advocacy and Partnerships (CAP) sections to identify and prioritise key issues affecting children.

She explained that CAP serves as a cross-cutting function supporting the achievement of all programme outcomes under the UNICEF Nigeria Country Programme by providing strategic communication, evidence generation, advocacy, resource mobilisation and partnership coordination to accelerate results for children.

Cover

How intelligence, multi-agency pressure forced release of abducted Oyo pupils, teachers 56 days after

REMI FEYISIPO (IBADAN), ANTHONY AILEMEN (ABUJA) AND TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN (LAGOS)

The release of 44 pupils and teachers abducted by terrorists in Oyo State after 56 days in captivity was the outcome of a coordinated intelligence-led operation that dismantled the kidnappers' network and forced them to free their captives without ransom, security officials have disclosed.

The victims were abducted on May 15, 2026, from their schools in Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State in an attack linked to the Ansaru terrorist group operating from the Old Oyo National Park forest.

The rescue was first confirmed on Friday by presidential spokesman Bayo Onanuga. "Finally, all the kidnapped pupils and teachers in Oriire, Oyo have been rescued by our security agencies," Onanuga wrote on X.

"Updated: in the course of the rescue operation, eight of the kidnappers were arrested and are now in DSS custody, while some of them were neutralised. There was no quid pro quo in the rescue as one of the terrorists, a kingpin, that the kidnappers demanded his release, is being prosecuted for his atrocities," he added.

How we rescued the victims - Military

The rescue followed a coordinated operation led by troops of the Nigerian Army under the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 2 Division, Major General Chibueze Nnebeife, working alongside the Office of the National Security Adviser, the National Counter Terrorism Centre, Defence Headquarters, special forces from the armed services, the Nigeria Police Force, Department of State Services, National Intelligence Agency, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, as well as local vigilantes, hunters and Amotekun operatives.

According to a statement issued by Lieutenant Colonel Danjuma Jonah Danjuma, acting deputy director of Army Public Relations for 2 Division, the operation focused on identifying and dismantling the network behind the abduction.

"The operations, which lasted for more than a month, focused on identifying the terrorists' kingpins that masterminded the kidnapping, bursting and dismantling their networks and logistics links, including their informants and hideouts located within the Old Oyo National Park Forest, Oyo State," the statement said.

The military said multiple arrests were made in Oyo and other states, disrupting the group's operations and placing it under sustained pressure.

"These arrests completely disorganized the group, exerted overwhelming pressure on them and ultimately led the terrorist group to unconditionally release the pupils and teachers," the statement added.

Security authorities said the operation was carefully planned to ensure the safety of the captives and avoid civilian casualties, although some security personnel suffered casualties during the mission.

The rescued pupils and teachers are currently receiving medical attention at an undisclosed hospital and will later be reunited with their families through the Oyo State Government.

The rescue brings an end to a tense period that gripped Oyo State and the wider country. However, one of the abducted teachers, Michael Oyedokun, was killed while in captivity after being beheaded by the terrorists.

Tinubu hails operation, says no ransom paid

President Bola Tinubu hailed the operation, saying no ransom was paid and no concessions were made to secure the victims' freedom.

"Tonight, our nation has reason to give thanks. The children and teachers abducted by Ansaru terrorists in Oyo State have been rescued by our security forces, alive and unharmed. No ransom was paid. No concession was made," the president said.

"I salute every officer and operative whose courage, discipline, and professionalism made this possible. To those who seek to spread fear through terror, know that the Nigerian state will pursue you relentlessly. We will protect our people, defend our communities, and never relent until peace and security prevail across our country."

Seyi Makinde, Oyo State governor, described the development as a major relief.

"It is such a big relief for all of us. Just right now, I am overjoyed and can hardly say much," he said during a telephone interview with Channels Television on Friday.

Government arrested terrorists' families to force victims release - Ex-DSS operative

Providing insight into the operation, Seyi Adetayo, security and intelligence expert, said the government rejected negotiations with the abductors and instead relied on intelligence gathering and pressure tactics.

"They identified the kidnappers' mothers, wives, children and close associates. They arrested them, recorded videos and sent them to the abductors," the former DSS operative said during an appearance on TVC on Friday.

According to him, security agencies tracked the kidnappers' network, cut off supply routes and escape channels, and gradually weakened the group until the captives were released.

Obi reacts as presidency knocks Atiku for late response

The rescue also drew reactions from political leaders across party lines.

Peter Obi, presidential candidate of the Nigeria Democratic Congress, welcomed the development, describing it as worthy of thanksgiving.

"The children's safe return is worthy of thanksgiving. I am greatly relieved and delighted to learn of the safe rescue of the schoolchildren who were kidnapped. I sincerely thank all those whose tireless efforts made their freedom possible, especially the security personnel and everyone who worked behind the scenes," Obi said.

"While we celebrate this happy outcome, we must remember that no child should ever have to endure such trauma. The recurring incidents of kidnapping, particularly of schoolchildren, underscore the urgent need to strengthen our security architecture and make the protection of lives and property the foremost responsibility of government.

"Our children deserve to learn in an atmosphere of safety, not fear. We must continue to work towards building a Nigeria where every child can pursue education without the threat of violence or abduction."

The development also triggered a political exchange after the presidency criticised former Vice President Atiku Abubakar for not immediately reacting to the rescue.

"Almost 18 hours after the Oriire pupils and their teachers regained their freedom, Atiku Abubakar @atiku has not deemed it fit to rejoice with the Tinubu Federal Government, the security agencies and the traumatised victims," Onanuga said on X, while praising Obi for issuing a statement.

However, Atiku later welcomed the operation and commended the security agencies.

"The rescue of innocent schoolchildren from the hands of terrorists is a victory for our gallant troops and a source of hope for every Nigerian family. They deserve the gratitude of the nation," he said in a statement issued through his spokesman, Phrank Shaibu.

Atiku also urged the president to publicly brief Nigerians on the operation. "Following the successful rescue operation, the President ought to have immediately addressed the nation alongside his defence chiefs — not merely to announce the good news, but to brief Nigerians on the operation, acknowledge the bravery of the troops, highlight the lessons learned, reassure families that no effort would be spared to rescue those still in captivity, and send an unmistakable message to bandits and terrorists that the Nigerian state remains resolute."

Sanwo-Olu commends Tinubu, Adeoye hails Makinde

Babajide Sanwo-Olu, Lagos State governor, also celebrated the rescue, saying it showed that Tinubu is committed to war against insecurity.

"The rescue is a big relief and shows the commitment of President Bola Tinubu's administration to the war against insecurity. I commend the tireless efforts and resilience of our gallant security operatives who made this possible. I equally rejoice with the people of Oyo State, particularly the residents of Ogbomoso on this great news," he said.

Also, Laja Adeoye, the Allied Peoples Movement governorship candidate in Lagos State, praised Makinde for refusing to negotiate with the kidnappers or pay ransom, describing the "successful operation as evidence of the effectiveness of intelligence-driven security strategies and inter-agency collaboration."

The APM governorship candidate also commended the security agencies, the Oyo State Security Network Agency (Amotekun), and all personnel involved in the rescue mission for their professionalism, resilience, and dedication, which culminated in the safe release of the abductees.

Oyo NUT, UBEC hail rescue operation

The Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), Oyo State Wing, described the release as "a victory for humanity" and said it had lifted a heavy burden from teachers, pupils, parents and communities affected by the incident.

The union commended the federal and Oyo State governments for deploying resources toward securing the victims' release, while urging authorities to strengthen security around schools and communities.

It also paid tribute to those who lost their lives during the ordeal, including members of the education community.

Similarly, Oyo State Universal Basic Education Board Chairman, Nureni Aderemi Adeniran, welcomed the release and described it as "a moment of great relief and thanksgiving for the entire education community in the state."

Military authorities said further operations would continue to track down remaining members of the network involved in the abduction.

How persistent torrential rainfall in Nigeria wreaks havoc on homes, businesses

Continued from Page 1

teau, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Edo, Abia, Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers and Bayelsa.

Lagos and Akwa Ibom states were seriously pounded last week as the states literally came under heavy flooding after several hours of continuous rain.

In Akwa Ibom, persistent rainfall submerged most of the state capital, Uyo, forcing the state government to issue a statement as residents count losses.

In Lagos, widespread, recurrent overnight rainfall in the last three to four days submerged major roads and houses in areas like Lagos Island, Lekki, Alimosho, Surulere, Mushin, and Iwaya, leaving many residents stranded.

In Kogi State, rainstorms tore through communities like Ega Eriga in Lokoja, ripping off roofs and destroying over 40 houses, leaving dozens of families temporarily without shelter.

While severe downpours and strong winds in Plateau State blew off rooftops and destroyed at least 20 homes, residents in the Nghassi community of Bokkos Local Government Area were displaced.

Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti states in South West

were not left out as continuous heavy downpours caused flash floods and windstorms that ravaged local roads and sacked residents, causing heavy economic losses.

States including Adamawa, Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Cross River and Edo in South West have also reported varying levels of devastation, property damage, and mass displacement of villagers along rising riverbanks and low-lying coastal areas.

NiMet had earlier cautioned that stagnant floodwaters could increase the risk of waterborne diseases in affected communities if proper sanitation measures are not maintained.

It called on State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs), the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), local authorities, community leaders, and other stakeholders to strengthen preparedness and emergency response efforts.

It emphasised that early preparedness, public awareness and prompt action remain critical to reducing the risks and impacts associated with flash flooding during the peak of the 2026 rainy season.

The agency also urged residents to monitor official weather forecasts and flash flood advisories to minimise the impact of possible flooding, while also asking Nigerians to keep their drains and waterways free of refuse, secure loose outdoor objects, and avoid walking or driving through flooded roads.

Lagos reacts

Flood

Titilayo Oshodi, special advisor to the Lagos State Governor on climate change and circular economy, said: "While climate change has intensified the frequency and severity of heavy rainfall, rapid urbanisation, blocked drainage channels and indiscriminate waste disposal have also worsened flooding."

According to Oshodi, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond expanding drainage infrastructure and strengthening early warning systems.

She reiterated that the Lagos State government was enforcing better environmental management while encouraging residents to take responsibility for keeping waterways clear.

Seventh-day Adventist Church premises on Iya Street, Uyo, overtaken by flood water

"Building a climate-resilient Lagos is a shared responsibility, and sustained collaboration between government, businesses and citizens will be essential to safeguarding the state's future," Oshodi said, adding: "My thoughts are with the residents and families affected by the recent flooding across Lagos."

Faith Donatus, environmental scientist and climate change expert, said that the widespread recurrence of torrential floods across Nigeria was mainly a result of climate change and its growing interactions with poor urban planning, blocked drainage systems, and the continued degradation of natural ecosystems, particularly forested areas.

"High amounts of rainfall are unavoidable; however, its impacts on humans and their sources of livelihood is preventable through climate-resilient infrastructure, effective land-use planning, wetland and forest conservation, and stronger enforcement of environmental regulations," Donatus said.

According to her, Nigeria must enhance its response strategies, by shifting from reactive disaster response to building proactive climate adaptation measures if it hopes to reduce the human and economic costs of recurring floods.

Uyo residents count losses

Moses Akpan, resident pastor of Seventh-Day Adventist, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, said he managed to rescue his children from their flooded room.

Akpan said that he was unable to take anything out of his apartment because of the devastating nature of the flood. "We did not take any pin out," he said.

He also disclosed that the flood damaged many things within the church. "All the church documents, all my personal documents, my certificates and that of my wife, everything is gone.

"Now the water inside the church is too bad. Everything has been destroyed inside the church. Nothing left inside the church," he said.

According to him, the flood situation is annual but the recent situation was on another level.

"We have never experienced this particular flooding. Today has been something so terrible."

Akpan described the current flood situation in Uyo as a disaster demanding urgent government attention to support affected residents of the state.

According to him, the community is prone to flooding and has always been flooded whenever it rains. "So, we need help. We need government intervention for the drainage system.

"I can't even know how to explain it because right now it has caused me both physical and emotional trauma. I don't even know what to do."

Philip Asuquo, another resident of Uyo, said the current flood situation is an eye-opener. According to him, the flood situation is a pointer that the state government has not been proactive about dealing with environmental situations.

"It's a terrible thing. If we are always reactive, we are waiting for the worst to happen before we respond as a people then we have missed it," he said.

Asuquo, who resides on Nkemba Street adjacent to Iya Street (off Abak road), said his community was badly affected by the flood.

"It is a terrible thing that something like this will happen. Look at old women being swept by floods. Look at kids being carried on their head, taken out. Look at properties, cars. Look at mattresses, home appliances destroyed by this flood," he said.

Akwa Ibom State government's response

The state government responded to residents' clamour in a press release signed by Aniekan Umanah, commissioner for Information and tagged 'AKSG moves to ameliorate storm water flooding occasioned by torrential rainfall on Thursday, July 9, 2026.'

According to the statement, the state governor has directed some construction companies in the state to immediately mobilise to flood-affected areas to evacuate excess storm water, drain flooded communities, and restore normalcy following the torrential rainfall experienced on Thursday, July 9, 2026.

The governor has also directed the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), under the Office of the Deputy Governor, the Ministry of Environment, and the Akwa Ibom State Environmental Protection and Waste Management Agency to immediately inspect the affected locations, assess the extent of the damage, and implement appropriate emergency measures to ameliorate the situation.

According to the government, Thursday's heavy rainfall resulted in storm water flooding in several parts of Uyo, including Nkemba Street (Abak Road), Itu Road, Osongama Estate, and Shelter Afrique, as well as some areas in Abak Local Government Area.

The government called on all residents to complement government efforts in line with earlier warning by NiMET, by ensuring that drainage channels around their homes and business premises are kept free of refuse and other obstructions to allow the free flow of storm water.

Similarly, the government also disclosed that it will remove all structures and properties obstructing waterways and drainage lines, regardless of ownership or persons involved, in order to ensure the free flow of storm water and protect lives and property.

2027 presidential running mates: What Shettima, Kwankwaso, Amaechi bring to the table

Continued from Page 1

dates remain the face of their campaigns, political analysts say the 2027 contest will equally be shaped by what the running mates bring in terms of regional influence, political structures, grassroots mobilisation and electoral strategy.

With Shettima flying the flag of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as runAning mate, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, former Kano State governor, partnering Peter Obi of the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC), and Rotimi Amaechi, former Rivers State governor, teaming up with Atiku Abubakar on the African Democratic Congress (ADC) platform, and the battle for votes has become a contest of political heavyweights.

Shettima: The APC's northern bridge

For President Tinubu, retaining Shettima was a strategic decision aimed at preserving political stability and rewarding loyalty. Shettima, former Borno State governor remains one of the APC's strongest political figures in the North-East, a region that has consistently delivered substantial votes for the ruling party.

Beyond the North-East, Shettima has cultivated relationships with political leaders across the North through years as governor, senator and now vice president.

His experience in government also gives the APC the advantage of presenting a ticket with a proven working relationship, unlike opposition alliances that are only beginning to build internal cohesion.

Analysts say Shettima's calm disposition, accessibility and understanding of northern political dynamics make him a valuable asset as the APC seeks to retain support in a region where insecurity remains a dominant concern.

He is also expected to play a leading role in reassuring northern voters over issues affecting agriculture, security and infrastructure. Yet, his biggest assignment may not be political mobilisation but defending the Tinubu administration's record.

The opposition is expected to campaign heavily on soaring inflation, the high cost of living, unemployment, insecurity, naira instability and widespread complaints of economic hardship since the removal of petrol subsidy and other reforms.

As vice president, Shettima will inevitably become one of the administration's chief defenders, explaining government policies while convincing voters that the economic pains are temporary and that reforms are beginning to yield results.

Chekwas Okorie, elder statesman, former presidential candidate and founding national chairman of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), said Shettima's greatest political test would be his ability to deliver the North-East for Tinubu, stressing that the region would determine the vice president's contribution to the APC ticket.

According to him, Shettima's influence has largely remained within the North-East despite serving as vice president for nearly four years.

"I have not seen him all the while as one whose political influence extends beyond the North-East. The electorate in the North-East will assess him based on what he has been able to attract to the region as vice president," he said.

Okorie argued that Shettima's task has become more difficult because Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President, who is candidate of the African Democratic Congress (ADC) also comes from the North-East.

"Because Atiku Abubakar is from the same geopolitical zone and remains one of the most prominent northern politicians, it will be a major challenge for Shettima to deliver substantial votes from the region," he said.

"If Tinubu performs strongly in the North-East, then it can reasonably be said that Shettima's influence came to bear. That region will determine his real contribution to the election," Okorie added.

Amaechi: Experience meets political headwinds

For the ADC and its presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar, Amaechi offers administrative experience, national political networks and campaign expertise.

The former Rivers governor has served as Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly, governor, chairman of the Nigeria Governors' Forum and Minister of Transportation, making him one of Nigeria's most experienced politicians.

Pundits say his reputation as an organiser and strategist could strengthen the ADC's nationwide campaign and improve coordination across states.

However, Amaechi faces perhaps, the toughest regional battle among the three running mates. His political dominance in Rivers is said to have steadily waned following years of intense rivalry with Nyesom Wike, minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Since leaving office, many of Amaechi's loyalists have either lost elections or defected to rival political camps, while candidates backed by Wike have repeatedly won key contests in Rivers State.

Analysts argue that Wike has built a stronger grassroots political structure in Rivers and continues to wield considerable influence across much of the South-South through alliances with governors, lawmakers and local political actors, and he has openly declared his support for Tinubu's re-election bid.

There are claims that Amaechi might find it difficult to deliver Rivers to the ADC in 2027.

Jackson Lekan Ojo, a political analyst, told BusinessDay that Rotimi Amaechi may have little to contribute to the ADC presidential ticket, arguing that his electoral value and ability to sway voters remain limited.

"I have doubt over his capacity to make a significant electoral impact or add substantial value to the ADC's presidential ticket ahead of the election," Ojo said.

Chekwas Okorie, convener and National chairman of the Igbo Agenda Dialogue (IAD), also expressed doubts about Amaechi's ability to significantly influence the outcome of the election for the ADC ticket.

He said that Amaechi's political standing in Rivers State has diminished amid changing political realities and competing power blocs.

"In Rivers State, you have the Amaechi-Wike factor and other emerging political interests. I honestly do not know what Amaechi's contribution will be," he said.

Okorie also pointed to Amaechi's record as Director-General of Muhammadu Buhari's presidential campaigns in 2015 and 2019, arguing that he failed to substantially improve Buhari's electoral performance in Rivers State.

"He served as Buhari's campaign Director-General twice, yet he did not make much impact in Rivers State to Buhari's benefit. It is therefore, doubtful that he has acquired enough political capital while out of office to attract significant support now," he said.

"So, his contribution to the election of Atiku Abubakar, in my view, will be minimal. I do not see him making a significant electoral impact in the final analysis," Okorie said.

However, some observers are of the view that his challenge will be helping the ADC to expand into other South-South states and making inroads in parts of the South-East and North-Central.

Kwankwaso: Still formidable, but facing new realities

For Peter Obi and the NDC, Kwankwaso remains one of the most recognised political figures in northern Nigeria. His greatest strength lies in the Kwankwasiyya political movement, which for years built a loyal grassroots base in Kano and parts of the North-West.

His experience as former governor, senator and presidential candidate also gives the ticket credibility among northern voters. It is argued that Kano remains one of Nigeria's biggest voting states, making Kwankwaso a significant electoral asset.

However, analysts believe his influence is no longer as dominant as it once was, following the defection of his political godson, Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf to the APC ahead of 2027.

There are also claims that internal divisions, defections and the emergence of competing political interests have weakened the once formidable Kwankwasiyya structure in parts of Kano and neighbouring states.

Observers say the NDC ticket could also face split votes in Kano, Jigawa and other North-West states where the APC, through Shettima and its established party machinery, is expected to mount a vigorous campaign.

However, Okorie, founder of APGA and the defunct United Progressives Party (UPP), told BusinessDay that Kwankwaso brings grassroots strength in the North West to the NDC and Obi's advantage.

"Kwankwaso is deeply rooted at the grassroots because of his investments in education, skills acquisition and youth empowerment. The Kwankwasiyya movement has also spread beyond Kano into other parts of northern Nigeria," he said.

Okorie also argued that Kwankwaso's political appeal could receive an additional boost from calculations surrounding the 2031 presidential race, noting that with Obi committing to serving only one four-year term if elected president, Kwankwaso could increasingly be viewed by northern voters as a leading presidential contender in 2031.

"That gives Kwankwaso leverage to market himself beyond Kano as a possible president in 2031. The votes he helps secure in 2027 could become an important bargaining chip for his future political ambition," he added.

As campaigns officially begin on August 19, analysts say the ability of these three running mates to mobilise their regions, counter political narratives and broaden their tickets' national appeal may ultimately prove decisive in determining the outcome of the 2027 presidential election.

Nigerian Govt still undecided on South Africa as stranded citizens' fate hangs in balance

Continued from Page 1

new wave of xenophobic attacks in the last four months, which have continued after the June 30th deadline given to undocumented African nationals by anti-immigrant groups to leave the country.

While the commendations are still on, some are worried over the fate of many Nigerians, who are still stranded in South Africa, awaiting registering for repatriation or their evacuation dates.

Although the federal government has been magnanimous with the evacuation mainly through Air Peace, and about 66 evacuated through ValueJet, observers are worried that there are over one million Nigerians who are willing to return home, but are constrained by lack of safety and free movement within the country for foreigners, the slow process of registration and evacuation.

"We appreciate our government's efforts at evacuating our citizens in South Africa. But the government and corporate bodies need to do more because there are many still stranded, especially in provinces far away from Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal like Northern Cape and Western Cape," Kevin Oyemese, a Pretoria-based medical doctor said.

Oyemese, who enjoys the safety of working with a multinational health outfit, expressed very deep concern over the safety of stranded Nigerian citizens, considering that security personnel have been engaging in thorough scrutiny of documents and identification of foreigners since the June 30th deadline, while locals taunt them in their neighborhoods, asking why are Nigerians still here when other have left.

"The evacuations are from OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg and the Nigeria High Commission, which are both in the Gauteng Province. Those stranded in far provinces like Western Cape are constrained by the high transport fares, fear of intimidation on their way across many security checks, the immigration is harsher now and police emboldened to intimidate our people.

"Our people are taunted in their neighborhood, on the streets and everywhere. Our government needs to do more, they need to come into South Africa to offer safety and speedy the movement and the repatriation process for the stranded. They are many, and hiding now," he said.

The doctor lamented that with the situation on ground, those with emergency health issues will not be attended to in South Africa now and those with minor security issues may go to jail, amid other forms of intimidation.

Buttressing Oyemese's point, Onyeka Mbaonu, a documented resident said that the hatred is obvious as the citizens no longer tolerate other Africans whether documented or undocumented.

"Since after the June 30th deadline there has not been free movement for foreigners in South Africa. Even those with documents are very careful because of the fear of being lynched by mobs and even friends in the name of anti-migrant action," Mbaonu, a business executive and victim of backstabbing in South Africa, decried.

Sam Onikoyi, a Nigerian academic in Brussels, supports the Nigerian senate's calls for action, but urged that it should not end there as the fate of many stranded Nigerians hang on the government's decision, which should not be delayed.

"We in the diaspora are happy with the evacuations. But it should continue until every citizen, both documented and undocumented, who are willing to return home, are safely back," he said.

He also called on corporate giants, especially financial institutions, through which remittances were made by Nigerians, while in South Africa, to help fund the evacuations.

"Our banks, our billionaires, philanthropists, religious bodies and all well-meaning Nigerians should join the government in bailing out our stranded citizens in South Africa.

"But they should also help them to resettle back home and address the root causes of the exodus from the country, especially in recent time," Onikoyi said.

However, many are calling on the government to emulate Ghana on 'tit for tat' against South Africa.

It would be recalled that the Ghanaian government halted the planned visit by Cyril Ramaphosa, South African president, amid row over anti-migrant protests.

President Ramaphosa, who had long planned a visit to Ghana in the first week of August, and had been hoped that the visit would help de-escalate tensions between the two nations, will not visit again considering possible protest in Ghana for his visit after the repatriation of more than 900 Ghanaians citizens, from South Africa, and the last batch of over 900 others expected to be brought home in the coming weeks.

For Alhassan Omije, an Abuja-based lawyer and human rights activist, who schooled in South Africa, it is time for the federal government to go tougher with the South African government as diplomacy and bilateral talks, according to him, have not worked.

"We keep saying peace and be your brother's keeper, yet our people are being maltreated in other lands. I think the government should change the approach by being a bit tough with the maltreatment of our citizens in South Africa. If we keep looking away, other countries will also do same because have seen that our government cares less," Omije said.

Toeing the same line, Chijoke Umelahi, a lawyer and a former lawmaker thinks that Nigeria should emulate Ghana on 'tit for tat' against South Africa and other countries that maltreat her citizens across the world.

Umelahi suggested that the government can severe diplomatic relations with South Africa for now, pending when they both agree on how best to work together.

"I think severing diplomatic relations will save the situation because at every xenophobic attack, Nigerian citizens are the major targets, their businesses are shutdown, shops looted, many arrested, some killed and nothing happens afterwards.

"It will also reduce the number of Nigerians going to South Africa, make those still in the country to plan their exit and make us less targets," he said.

Tambiso Dule, a South Africa resident in Nigeria, thinks otherwise. He called for calm, blaming the escalating situation on the actions and inactions of the ANC-led government in South Africa, which he said has long left the legacies of Nelson Mandela and other founding fathers of the party and democracy in the country.

"Mandela never asked us to kill our African brothers because he told us how they assisted us during apartheid era. How can we now turn against our own blood in the name of taking over jobs and crime," he decried.

He called on other African nations to follow the example of Ghana and take the case to the African Union and insist on lasting resolutions or they boycott the union.

Meanwhile, there has been allegation of bribery and 'long-leg' surround evacuation efforts, as many who made efforts to be evacuated are still stranded.

But an official of the Nigerian Embassy in South Africa, who pleaded for anonymity, refuted such claims, explaining that the evacuation started with expressing interest to be repatriated, registering, being captured and given possible date of repatriation.

"Those making such allegations are those who did not take the registration exercise seriously. How do we repatriate you without registering and profiling you. Some thought the government was not serious or that they were going to pay for their flights back home. Those who took the risk to register early have been safely home," the official said.

But observers are calling on the embassy to use its diplomatic immunity and available logistics to seek out many stranded, who cannot make their way to the embassy due to safety, finance and health issues.

"We have heard of many who complained of personal challenges like ill-health and paucity of fund preventing them from being evacuated. Some, their friends are speaking on their behalf. Our embassy should extend extra gesture to them, to ensure their safe return because these are the most vulnerable of Nigerians in South Africa, who are likely going to be victims if not evacuated soon," Omije urged.

Sunday Magazine

OLATUNJI OMIRIN, Maiduguri

Sahel crisis: What Nigeria must do to avert impending danger - Experts warn

The current security crisis in Nigeria's neighbouring African countries, especially in the Sahel, could further worsen insecurity due to growing efforts by extremist groups and terrorists in the Sahel to gain access to Lake Chad and the Northwest of the country.

Observers are worried that the Niger Republic, Burkina Faso and Mali are deeply troubled by the al-Qaeda-affiliated JNIM and the Tuareg separatist rebels JNIM /FLA coalition. They warned that JNIM/FLA access to the Lake Chad Basin would significantly serve as safe havens and boost their capacity for smuggling of arms and foreign fighters unhindered due to porous borders.

Consequently, the Sahel countries of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are widely regarded as the epicentre of terrorist activity, with insurgent networks linked to ISIS and Al-Qaeda particularly entrenched in Burkina Faso and Mali. The Nigerian government has been battling Boko-Haram terrorists for 16 years, and its arch-rival ISWAP fighters; Bandits, Lakurawa, Ansaru and recently Yaro Mallam terrorist groups.

According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, the Sahel accounted for 19 percent of all terrorist attacks worldwide and 51 percent of global terrorism-related deaths in 2024, up from 48 percent in 2023.

General Abdourahamane Tchiani of Niger

Malian president Assimi-Goita

Captain Ibrahim Traore, president of Burkina Faso

Terror groups in Lake Chad

Nigeria must strengthen regional security framework now or blame itself - Sadiq

Security expert raised concern that while these transnational threats are becoming increasingly interconnected, the regional security architecture framework established by neighbouring countries to address some of these problems has begun to shrink, with significant implications for Nigeria.

Sadiq Muhammad Mustapha, Senior Programme Officer, Dispute Resolution and Development Initiative (DRDI), noted that whatever happened in the Sahel region would significantly affect Nigeria, especially states that share borders with the Niger Republic, as these states have cultural, historical, traditional, social, and economic ties with the Niger Republic.

"We share long borders with Niger, Benin, Cameroon and Chad alongside historic economic and social connections with them. So, what happens in the wider Sahel will definitely affect Nigeria's security environment, because we have seen it happening across some of these northern states that share borders with Niger, Chad, and other places.

"If we look at the crisis that is unfolding in the Sahel region, it is something that we should stop seeing as a collection of isolated national security problems, and what I mean by that is we should stop seeing it as an issue affecting individual countries like Mali alone or Burkina Faso, Niger, or Nigeria independently.

"For instance, where we are talking about the issue of violent extremism, transnational organised crime, arms trafficking, illicit financial flows, political instability, and even climate-induced pressures reinforce one another. So, all of these things are happening not in a vacuum, but complementing one another. So, the threat, as seen in the Sahel, operates across borders. Therefore, it's not confined to one country or nation."

He maintained that "it operates across borders, and therefore, our understanding of it also and our response will also be regional rather than purely national. And in that case, what I mean is that, instead of focusing solely on individual national security measures, we should also do so alongside a regional security framework that governs how security cooperation, intelligence sharing, and other activities are carried out within the region."

President Tinubu

He explained that until recently, ISWAP operated across these countries; for example, it is operating in Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon, exploiting the shared borders, navigating difficult terrain, and establishing movement corridors where its fighters can easily move, converge, and proceed.

"So, this is one of the reasons that countries in West Africa and the Sahel in general recognise that no single country can effectively control these threats. So, they must strengthen the regional security framework architecture. We hope AES won't operate independently without MJTF or ECOWAS."

He opined that "Nigeria should also continue to strengthen its border security by improving surveillance technology and enhancing operational coordination among the armed forces. By that I mean the army, navy, the air force, the other paramilitary structures, including the Nigerian Immigration, Customs, and any other intelligence agencies, because border dominance in these days and times requires capability rather than isolated deployment."

Political alignment shouldn't affect regional security cooperation

Sadiq pointed out, "So, whether this cooperation is through ECOWAS or the AES or even the multinational joint task force or even bilateral agreements, the overriding objective should be to ensure that regional security cooperation remains complementary rather than fragmented, because along the way, we have seen issues where political realignments that happens to this group has affected neighboring diplomacy, and in that regard, it's one of the motivating factors that makes countries withdraw from some of these security cooperations.

"So, in the long run, what we are trying to achieve is that, whatever the political realignment. It is imperative that security cooperation, especially at the regional level, is not affected by the issue of political diplomacy, but rather it's maintained as something that should be continuous.

"So, another aspect that we need to also pay attention is Nigeria should continue playing a leadership role, particularly in sustaining practical regional security cooperation, so this is because as the region's largest economy and one of its principal military powers, so Nigeria has both a strategic interest and also the institutional capacity to preserve intelligence sharing and even issue of defense diplomacy and operational coordination with neighboring countries," Sadiq maintained.

Exit of Niger could weaken regional counter-terrorism efforts - Analyst

The instability in the Sahel region has spilt over into Nigeria through its 4,000-kilometre border over the years; sadly, Nigeria's borders remain heavily porous and dotted with hundreds of unmanned, illegal entry routes into Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad.

Abubakar Mohammed Kareto, a public affairs analyst, said the exit of the Niger Republic from the multinational joint force set back earlier this year, when Niger announced its exit from the operation, opting instead to partner Burkina Faso and Mali to counter extremist violence under the alliance of Sahel states, which could weaken counter-insurgency, especially along Niger's borders, where the terrorist groups operate.

"Niger should come back. We should do it together. We are talking of lives and properties of our citizens. Boko Haram does not have limitations. They attack everywhere. There is no saying that this Boko Haram belongs to Nigeria or he is of Chad or he only attacks in Cameroon. No, the same Boko Haram that is attacking Nigeria is the one coming to attack Nigeria; it is the one going to attack Cameroon—likewise, Chad. So, the best thing is for us to come together to make sure we combat these guys using the same umbrella.

"It is obvious that the crisis in the Central Sahel has been rising and becoming more scary by the day, posing a huge amount of internal security threats to already chaotic Nigeria; the rise of groups like Lakurawa, Boko Haram and ISWAP has turned Nigeria's neighbouring region into a global epicentre of violent extremism, and Nigeria cannot be exempted from the heat.

"I think allowing foreign breeder terrorist networks, group movements of sophisticated weapons, and fighters into the Northwest, North East and North-central regions has transformed localised banditry into a highly lethal, multi-front guerrilla war that has been lingering for decades without adequate government intervention," he warned.

UNHCR warns Lake Chad Basin at tipping point as violence, displacement surge

Meanwhile, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is alarmed that escalating violence across the Lake Chad Basin is driving a sharp increase in forced displacement and insecurity, threatening to reverse recent fragile stabilisation across the region.

Across the Lake Chad Basin, incorporating swathes of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, more than 3.5 million people are forcibly displaced, while 8.2 million require humanitarian assistance. The security situation has recently deteriorated sharply, with recorded incidents rising by 80 percent between January 2024 and April 2026.

"Between September 2025 and May 2026 alone, nearly 1,800 security incidents and more than 5,700 fatalities were recorded across the Basin. These incidents include attacks on civilians, killings, kidnappings, explosions, clashes between armed actors and raids on villages.

"Borno State in Northeast Nigeria remains the epicentre of the crisis. Repeated attacks by non-state armed groups, military operations and insecurity along roads and displacement routes are uprooting families and severely limiting humanitarian access.

"The ripple effects extend beyond the northeast, as displacement, insecurity and competition over scarce resources increasingly spill into other regions, including the northwest and the so-called middle belt, deepening fragilities.

"Since January 2026, more than 77,500 people have been displaced across the four countries, including over 16,000 refugees who fled attacks in northeast Nigeria and recently crossed into Niger's Diffa region, where UNHCR and partners are helping identify urgent needs, register new arrivals, monitor protection risks and provide life-saving assistance," it stated.

According to the UN Refugee Agency, violence is increasingly having cross-border consequences, with attacks in one country rapidly triggering displacement in another.

"In Cameroon's Far North, persistent attacks, abductions and village-level violence continue to drive chronic insecurity and new displacement. In Chad's Lac Province, recurrent attacks and military operations have displaced some 60,000 people; a state of emergency was declared in May following an attack on military installations.

UN Refugee Agency lamented that recent protection monitoring across affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin shows that one in five households report no longer feeling safe in their own communities, reflecting the extent to which insecurity prevails.

"Women and girls face rising risks of violence, while specialised services remain critically under-resourced. The number of people who know survivors of violence has reportedly increased to 27 per cent so far in 2026, from 19 per cent in 2025, indicating a worsening protection environment amid significant underreporting, as survivors rely on strained family and community support networks.

"Without timely and flexible support, protection gaps will widen, displacement will continue to spread across borders, and the risk of a more entrenched regional crisis will increase. The trajectory remains deeply concerning, but it is still reversible with sustained support now," the statement concluded.

Nigeria faces rising insecurity, abduction - PAVE

The activities of these terror groups have severely affected Nigeria, resulting in a dangerous convergence of ideological terrorism and transnational crime; rising cases of attacks on lives and properties leading to the destruction of economic activities, kidnapping; killings of innocent people; rural displacement leading to the disruption of Nigeria's agricultural heartland, driving up food inflation, straining food security hopes.

Echoing the same view, the Partnership Against Violent Extremism (PAVE) Network has said its advocacy campaign aims to press for greater protection of lives and more accountable security responses amid rising concerns over insecurity, recurrent abductions and attacks on communities across Nigeria.

Jaye Gaskia, Chairman of the Steering Committee, PAVE Network, said the aim is to shift public engagement from mere outrage to focusing on practical actions that can bolster community resilience and enhance security governance.

"Nigeria is facing a severe insecurity crisis characterised by abductions, killings, attacks on schools and communities, violent extremism, banditry, organised crime, threats to livelihoods, and the erosion of community resilience.

"Nigeria's insecurity challenge continues to impact communities through abductions, violent extremism, organised crime, attacks on educational institutions, and increasing threats to livelihoods, warning that long-term solutions must involve both government measures and active citizen participation.

The network also contended that strengthening local government systems is vital to enhancing community security, noting that local institutions often serve as the first line of defence for early warning, peacebuilding, and service delivery.

Jaye called on citizens, labour organisations, professional associations, civil society groups, faith leaders, and community actors to join the campaign and reinforce its message that safeguarding lives must remain a national priority.

FG, security apparatus need to go back to the drawing board - CSO

Ahmed Shehu, chairman of the Network of Civil Society Organisations in the Lake Chad Basin, lamented the recent surge in attacks and urged the military and the federal government to go back to the drawing board and change the approach, as insecurity is becoming increasingly worrisome.

He said, "We need to do something about this because now a lot of people are beginning to lose their means of livelihood. This is very unfortunate and very worrisome, especially given that many incidents are occurring at the same time. The government's role is to protect its citizens. I think the government need to up its game to protect the citizens.

"This calls for immediate reflection by all stakeholders. As you can see, the attacks are occurring simultaneously and targeting the same formation. And now you can see the northern governors gathered to confirm that they have mobilised funds to support this security situation. For me, I'm looking at it not only in terms of funding but also inclusivity and engagement.

He added, "I still call for improvement in civil security engagement because the community needs to have been playing a role toward ensuring that these things are abated. I will still urge other stakeholders, including community leaders, religious leaders, and governments at all levels, to immediately implement the necessary measures to arrest the insecurity ravaging our region.

Lake Chad has about 800 islands

Security observers said terrorists have been active in Nigeria since 2009 and have since expanded into the three other countries bordering Lake Chad: Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. "The armed forces have been fighting the war but are far from having won a decade later. Battling Boko Haram and ISWAP has not been easy, because the group isolates itself in Lake Chad Islands," observers said.

> **The ripple effects extend beyond the northeast, as displacement, insecurity and competition over scarce resources increasingly spill into other regions, including the northwest and the so-called middle belt, deepening fragilities**

Audit committees must intensify oversight to curb financial misstatements, experts

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

Audit committees must demonstrate informed oversight and ask tougher questions to reduce the risk of financial misstatements, Doyin Owolabi, former president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), has said.

Owolabi spoke at the Audit Committee Conference held recently in Lagos, where experts highlighted the roles of audit committees, internal auditors and regulators in strengthening corporate governance and preventing fraud.

Presenting a paper titled 'Gate-Keeping: Detecting Error and Fraud in Financial Reporting,' Owolabi said effective gatekeeping requires vigilance, knowledge and constant attention to emerging risks.

"Gate-keeping requires a posture that is informed, vigilant and attending," he said.

According to him, gatekeepers play a critical role in ensuring that financial statements accurately reflect the economic realities of organisations.

"Gatekeepers ensure that financial statements reflect economic reality," Owolabi said, adding that their responsibilities require them to be "informed, vigilant and attending to inconsistencies, signals and emerging risks."

He specifically urged audit committees to move beyond routine reviews and actively scrutinise management reports and assumptions

"Audit Committees, in particular, must demonstrate informed oversight and vigilant questioning to reduce the likelihood of misstatement," he said, noting that internal auditors must also "attend to the details of control operation and reporting processes."

Corroborating Owolabi's position, Williams Erimona, partner, Assurance Services at EY Nigeria, said audit committees must evolve from passive reviewers into active guardians of corporate integrity.

According to Erimona, audit committees should challenge management assumptions and base their oversight on evidence rather than accepting information at face value.

"The audit committee as guardian of truth must shift from passive reviewer to active navigator," he said.

He added that effective oversight requires "interrogating management's assumptions, challenging narratives, and grounding oversight in evidence."

Erimona said audit committees must develop the capacity to anticipate risks and respond effectively to changing business realities.

"As navigator, the audit committee must see clearly, anticipate wisely and adapt resiliently," he said.

The conference also examined the role of internal audit in preventing corporate failures.

Interview

88% of Nigerians now use AI to shop, but trust remains the real currency – Auma

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping how Nigerians shop, with nearly nine in 10 consumers now using AI-assisted tools to make purchasing decisions. Yet, as digital commerce becomes more sophisticated, trust–not technology alone–remains the foundation of secure payments. In this interview with WASIU ALLI, Irene Auma, senior director, Risk, Visa Sub-Saharan Africa, spoke on the the findings of Visa's Stay Secure Survey, examining how AI is changing consumer behaviour, the growing fraud risks linked to social commerce, and why confidence in digital payments remains resilient despite rising scam attempts. She also explains how AI is being deployed to combat fraud, what will be needed to secure emerging payment methods such as crypto and AI payment agents, the shared responsibility of banks, government and payment providers in strengthening the payments ecosystem, and the objectives of Visa's Stay Secure campaign for Nigerian consumers. Excerpt:

Nearly 88 percent of Nigerians are using AI to shop. What does that tell you?

It tells you that Nigerian consumers are not waiting to be convinced. They have decided. AI is already part of how people discover products, compare prices, and make decisions every day. When you look at the data, 88 percent of Nigerian respondents said they use AI specifically to find the best prices or deals, and over 72 percent use it to compare options across brands and retailers. That is not experimentation. That is habitual behaviour. What it means for us is that the security infrastructure supporting those transactions has to keep pace with that adoption. The technology driving the shopping experience and the technology protecting it need to evolve together. Convenience cannot come at the cost of safety.

Social commerce is booming here. Over 82 percent of Nigerians have bought directly through social media. Is that a security concern?

It is a reality we take seriously. Social platforms are built on trust and familiarity, and that is precisely what makes them attractive to fraudsters. Among Nigerians who experienced a scam in the past year, social media was the most common channel where it happened, cited by 57 percent of those victims. That is significant. What is also notable is that 78 percent of Nigerian respondents say they discover new brands through social media, which means the shopping journey increasingly begins there. That does not mean consumers should avoid social commerce. It means they need to be more aware of what they click on and who they buy from, and it means the payment systems operating in those environments need to be as robust as anywhere else. Visa's detection tools are designed to work across every channel, not just at traditional checkout.

Over half of Nigerian respondents reported being victims of a financial scam in the last 12 months. How do you make sense of that alongside the high trust in digital payments?

People are distinguishing between a bad experience and a broken system. They know that fraud happens, but they also know that the vast majority of transactions go through without incident, and that there are mechanisms for recourse when things go wrong. Over 96 percent of Nigerians surveyed said they trust digital payments to some degree, and nearly 74 percent said they mostly or completely trust them. That trust is not naive. It is based on lived experience of a system that, most of the time, works. Our job is to make sure it keeps working and that when fraud does occur, it is caught quickly and the consumer is protected. That is why Visa invests heavily in real-time fraud detection and why we work closely with banks and issuers in Nigeria to close gaps as soon as they appear.

Nigerians want alerts when something looks suspicious. 64 percent said that would make them feel more secure. Is Visa delivering on that?

That finding reflects what we are already building toward. Consumers expect the institutions they trust, their banks, their payment providers, and their governments, to take the lead on protecting them. Sixty-four percent want real-time alerts when something looks suspicious, and 39 percent say seeing a familiar, trusted logo at checkout makes them feel more secure. Those are clear signals. Visa's tools already support these capabilities, and our partnerships with banks and issuers in Nigeria are designed to bring them to consumers consistently. We also see strong appetite for biometric payments specifically. 54 percent of Nigerians said that paying with a fingerprint or face recognition instead of a password would increase their confidence. That technology exists and we are actively building on it across the market.

76 percent of Nigerians say AI has made scams easier to recognise. Does that surprise you?

It speaks to the digital literacy that is developing in this market, and that is genuinely encouraging. Nigerians are getting better at spotting red flags: an unusual payment request, a link that does not look right, a message that creates unnecessary urgency. But I would not read that figure as a reason to relax, because the other side of it is that cybercriminals are also leveraging AI. We are seeing more convincing phishing messages, synthetic identities, and even voice cloning used to impersonate bank staff. The threat is evolving in real time. What does give us real confidence is that 89 percent of Nigerian respondents agreed that AI will play a critical role in protecting consumers from fraud in the future. We share that view entirely. Visa's fraud detection systems already use machine learning to analyse patterns across billions of transactions globally, and we continue to deepen those capabilities in markets like Nigeria.

There is clearly openness to emerging payment methods here. 66 percent would consider crypto, and nearly 50 percent are open to AI payment agents. How does Visa think about securing those?

The payment method changes. The security principles do not. Whether someone is tapping a card, paying through a digital wallet, or one day authorising an AI agent to complete a purchase on their behalf, they need the same guarantees: strong authentication, real-time monitoring, and a clear path to recourse if something goes wrong. What is interesting about Nigeria specifically is that only about 6 percent of respondents said they have no intention of using any new or emerging payment method. That is one of the lowest opt-out rates across all 17 markets in the survey. Nigerians are enthusiastic early adopters. Agentic commerce is coming faster than many expect, and Visa is already working on the security architecture for that era. We are not watching from the sidelines. We are in the room helping to define what safe looks like.

Who should be responsible for protecting consumers from fraud online, as the survey shows Nigerians are divided?

Rightly so, because responsibility here is genuinely shared. 49 percent of Nigerian respondents pointed to banks or financial institutions as primarily responsible, 35 percent said government or regulators, and 30 percent said payment providers like Visa. All three are correct, and none can do it alone. Banks hold the customer relationship and can act immediately when something looks wrong on an account. Regulators create the framework of standards and accountability that the whole ecosystem operates within. Visa provides the global intelligence layer: we are monitoring fraud patterns across markets around the world and feeding those insights back into local protections in real time. That is the kind of coordinated secure-by-design approach that keeps consumers protected.

What is the Stay Secure campaign looking to achieve in Nigeria?

Informed consumers are our strongest line of defence, and that is not just a talking point. Technology can catch a great deal, but it cannot catch everything. The survey data bears this out: Nigerians who have experienced fraud encountered it most often through social media, websites, and online marketplaces, which are all environments where consumer judgement plays a critical role. When a Nigerian consumer knows to pause before clicking a suspicious link, to question an unexpected payment request, or to verify that a site is legitimate before entering their card details, that vigilance makes a measurable difference. Stay Secure is about building that habit at scale and giving people the confidence to transact freely because they know what to watch for. Transact freely but transact smart.

What is your message to Nigerians navigating this landscape right now?

You are not alone in this. Visa, your bank, and the broader payments ecosystem are working constantly on your behalf, and the data shows that the system is holding up: 96 percent of Nigerians trust digital payments, and that trust is backed by real infrastructure. But your own vigilance matters too. Enable your transaction alerts. Use platforms and payment methods with clear security credentials. If a deal seems too good or a request feels off, stop and verify before you proceed. Nigeria's digital economy is one of the most dynamic in Africa, and that is something to be proud of. What we are building toward is an environment where every Nigerian can participate in it fully, freely, and safely.

Nigerian government must rethink how it treats football – Edun

For decades, Nigeria has produced world-class athletes despite weak grassroots structures, poor infrastructure and inconsistent investment. While football continues to dominate public attention and government spending, other sports with significant medal and commercial potential remain largely underfunded. For Yemi Edun, group managing director of Daniel Ford International and a long-time sports enthusiast, that imbalance represents one of the country's biggest missed opportunities. Having attended almost every FIFA World Cup since 2006, including the 2026 tournament in Mexico, Edun has seen firsthand how nations transform sports into thriving industries that create jobs, attract investment and promote tourism. His sporting journey began in Surulere, Lagos, where growing up near the National Stadium exposed him to elite athletes from an early age. Today, his passion extends beyond football into grassroots development through investments in chess and table tennis, where his initiatives have already produced national and regional champions. In this interview with KENNETH ATHEKAME, Edun speaks on rebuilding Nigeria's grassroots sports ecosystem, why the country must diversify investment beyond football, and how sport can become a major contributor to economic growth. Excerpt:

Your sporting journey began around the National Stadium in Surulere. Looking back, how did those early experiences shape your views on grassroots sports development?

Growing up around the National Stadium made sport a natural part of everyday life. We watched the national teams train, attended competitions and saw elite athletes up close. Those experiences convinced me that when young people have access to facilities, coaches and competitions, they begin to believe they can succeed through sport. That belief is the foundation of every successful sporting nation.

Nigeria has invested heavily in football for decades. Is it time to rethink that strategy?

Football deserves continued investment because of its popularity, but Nigeria cannot afford to build its entire sports ecosystem around one game. We have exceptional talent in athletics, basketball, table tennis, chess and several other sports. Diversifying investment expands opportunities for young people and increases Nigeria's chances of producing world champions across multiple disciplines.

Many public sports facilities have deteriorated over the years. What lessons can Nigeria learn from the National Stadium of the past?

The National Stadium was much more than a venue for major events. It was a centre for training, talent discovery and community engagement. Today, we should focus not only on rehabilitating facilities but also on ensuring they are actively used through coaching programmes, competitions and year-round community access.

Having attended almost every FIFA World Cup since 2006, what separates successful sporting nations from Nigeria?

The biggest difference is consistency. Countries that succeed do not begin preparing a few months before international competitions. They invest continuously in schools, academies, coaching, sports science, athlete welfare and talent identification. Nigeria has the talent; what we need is a system that consistently develops it.

Your support for chess and table tennis has produced impressive results. What does that tell you about Nigeria's untapped sporting potential?

It confirms that talent already exists. What is missing is opportunity. When young athletes receive quality coaching, structured competitions and the right support, they progress quickly. Our table tennis programme produced national and West African champions much earlier than we anticipated, demonstrating what is possible with sustained investment.

Can sports become a meaningful contributor to Nigeria's economy?

Absolutely. The sports economy extends far beyond athletes. It includes broadcasting, merchandising, hospitality, tourism, infrastructure, sports medicine, technology, media and event management. Countries that have developed these ecosystems generate billions of dollars annually. Nigeria has the talent and the audience; what remains is building the institutions and businesses that convert passion into economic value.

What should the government do to encourage greater private-sector investment?

The government should introduce stronger tax incentives and transparent public-private partnership frameworks for companies investing in grassroots sports. Businesses need confidence that facilities will be properly managed and programmes sustained beyond political cycles. When governance improves, private investment will naturally increase.

What role should local governments and schools play?

Grassroots development begins in communities and schools. Local governments should organise regular competitions, maintain facilities and work closely with schools and coaches to identify talent early. Reviving inter-school sports competitions is essential if Nigeria wants to establish a sustainable pipeline of future champions.

If you had the opportunity to redesign Nigeria's sports development strategy, what would be your first priority?

I would start with grassroots development. Every international champion begins somewhere, usually in a school, local club or community competition. If we invest consistently in those foundations, the results will eventually be seen at continental and global competitions. Sustainable sporting success is built from the ground up, not from the top down.

Fundvine Berkshire launches N1bn Halal balanced fund to deepen ethical investment in Nigeria

BLESSING ADIMABUA

Fundvine Berkshire Asset Management Ltd has unveiled its N1 billion Fundvine Halal Balanced Fund, a Sharia-compliant investment vehicle designed to expand ethical investment opportunities and promote inclusive wealth creation in Nigeria.

The fund was officially launched in Abuja, attracting investors, financial experts, business leaders and stakeholders in the country's capital market.

Speaking with journalists shortly after the launch, the Group Chief Executive Officer of Fundvine Berkshire Asset Management Ltd, Michael Enyinna, described the unveiling as a landmark achievement for the company and a major step in advancing ethical investment products in the country

"Today is a very big milestone for us. We are launching a Sharia-compliant investment called the Fundvine Halal Balanced Fund, and you can see for yourself that the response has been overwhelming, with many people subscribing today," Enyinna said.

He explained that the mutual fund has received all necessary regulatory approvals from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and operates under established governance structures designed to safeguard investors' funds.

Enyinna disclosed that UBA serves as the custodian, while Apel Capital & Trust acts as trustees of the fund, assuring prospective investors that their investments would be protected through strict regulatory oversight.

"There should be no doubt about the safety of investors' funds because the fund is regulated by the SEC. The custodian and trustees also provide additional layers of oversight in line with regulatory requirements," he stated.

He explained that the company

L-R: Ismail Rufai, head, Advisory One17 Capital; Michael Enyinna, Group CEO Fundvine; Nafiu Kwakwaso, Nonye Cally Bechi, Group Head Fundvine, and Mohammed Umar.

intends to leverage its existing customer base while embarking on aggressive awareness campaigns to attract new investors.

Although he declined to guarantee any specific rate of return, Enyinna observed that several balanced funds in Nigeria had recorded returns of between 40 and 50 percent over the past year, expressing confidence that investors in the new fund would enjoy competitive performance.

"We are not promising any fixed return because this is only the opening day of the fund. However, based on market performance, many balanced funds have recorded impressive returns, and we are confident our investors will benefit," he said.

He also assured investors of easy access to their funds whenever withdrawals become necessary, explaining that the company has developed efficient digital channels that enable customers to request withdrawals through its online platform.

In his keynote address, the Chief Executive Officer of One17 Financial Services Ltd, Ismail Rufai, sought to dispel widespread misconceptions surrounding Islamic finance, stressing that Sharia-compliant investments are not only profitable but also open to everyone regardless of religious affiliation.

Rufai explained that Islamic finance promotes productive economic activities, infrastructure development and ethical wealth creation rather than speculative lending.

He cited Nigeria's Sukuk financing programme as a practical example of Sharia-compliant financing contributing to national development through the construction of critical road infrastructure.

According to him, mutual funds such as the Fundvine Halal Balanced Fund invest in Sukuk and other Sharia-compliant assets, enabling investors to participate indirectly in infrastructure financing while earning investment returns.

Interview

What state police system must avoid, by Chukwuma

Mike Uche Chukwuma, a retired Assistant Commissioner of Police, who heads the Rivers Neighbourhood Security Watch, opens up in an exclusive interview with IGNATIUS CHUKWU on the inside possibilities of a state police system. He is the author of 'The Noble Policeman', onetime PPRO, now pushing for state police. He wrote a book on the need for community policing and has been a resource person to the police since the days of Tarfa Balogun on community policing sysyem. Excerpts:

You are known to be, not just a supporter, but a propounder of the concept of both state policing and community policing system. How do you feel now that Nigeria seems to go that way?

I feel great, I feel glad. I'm happy that Mr. President has courageously, despite all varied opinions, approved state policing for Nigeria. It is a thing we have been clamoring for a long time ago. I have gone to the extent of writing a book on it, on community policing, while I was still in service.

You may help us here in terms of concept. Community policing, state policing, are they exactly the same?

Yes, they are one and the same because, the concept is about the participation of the people. You see, let me be very frank to you. We inherited a policing system that is not only monolithic, but it was not built with context of Nigerians around it. It was established by the British colonial masters to serve the interest of the masters, their economy and trading. It was an oppressive institution created to subjugate us to slavery today.

That is why you now see what they call brutality, oppression, public distrust, etc. So, the community policing system is a state where the community will physically participate in the police discussions, security discussions, issues concerning their community, and the police itself will also see themselves as part and parcel of the community. Where the indigenes of the of the area will play major role in deciding the security arrangement of their community vis-à-vis with the police.

I understand you to be talking about a bottom-up policing system, while what we have is the top-bottom system?

Yes, that's what we have.

Are you sure the new system they're bringing will also not be another structure, another top-bottom structure?

Well, let me tell you one thing, eh. Practically speaking, unless they politicize it, at this beginning, to have it right, if they venture to look at academic qualification without practical policing experience particularly, and without somebody who has that deep interest in community policing system in all the states of the federation, you'll find it difficult. If it's also politicized whereby it is based on political patronage, it will be difficult again.

Political control was what people complained in years past when state police was suggested. If they allow bad appointments, then the fears of the people would be right.

What we expect is that the nomenclature would be decided as to title of the head in each state; if it's a Commissioner of Police, or Director-General whichever that it is. The majority of the people that will be recruited to work will be indigenes of the community—of the state, and from the communities and local government having a proportion.

If the non-indigenes are even being recruited, they should be non-indigenes that are resident in that particular state for a long time and who have stakes. For instance, a man who is here for the past 40 years, he has grown-up children who were brought up here—those people are qualified to be treated as indigenes of that state because they have stakes in that state.

Are there structures already on ground that may make this new idea to work in Rivers State?

Well, like I told you, in 2018,

> **The governor had no role initially. But today, they have said that the state police boss would be appointed by the state governor**

Rivers State established Law No. 8 of 2018, which established the Neighborhood Watch Security Agency. That agency is still on ground. It has not been disbanded. Unfortunately, due to political wrangling, the activities of that body were disrupted. But since then, the government on ground has not activated it by way of funding. But majority of the men and women in that agency are still standing by, waiting to be called upon. That is the truth. So, that is a structure and platform under which the state can start off. It's just like the Lagos State Neighborhood Watch that has been in existence, well-funded and well-catered for. Just like the Hisbah in the North. There are some other vigilante groups in even in Southeast. I know of Anambra State, Bayelsa State too, etc. So, Rivers State has a platform on which it can start her own.

With your experience and inside knowledge, do you think Rivers State missed a great opportunity to have gone ahead in private policing, by what happened to Neighborhood Watch Agency?

Yes, I must very categorical with you. The state government miscalculated by not boldly funding the State Neighborhood Watch Agency.

Let me make it clear, at the risk of blowing our own trumpet, but I need to tell you this. As at the time the Neighborhood Watch was operationally functional, we helped so much in intelligence gathering. We contributed to most of the successes that the police recorded. One particular commissioner of police, now retired as an Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG), was the main beneficiary. This is because we shared intelligence with him on daily basis, very important intelligence. Lots of incidents that would have taken place were nipped in the bud. We were more on covert roles, not overt. We didn't want to come and tell ourselves that we were the ones giving out information. Most of our men went on surveillance duties, and we've shared information with not just the police, in actual fact, even other security agencies gained very much from us. We were more interested in proactive policing than reactive. And they helped the state.

What happened after was a surprise. After winning the case in court on legitimacy, disruption set in, funding stopped. We expected the court victory to open doors for funding and full operations. Rivers State would have been on a very high level by now.

Despite the salary stoppages, we were also working until when things were bad, there was a communication breakdown. Many phased out.

Do you think the state police that is coming to Rivers State will fall back on vigilante structures within the states, or are they just going to inherit the state command of the Neighbourhood Watch or to inherit the various commands of the vigilantes?

Let me make the state police system clear to you. When it was approved, the Inspector-General of Police set up a committee led by the Professor, Olayemi Akinwumi, to work out the structure. And actually, I waited to see the result of that committee report. Some people contributed and said that I would have been a member of that committee. I told them it's not necessary. The IG, who incidentally is my friend, was my ASP mate (he's a cadet, I'm not a cadet), and a very good friend, probably forgot my name because of the enormous duties he's carrying, and formed this committee. But I said let me wait for the committee report. And when the report came out eventually, I went through the excerpts, and I was not comfortable with some of what they brought out and sent to the National Assembly. It said that 60% of policemen would be drafted into the state police, allocation, and all the rest. I said it was not necessary because, one, the police is monolithic. It's a federally controlled police system and they have a system of theirs as inherited from the British colonial policing system.

If care is not taken, it may be like new wine in old wine bottle. There won't be any change or innovation. Secondly, transferring even 1% of the federally controlled police, people who are already gainfully employed, will now block chances for some of the teeming youths of the various states who are not employed, from getting employment.

Let me tell you one thing, when youths are unemployed, the tendency of getting into crime will be there. These people are already federally-controlled, they're already gainfully employed. Get some of these youths in the state who have no gainful employment but are qualified, into the state policing architecture. Let them get a good job and then be meaningfully and gainfully employed. Let them have a stake. Let them see that their contributions are being appreciated and being compensated by way of salary and other ways.

You see, being stakeholders, they know their communities and their communities know them. The tendency of identifying criminals earlier will be there. The tendency of criminals avoiding to commit crime because they know that if they do, these boys know them and they know the boys. They will say, 'na we, we'.

This way crime will be reduced. You see, I'm a specialist in crime prevention. While in the police, I specialized or took special interest more in preventive security than reactive security.

In the police, I was too realistic. They called me stubborn person, they seemed to resent me, and they were posting me to dangerous places; burning place. But when I got there, I knew how

> **The majority of the people that will be recruited to work will be indigenes of the community—of the state, and from the communities and local government having a proportion**

I played my way and got into the heart of the people, the communities, and doused whatever tension there was.

I did not get posting to any great division because of how they perceived me. It's only few Police Commissioners that recognized some of the little qualities God put in me. Somebody like CP Sir Kieran Dudari, Suleiman Abba, Amusa Bello, CP Tunji Alapini. These ones recognised me and then gave me sensitive positions and gave me the opportunity to showcase what God put in me. To me, state police system is long overdue.

What is your advice since they did not even take the route you suggested? So, what's the advice now?

I have not said that; because they have not come out with the final operational position. Initially, they said that the state commissioners will be answering to the Inspector General of Police, not to the governor. The governor had no role initially. But today, they have said that the state police boss would be appointed by the state governor. There would be State Police Council playing its role the way National Police Council plays its role, with the State House of Assembly too. These were my suggestions. In fact, I can't see anything I suggested that has not been picked up.

The only thing that I have not seen, and I'm still waiting, is when they say that there's a Commissioner of Police in the state, you now appoint and call other one a state police commissioner. There will be confusion.

I suggested that since the states have Director-General nomenclature, federal has commissioner of police, Civil Defence has Commandant system, the DSS goes by State Director, the head of the state police should be Director-General of the State Police.

This is to ensure there is a clear demarcation such that if you're going to see the Commissioner of Police in the state, you know you're going to see Federal Commissioner of Police. When you're going to see the Director General of the state police, you know it's for the state. There will be a clear distinction as to their duty too. When there is a clash, there shouldn't be a clash in the first place, the duties should be spelt out.

There should be a boundary where the state can go into and where federal police can go. If there is an inter-state clash between a state and another, the National Police can now come in, take the case, and go look into it and then give the two states Commissioners of Police, and also the state Directors—General of Police, standard report. Then they will now know who has the jurisdiction to charge to his state court, or when it should be the federal court.

That was why I advised in an instance when they wanted to model state policing and I saw it was going toward the US system. I said that for me, the American culture, American environment, American economy, American society are quite different from ours. We have a polarized system culturally speaking, religiously speaking, economically speaking, and otherwise. It is far different from a straight culture, tradition, and religion.

If they had wanted to introduce community policing in Nigeria, they should have looked for seasoned officers who know exactly what has been. Now, if you look at the North, they have Penal Code guiding their police. In the South, we have Criminal Code law. Now, even in the South here, the laws, our culture, our policing system are different from the one of the North. In the South, a police officer can in pursuit of a felon, break in and break out of living quarters. In the North, you don't do it. If a suspected felon runs into the residence, you can't follow him because you cannot see the face of the wife of an Alhaji. It's a heinous offence.

But here, the law protects the policeman. This is why I said you cannot bring an American to come and teach us community policing. I was punished for that, quite alright, for speaking out my mind. Now, coming to tradition, religion, and culture. Even in Rivers State here, there are small cultural differences.

So, talking about community policing, we need indigenous people to play indigenous roles. And, should I tell you this, if arrangements are made and the community leaders and chiefs don't get a role to play in this state policing architecture they want to build, we'll all get it wrong. Because it is not about the police carrying uniform, carrying gun, going to arrest people. It is about getting the participation of the community people. The community is part and parcel of the policing. The issue of trust is a big factor.

For now, it is very difficult to get information from community people or members of the public by the police now because of issue of trust. They don't know who they are talking to.

Another problem with Nigerian police today is the issue of transfer of officers. Today, a man can be transferred from Zamfara down to Ebonyi, from Sokoto down to Ahoada. The next moment, he's been transferred out. Towards the end of my retirement, I was thrown to Cross River State border town with Cameroon. At what point would I understand the culture and tradition of the people? Then, when I was promoted Assistant Commissioner, what did they do? They took me to Sokoto. What was I going to do there in Sokoto? So, it in this concept of community policing is good for the community to play major role.

If the community is involved, trust will be built. The people may suspect your agenda. That is why the state police is a welcome development. You know, some people say governors will hijack it. I say they are not being established for politics or for election. It's established to police the people for the people and by the people.

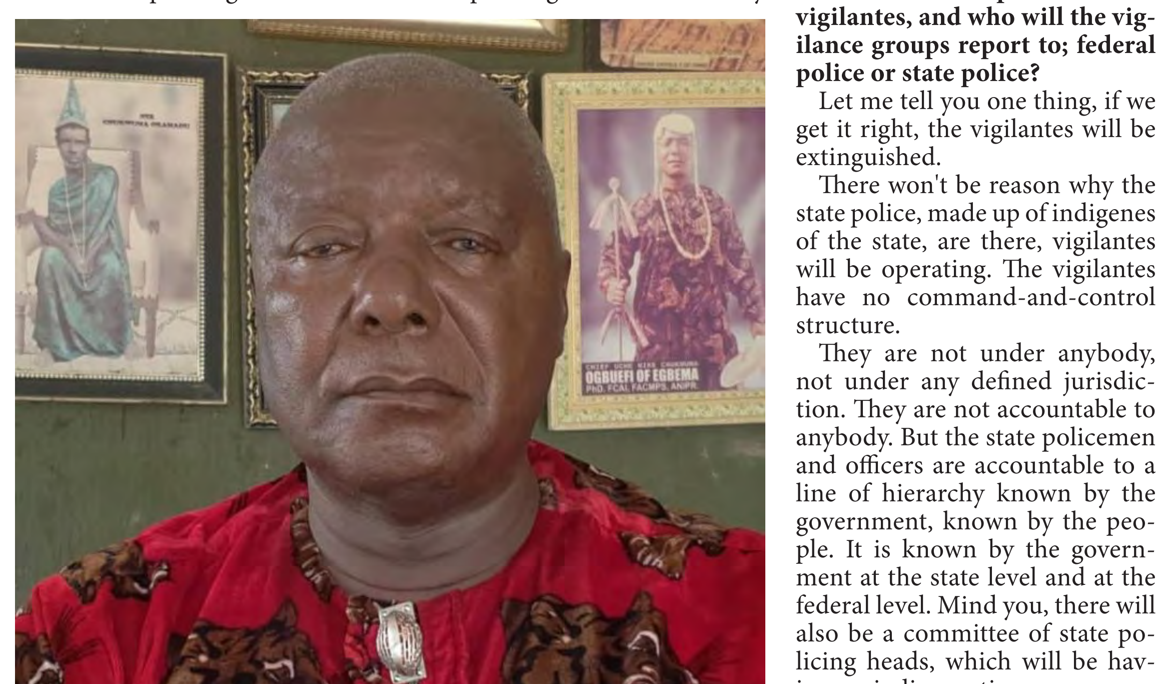
What relationship will exist between the state police and the vigilantes, and who will the vigilance groups report to; federal police or state police?

Let me tell you one thing, if we get it right, the vigilantes will be extinguished.

There won't be reason why the state police, made up of indigenes of the state, are there, vigilantes will be operating. The vigilantes have no command-and-control structure.

They are not under anybody, not under any defined jurisdiction. They are not accountable to anybody. But the state policemen and officers are accountable to a line of hierarchy known by the government, known by the people. It is known by the government at the state level and at the federal level. Mind you, there will also be a committee of state policing heads, which will be having periodic meetings.

Mike Uche Chukwuma


Mike Uche Chukwuma

City File

Oyo agency impounds 15 cows in Ijaye, Moniya-Iseyin axis, intensifies anti-open grazing enforcement

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

The enforcement team of the Oyo State Rule of Law Enforcement Authority (OYRLEA) alongside security operatives weekend continued its statewide enforcement exercise against illegal grazing and cattle rearing on farm settlements.

During an operation at the Haruna axis of the Ijaye Farm Settlement, the enforcement team caught herders off guard and successfully impounded 11 cows found grazing illegally within the settlement.

While exiting the farm settlement, the team intercepted and impounded one additional cow, bringing the total to 12 cows from the operation.

The enforcement exercise further extended to the Moniya–Iseyin Road, where three cows were found grazing openly by the roadside and posing a danger to motorists and other road users, 3 of which were also impounded.

In total, 15 cows were impounded during the operation, reaffirming OYRLEA's commitment to enforcing the Oyo State Anti-Open Grazing Law and protecting farmers' livelihoods, public safety, and the environment.

The authority reiterated its warning to herders to keep their cattle away from farm settlements, public roads, and residential communities, stressing that anyone found violating the law will face the full weight of enforcement without exception.

Police arrest three over teacher's death in Kogi

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE, Lokoja

Kogi State Police Command said it has concluded investigation into the death of a staff member of Brains Minds Nursery and Primary School, Ugbamaka, in Olamaboro Local Government Area, and arrested three suspects who will be prosecuted for alleged culpable homicide.

Mariam Usman, the victim, died on June 25, 2026, days after she was allegedly assaulted in separate attacks linked to the disciplinary action she took against a pupil.

Saliu Oyiza Afasat, Kogi Police Public Relations Officer, who disclosed this in a statement issued on Wednesday in Lokoja, said detectives from the Homicide Section of the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) carried out a thorough investigation that led to the arrest of the suspects.

Parts of the statement reads "Investigations revealed that the first attack occurred on June 17 when Abdullahi Isiaka allegedly assaulted the deceased at her residence over disciplinary measures she meted out to his 11-year-old son during school hours.

"The deceased was allegedly attacked again later the same day by Ramatu Isiaka Eleojo while she was on her way to a mosque for prayers.

"The investigation further revealed that on June 18, Ojonojima Mary, said to be the younger sister of Ramatu Isiaka Eleojo, allegedly stormed Brains Minds Nursery and Primary School in Ugbamaka and assaulted the victim at her workplace".

Police said the victim was initially treated at Grace Clinic, Ugbamaka, before she was referred to Eleojo Clinic, Okpo, where she later died from injuries sustained during the attacks.

The Command said its investigation established a prima facie case of criminal conspiracy and culpable homicide against the three suspects – Ojonojima Mary, Ramatu Isiaka Eleojo and Abdullahi Isiaka.

"The investigation has been concluded and the suspects will be arraigned before a court of competent jurisdiction to face prosecution".

Naziru Bello Kankarofi, state commissioner of Police, while commending the detectives for their professionalism, reaffirmed the Command's commitment to ensuring justice for victims of violent crimes, just as he urged residents to shun self-help and always seek lawful means of resolving disputes. He also encouraged members of the public to continue to provide timely and credible information to support crime prevention and effective policing across the state.

Niger police intensify crackdown on crime, arrest suspects

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Minna

The Niger State Police Command has arrested 27 suspected criminals in separate operations across Minna and Mokwa as part of its sustained efforts to combat crime and restore public safety in the state.

The suspects were arrested for offences ranging from criminal conspiracy, possession of dangerous weapons, thuggery, armed robbery, theft, and unlawful possession of illicit substances.

Wasiu Abiodun, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), disclosed this in a statement issued in Minna, the state capital.

According to him, police operatives attached to Tudun-Wada Division conducted coordinated sting operations on July 4 and 5, raiding identified criminal hideouts at Kafintella, Sauka-Kahuta and Building Materials Road in Minna.

He said that 10 suspects were arrested during the operation with dangerous weapons, including a long curved sickle, a digger, a shovel and sticks.

Abiodun said the suspects confessed during interrogation that they had travelled from Yobe State to Minna for illegal mining activities.

He added that the suspects have been transferred to the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID), Minna, for further investigation.

In another operation carried out between 2:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. on July 6, operatives attached to 'A' Division raided criminal hideouts in the PZ area, Angwan-Kaje, Saiko, Abdulsalam Quarters, Tudun-Natsira and Paida, leading to the arrest of 17 suspects.

Among those arrested was a notorious and wanted thug identified as Abdulkarim Mohammed, popularly known as "Na-Kareemu," who had allegedly been evading arrest over previous criminal activities.

The police recovered four cutlasses, two knives, cannabis and other illicit substances from the suspects, who are currently under investigation.

In a related development, police patrol officers attached to Tudun-Wada Division recovered a stolen Bajaj motorcycle during a routine patrol around the Highpoint area of Minna at about 3:00 a.m. on July 7.

According to the command, the suspected thief abandoned the motorcycle and fled upon sighting the patrol team.

The owner later identified and reclaimed the recovered motorcycle, while efforts are ongoing to apprehend the fleeing suspect.

Also on July 7, police operatives attached to Mokwa Division arrested five suspects for allegedly stealing 17 goats.

The suspects were intercepted while loading the animals into a Toyota Corolla along the Mokwa bypass.

Police investigations revealed that the goats had been stolen within Mokwa town and were being transported to Bida for sale.

Some of the owners later identified their animals, which were subsequently returned, while the suspects are expected to be charged to court after investigations.

The command also arrested two suspected armed robbers and phone snatchers around the M.I. Wushishi Estate/Living Faith Junction in Minna.

The suspects, aged 18 and 20, were apprehended while riding a motorcycle.

Recovered from them were a sharp cutlass, a face mask, suspected cannabis, other illicit substances, jewellery and N22,000 cash.

They are undergoing preliminary investigation before being transferred to the SCID for prosecution.

In another case, police arrested a 21-year-old suspect for allegedly stealing Point-of-Sale (POS) machines from a shop along Bakin-Iku, Kaduna Road, Minna.

The suspect allegedly visited the shop pretending to purchase an item before swapping the shop's POS terminal with another one in his possession.

Police recovered three POS machines and three ATM cards from him.

Abiodun said the suspect claimed he was travelling from Auchi to Jigawa State when he decided to commit the crime.

Similarly, police arrested an 18-year-old suspect over the alleged theft of money belonging to his uncle, a foodstuff trader in Kwamba.

Investigations revealed that the suspect allegedly stole money from the victim on several occasions by hiding in the kitchen until the victim fell asleep before escaping through the ceiling after taking the cash.

The suspect reportedly confessed to stealing about N1.5 million, while police recovered N330,000 from him.

Two other suspects were also arrested for allegedly assisting him in spending the proceeds of the crime, and four mobile phones were recovered during the investigation.

The police spokesman said all the suspects would be charged to court upon the conclusion of investigations.

Kaduna govt hails NSA's Forest Guards initiative

BENJAMIN AGESAN, Kaduna

Kaduna State Government has commended the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) for the Presidential Forest Guards Initiative as trainees completed about 60 percent of their training programme.

Governor Uba Sani gave the commendation while receiving an ONSA delegation led by H.I. Mabeokwu at the Government House, Kaduna.

A statement from ONSA on Thursday said the delegation visited the state to assess the ongoing training of more than 1,000-armed forest guards being prepared for deployment to security flashpoints.

Sani described the initiative as a strategic intervention aimed at improving security across forests and vulnerable rural communities.

He said that the programme reflected the Federal Government's commitment to strengthening security through collaboration with state governments.

The governor reaffirmed his administration's commitment to supporting the initiative by sustaining the welfare of trainees and instructors.

The ONSA delegation expressed satisfaction with the progress of the training, describing the exercise as well organised and the facilities as adequate.

The team also commended the Kaduna State Government for providing welfare support to trainees and instructors throughout the programme.

Officials said that participants had completed about 60 percent of the curriculum covering weapons handling, tactical operations and other field competencies.

The assessment team comprised representatives of the National Intelligence Agency, Department of State Services, National Park Service, Nigeria Police Force and the Armed Forces of Nigeria.

The Presidential Forest Guards Initiative is coordinated by the ONSA to reclaim forests exploited by terrorists, bandits and kidnappers as operational bases.

The forest guards are expected to support conventional security agencies through intelligence gathering, patrols and sustained security presence in forested communities.

FRSC blames driver fatigue, excessive speeding, burst tyres for highway crashes

...As seven die in Kogi auto accident

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE, Lokoja

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has confirmed the death of seven persons in a tragic road accident along the Okene–Osara–Lokoja Highway in Kogi State, saying excessive speeding, driver fatigue and burst tyre were the cause.

It was gathered that the crash occurred when a commercial Siena bus reportedly rammed into a stationary heavy-duty truck undergoing repairs in Osara. Seven people lost their lives, while three others sustained varying degrees of injuries.

Speaking to journalists in Lokoja, Lawal Fagge, Kogi State Sector Commander of the FRSC, said the ill-fated bus departed Auchi in Edo State and was heading to Abuja, carrying passengers travelling to different destinations, including Abaji in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

According to Fagge, six passengers in the Siena bus died on the spot, while the motor boy of the parked truck also lost his life. The deceased have been deposited at the morgue, while the three injured victims were rescued by FRSC personnel and taken to a nearby hospital for treatment.

"The fatal crash occurred along the Okene–Osara–Lokoja Road. The Siena bus carrying passengers from Auchi to Abuja suffered a tyre burst due to excessive speeding before crashing into a stationary truck undergoing repairs. Six occupants of the bus and the truck's motor boy died, while three others sustained injuries. Our rescue team responded immediately and evacuated the injured to a nearby hospital for medical attention".

The FRSC Sector Commander urged motorists to avoid excessive speeding, ensure their vehicles are roadworthy, remain alert behind the wheel, and exercise caution around broken-down or stationary vehicles to reduce avoidable crashes.

The latest tragedy has once again raised concerns over road safety along the busy Okene–Lokoja corridor, a major highway linking southern and northern Nigeria. The route has witnessed several fatal accidents in recent years, prompting renewed calls for stricter adherence to traffic regulations and enhanced road safety measures.

Olubadan pays condolence visit to Bode market gutted by fire

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

Oba Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja, the Olubadan of Ibadan, has paid a condolence visit to Bode Market in order to condole the traders on the recent fire disaster that happened in the market

The Paramount ruler expressed his condolences to the affected traders by the inferno, adding that he received the news with rude shock

The condolence message which was contained in the press release issued and signed by the Chief Press Secretary to Olubadan of Ibadanland, Ayoade Solomon Olugbemiga, stated that Oba Ladoja appreciated the market traders for immediately embarking upon on reconstruction of the market without delay.

Speaking through the Ashipa Olubadan of Ibadanland, Oba Salawudeen Amidu Ajibade and the Ashipa Balogun of Ibadanland Oba Abiodun Azees, the monarch described Bode Market as an international one for all and Sundry to trade, the monarch enjoined the traders to make love, unity and transparency their watchwords

Earlier in her welcome address, the Iyaloja of Ibadanland, Iswat Abiola Ameringun appreciated the condolence visit made by Olubadan delegates assuring the Kabiyesi that peaceful co -existence tranquility and love for one another will reign supreme in the market

Dignitaries assembled to receive Oba Ladoja included Iyaloja of Bode Market, Makinde Sikirat, other Iyalojas from the eleven Local Governments Areas in Ibadanland, Mogajis, religious leaders, Market traders, among others

The Worshipper

OAIC bridges ethnic, cultural, and religious divides that contributes to a more unified Nigerian society – Evangelist Shogbesan

Yemi Shogbesan, the shepherd-in-charge, Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), Ile Iyanu, Estate Gate, Ipaja and the newly elected OAIC, vice chairman, Estate Gate area, spoke on the unity of the Church and the impact of African instituted churches on nation building. Excerpts by JOHN SALAU:

What can you tell us about the impact of Organization of Africa instituted churches (OAIC) on nation building in Nigeria?

The Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) has made substantial contributions to nation building in Nigeria by promoting unity, supporting community development, providing moral leadership, and fostering peace. Through its grassroots presence and commitment to both spiritual and social progress, OAIC continues to play a vital role in shaping a stronger, more unified nation. As a bloc of the CAN, OAIC promotes interfaith engagement by actively participating in interfaith dialogue with other religious groups, promoting understanding and cooperation for national development. These efforts help reduce religious tensions and build bridges across Nigeria's diverse population.

The Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) is a prominent bloc within the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Representing indigenous African churches, OAIC has played a significant role in the nation-building process by promoting spiritual, social, and economic development across Nigeria. OAIC preserves and promotes African cultural heritage by integrating local traditions with Christian worship. By fostering pride in African identity, OAIC helps bridge ethnic, cultural, and religious divides, contributing to a more unified Nigerian society.

OAIC churches are deeply rooted in local communities, often providing basic education, healthcare, and social services in rural and underserved areas. These grassroots efforts support poverty alleviation, empower women and youth, and encourage self-reliance. As a ministry OAIC provides moral guidance, emphasizing values such as honesty, hard work, and integrity—qualities essential for national progress. And, by addressing social issues like corruption and injustice, OAIC encourages ethical behavior among citizens and leaders.

Peace building and conflict resolution is deeply rooted in the African Instituted Churches, which promotes peace, tolerance, and conflict resolution among diverse ethnic and religious groups. Through dialogue and advocacy, OAIC helps de-escalate tensions and foster harmonious coexistence, especially in regions prone to conflict. As nation builders, OAIC encourages members to participate in civic duties, such as voting and community service, strengthening democratic processes. The organization advocates for social justice, equity, and the protection of human rights.

Yemi Shogbesan

What is your view on practical unity in diversity, especially in relation to CAN's motto?

Unity does not require uniformity. The New Testament envisions a Church where diversity of gifts, cultures, and personalities contributes to a richer, more vibrant community. Paul uses the metaphor of the body: "For just as each of us has one body with many members…and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body" (Romans 12:4-5). Differences are not obstacles to unity; they are its foundation. In today's globalized, multicultural world, the Christian message of unity is more relevant than ever. Racial, ethnic, and national tensions persist, and religion is sometimes manipulated to deepen divides. Christians are called to reject such misuse and instead model inclusive, reconciling communities.

Modern Christian leaders and organizations increasingly promote dialogue across denominational lines and even with other faiths. Initiatives such as the World Council of Churches and local ecumenical movements embody the biblical vision of unity. While theological differences remain, the emphasis is on shared values, mutual respect, and collaborative action for the common good. Unity begins with humility—recognizing that no individual or group has a monopoly on truth. Christians are called to listen, learn, and correct their own biases. Whether in families, churches, or communities, believers should take the initiative in healing wounds and restoring relationships, following the example of Christ. Rather than fearing difference, Christians can celebrate it as a gift. Worship, traditions, and perspectives from various backgrounds enrich the Church globally. Joint service projects, advocacy for justice, and caring for the marginalized unite believers in a common mission, transcending doctrinal and cultural lines.

Many have criticised the Church for not helping enough; how true is this?

From its very inception, Christianity has been a faith centered on love, reconciliation, and the unity of humankind. Yet, throughout history and even today, Christianity is often associated with schisms, denominational disputes, and sometimes, even conflict. This contradiction between the message of unity at the heart of Christianity and the reality of division in its practice calls for honest reflection. Jesus Christ, the central figure of Christianity, consistently advocated for unity. In his famous prayer recorded in the Gospel of John, Jesus prays, "That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us" (John 17:21). This prayer reveals the heart of Christ's mission, not only to reconcile humanity to God but also to each other.

What parallel can you draw from the early Church and what we have in Christendom today?

The early Church embodied unity across diversity. The book of Acts describes communities where Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor, shared life together. The apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, declared: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This radical message broke down social, ethnic, and economic barriers, creating a new community grounded in love and mutual respect. Despite its unifying core, Christianity's history is riddled with divisions from the Great Schism between East and West, to the Protestant Reformation, to countless denominational splits in modern times. These divisions often arose from theological disagreements, political pressures, and human failings rather than the teachings of Christ. When Christianity is harnessed to justify exclusion, it betrays its original message. Sectarianism, whether based on doctrine, culture, or politics, undermines the unity that Christ prayed for. Division breeds suspicion, intolerance, and sometimes violence—far removed from the love and reconciliation that define authentic Christian faith. The apostle Paul, in his letters, consistently called communities to reconciliation. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he writes: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ…and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Christians are thus ambassadors of reconciliation, tasked with building bridges, not walls.

True peace transcends immediate human suffering, says Archbishop Gallagher

JOHN SALAU

Paul R. Gallagher, the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States and International Organisations, has urged Nigerians to stay strong and persevere despite the current afflictions, adding that true peace transcends immediate human suffering.

The Archbishop also implored the lay faithful and clergies to operate in total obedience to God to avoid reaping the whirlwind, and warned against self-serving leadership and systemic corruption. He also prayed that the Church in Nigeria remains an unwavering beacon of hope in the service of the common good of every Nigerian.

The thanksgiving Mass to commemorate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the Holy See and Nigeria was held at Our Lady Queen of Nigeria Pro-Cathedral in Abuja. Gallagher acknowledged the steep socio-economic realities confronting Nigeria; drawing parallels to the biblical struggles of Judah and delivered a message of hope to Nigerians.

"The example of St Patrick remains important for the Nigeria of today, and indeed for all Christians, as he shows us that the burden of labouring for peace, while demanding, is made light by God's grace.

"As the people of Judah faced different forms of oppression and hardships, too many in our own time are confronted by numerous challenges including insecurity, economic hardship and the lack of basic amenities, and indeed violence, sometimes extreme," Gallagher stated during his recent visit to Nigeria to mark the golden jubilee of diplomatic relations with Nigeria.

Gallagher in his address underscored the relationship between the Vatican and Nigeria extends beyond geopolitical strategy. According to him, the relationship is built on the shared values of protecting the God-given dignity of the human person, guaranteeing religious freedom and of promoting justice and peace.

Scripture Union's DG, seven others released by abductors

Uwem Cosmas Udoh, the general director of Scripture Union Nigeria and seven other pastors were recently released by their abductors after weeks in the kidnappers' den.

"With hearts full of immense relief and profound gratitude to Almighty God, we write to express our deepest appreciation for your unwavering support during the harrowing time our brethren were held captive.

"To the glory of God, our brethren were releases and are safe and healthy," Willy Onu, national chairman said in a statement.

According to Onu, Scripture Union Nigeria will never forget the faith, fervent prayers, and financial support, which gave the union the strength and courage needed to endure the agonizing ordeal. "We do not take your generosity and care for granted."

Onu added that their release is a testament to the power of collective prayer, resilience, and the sacrifices made by every member of the Union at all levels. "Let no one's heart fail because of this traumatic experience. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all." (Psalm 34:19).

"May the Almighty God reward you abundantly and protect you from all harm in Jesus' name."

Art

OBINNA EMELIKE

Rizzulenation: New voice for African creatives, sets sail

Recently, the Nigeria creative circle welcomed Rizzulenation, a new entrant, into its burgeoning fold.

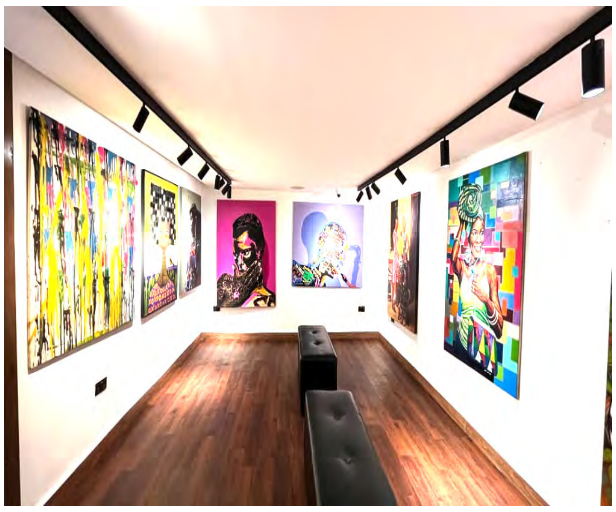
Considering the many creative platforms out there, Rizzulenation, an innovative African creative talent management agency, is coming with a difference.

The platform, which operates from its base at Ligali Ayorinde Street, Victoria Island, Lagos, focuses on empowering and amplifying the voices of African artists, fostering authenticity, global reach, and positive change within the creative industry.

Excited at the smooth take off, Adu Olubi, founder, Rizzulenation, explained that the initiative, which is his brainchild, is a creative and cultural company dedicated to shaping the future of African arts, culture, entertainment, and creative expression through innovation, storytelling, and community.

"Rizzulenation is built with a vision for global impact, to connect talent, ideas, and opportunities across borders," Olubi, who is also known as Rizzule, said.

At its core, Rizzulenation, according to Olubi, champions creatives by creating platforms that amplify voices, preserve cultural heritage, and open access to new audiences and markets.



Explaining the vision, Olubi said, "Rizzulenation is envisioned to be the leading force in amplifying African creativity, revolutionizing the artistic landscape, and bridging the gap between African heritage and global appreciation.

"The mission is to propel exceptional artists and musical talents toward worldwide recognition, ensuring they have the support and opportunities needed to thrive".

The brand also supports emerging and established talent through media, curation, partnerships, and experiences, amid a long-term goal of becoming a globally recognized creative ecosystem.

With its recent debut, he also noted that Rizzulenation will continue to expand influence, while maintaining a strong commitment to authentic representation and meaningful cultural impact.

However, beyond being a creative hub, the talent management company also offers consulting, event management, musical artist management, artist representation, and a global marketplace where African creativity can be appreciated and monetized.

Excitedly, its targets mainly undiscovered and underrepresented African artists across various creative fields, including music, poetry, and visual arts.

It also targets art enthusiasts, collectors, gallery owners, and lovers of African culture, both within Africa and in the diaspora.

The above strategy, according to Olubi, ensures that Rizzulenation not only promotes African talent but also builds a strong and global community of supporters and collaborators.

As well, Olubi said that Spotlight, the creative hub of the company, is the highlight.

Spotlight, according to the founder, is a creative hospitality and cultural destination designed to bring people together through experiences, entertainment, and artistic expression. It also serves as a space where culture, community, and lifestyle intersect in an accessible and inspiring environment.

"Spotlight is more than a venue," Olubi said. "It creates opportunities for artists, performers, brands, and communities to connect through live events, showcases, conversations, and curated experiences that celebrate creativity in its many forms".

He also noted that Spotlight is not every other creative hub because it is being driven by innovation and experience-led programming.

The bottom-line, according to him, is for Spotlight to become a hub for culture and entertainment that supports the growth of the creative economy, while creating memorable moments for every guest.

Nigeria's Odugbemi appointed to Editorial Advisory Board of 'Black Camera'

Femi Odugbemi, an award-winning Nigerian filmmaker, producer, director and media scholar has been appointed to the Editorial Advisory Board of Black Camera: An International Film Journal, one of the world's foremost peer-reviewed journals dedicated to the study, documentation and critical analysis of Black cinema and visual culture. The appointment was confirmed by Akin Adeṣọkan, a professor and editor-in-chief of the journal, who cited Odugbemi's distinguished contributions to filmmaking, scholarship and international engagement in cinema as invaluable to the journal's continuing mission.

In his letter of appointment, Professor Adeṣọkan noted that Odugbemi's leadership as co-founder of the iREP International Documentary Film Festival and his extensive work across production, policy, education and media studies make him an important addition to the journal's global advisory board. Published with the support of The Media School, Indiana University Bloomington, Black Camera is internationally recognized as a leading platform for scholarship on Black cinematic experiences across Africa and the global diaspora. The journal explores neglected and emerging sites of Black filmmaking, publishing original research, interviews, archival materials, reviews and critical essays that engage cinema as artistic practice, cultural expression and political discourse.

Accepting the appointment, Odugbemi said, "I am deeply honoured by this appointment and grateful for the opportunity to contribute to Black Camera's longstanding commitment to documenting and advancing critical scholarship on Black cinematic experiences across the world. I look forward to supporting the journal's continued growth, intellectual engagement and global reach."

Odugbemi's appointment further reflects the growing recognition of African creative leaders within global academic and cultural institutions. Throughout his career, he has worked at the intersection of storytelling, media policy, cultural advocacy and industry development, championing African narratives while helping shape conversations about the future of film and television on the continent and beyond. His name will appear on the journal's masthead beginning with the Fall 2026 edition (Volume 18, Number 1), joining an internationally respected Editorial Advisory Board comprising distinguished scholars, filmmakers and critics from Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and North America.

Odugbemi is an internationally acclaimed filmmaker, producer, director and media executive whose work spans documentary, drama and cultural programming. He is the Founder and CEO of Zuri24 Media, BLACKBox Hub and Co-founder of the iREP International Documentary Film Festival, and has served on numerous international juries, advisory boards and industry initiatives dedicated to advancing African cinema and creative industries.

Black Camera is an international scholarly journal devoted to the study and documentation of Black cinematic experiences around the world. It publishes peer-reviewed research, interviews, reviews and archival scholarship while fostering new conversations around filmmaking in Africa and the global Black diaspora. The journal serves scholars, researchers, filmmakers, media professionals and audiences interested in cinema, visual culture and representation.

Travel

Sustainable tourism: Sheraton sustains practice with key green initiatives

OBINNA EMELIKE

In line with the clean energy and sustainable tourism practice focus of Marriott International, Sheraton Lagos Hotel has boosted its quest for clean energy solutions and green environment for guests, staff members and the general public with key investments.

Shetaton Lagos Hotel, one of first internationally branded hotels in Nigeria, has commissioned a new gas generator, gas burner, as well as installed boilers.

The green key initiatives, according to the hotel management, is a further effort at saving on pollution on the planet and also to join in the global chain's Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) compliance.

Expressing appreciate to Ikeja Hotel PLC, the owning company, Martins Brednoord, general manager, Sheraton Lagos Hotel, commended them for seeing the worth in investing on a gas generator.

"The generator that you see behind us, they purchased outright, so it is not a rental. It is completely owned by Ikeja Hotel PLC and obviously managed by us, Sheraton Lagos Hotel," the general manager said.

Offering an overview and benefits of the investments, Maged Ibrahim, director, engineering, noted that the new enery solutions help in environmental sustainability.

L-R: Bolaji Alabi, director, human resources, Maged Ibrahim, director of engineering; Martin Bredenoord, general manager, all of Sheraton Lagos Hotel; Theophilus Netufo, CEO, Ikeja Hotel Plc, Rakesh Gokhool, hotel manager; Adegoke Olufunke-director, finance; Akisanmi-Samuel Oluwakemi, director, guest service and Joseph Oloidi, marketing manager, at the commissioning event.

"The first and most tangible benefit of this project is that it impacts our immediate environment positively. It doesn't emit as much air or as much waste as other generators do.

We are all familiar with the drawback of diesel, the noise, the soot, anf the emission that also affect the air quality around us," Ibrahim said.

According to him, natural gas is cleaner and is the main reason the hotel owners made the investment.

"By making this switch, we are significantly reducing localized pollution. This means cleaner air for our guests, for our team, and for the community because Sheraton Ikeja Hotel is part of the environment".

"Also, from an environmental performance standpoint, she explained that natural gas burns more effectively and efficiently, which translates directly into the massive production of CO2 emission, which also helps the plants.

"Also, this brings us to the bigger picture. Our commitment of the 2030 sustainability and sustainable energy goals. We are not just looking at operational efficiency intent. We are actively participating in the global solution for climate change and that is why we are here and we stand for that.

"Every ton of CO2 we eliminate moves us closer to our sustainability targets and firmly positions us for a forward-thinking leader in the industry," he said.

Looking beyond environmental sustainability, the general manager disclosed the impact of the new energy sources on the cost of operation of the hotel, confirming drop in cost.

"We all know the rising costs of not only electricity, but also diesel and as well as the running costs and maintenance costs of diesel engines.

"For the gas generator, we have already seen a very big drop in cost in the short time, during the testing phase before even the commissioning," he said.

"We are looking at an 18-month return on investment. Only 18 months from our calculations and by God's grace, that will happen," he said.

The gas generator, which is the major energy source and burner, according to him, will complement other sources of electricity supply in the hotel, as well as an electric charging station at the hotel's parking is aimed at encouraging guests to boost sustainability environment by going for sustainable vehicles and solar power too.

"Now we are mainly running on the gas generator and the diesel will be on the backup supply. Solar will be a small contribution and vehicle charging station is very small".

On his part, Theophilus Eniola Netufo, managing DI-director/CEO, Ikeja Hotels PLC, expressed deep appreciation to Sheraton, the operators of the hotel, for the cooperation both have enjoyed over the years.

"I commend the team of Marriott for allowing us to collaborate and to ensure that our operations are run cost-effective and for taking advantage of the

synergy to deliver quality services and improve the bottom line for the benefit of the stakeholders and fund providers for this project," Netufo said.

"It will go on record that this is the first time in the history of this company that the operators and the owner will work together and achieve great results that we are having today".

The managing director and CEO also noted that it has been a wonderful experience for the owning company for some time now as the company Haa been doing well in the capital market.

"The company has become an investor delight. That was not the case before," while commending everybody involved; the operators, the owning company, and the vendors for their commitment and dedication to the progress of the hotel.

Ikeja Hotel Plc is a premier Nigerian hospitality company listed on the Nigerian Exchange (NGX) under the ticker IKEJAHOTEL.

Founded in 1972, the group owns and operates major luxury assets, including the Sheraton Lagos Hotel.

FG to partner Edo to unlock tourism potentia

ELVIS OMOREGIE, Benin

Ola Awakan, director general, Nigeria Tourism Development Authority (NTDA), has assured the people of Edo of government's commitment to partnering with the state to unlock and develop its vast tourism potential.

Awakan gave the assurance on Monday in Benin at the opening of the two-day tourism summit, exhibition and fashion show organised by the Edo State Tourism Agency.

He said that Edo's abundant tourism resources could only be fully harnessed through strategic collaboration among government, the private sector, and other critical stakeholders.a

"The tourism potential in Edo cannot be harnessed in isolation. Strong synergy is required, particularly with the private sector. We must work together to unlock the immense opportunities within the sector," he said.

Awakan noted that Nigeria's rich cultural heritage presents a unique opportunity to reshape the country's image on the global stage.

"Nigeria is not a country defined by violence or insecurity. We are a people blessed with rich culture, enduring traditions, and remarkable artistic heritage.

"We must work together to change the negative narrative about our country by telling our stories through arts and culture. I am confident that this summit will produce a practical master plan that will drive tourism development," he said.

He described tourism as one of the world's fastest-growing economic sectors, noting that it contributes significantly to employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure development, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

Vivian Elabor, director general, Edo State Tourism Agency, in her keynote address, said that participants, investors, tourists and cultural ambassadors had gathered with a shared vision of unlocking Edo's immense tourism potential.

She noted that Edo has long been recognised as a leading destination for culture, heritage, investment, and sustainable development.

According to her, the state is endowed with a rich history, remarkable cultural heritage, world-renowned arts and crafts, historical monuments, colourful festivals and unique ecological attractions, all of which provide a strong foundation for a vibrant tourism economy.

"The summit is designed to promote meaningful dialogue on digital transformation, investment opportunities, community partnerships, sustainability and innovation in tourism development.

Fashion Talk

Why black is the only colour that commands every occasion

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

In the fast-moving world of fashion, trends come and go with the seasons. "Neon pink" might dominate the runway in the spring, while "earthy browns" take over by the winter. Yet, amidst this constant cycle of change, one hue remains entirely untouched by time: black.

Far from being just a safe choice or a fallback option, black has cemented its status as the ultimate fashion statement. It is a structural chameleon—the only shade capable of seamlessly transitioning from the profound solemnity of a burial to the high-octane energy of a late-night party, all while setting an unmatched standard of elegance.

What gives black its enduring power? In design psychology, black is not a color of emptiness; it is a color of absolute presence. It absorbs light, creates sharp silhouettes, and acts as a visual frame that commands respect. Where other bright colors demand attention by screaming for it, black commands the room through quiet confidence. It flatters every body type, complements every skin tone, and provides a neutral canvas that allows the wearer's personality—and choice of accessories—to take center stage.

From Solemnity to Celebration

The true genius of a black outfit lies in its adaptability. By simply swapping a shoe, altering a hairstyle, or shifting from muted silver studs to bold gold jewelry, the exact same base attire can serve entirely different cultural mandates.

1. The Burial: A Symbol of Dignified Grief

Historically and culturally, black has long been the uniform of mourning. In its matte forms—think structural crepe, deep linens, or traditional lace—black conveys profound respect, empathy, and somber dignity. It allows a mourner to blend into the collective support system of a funeral without drawing undue attention to themselves, serving as a visual shield for personal grief.

2. The Corporate Boardroom: Unmatched Authority

Step into any high-stakes corporate environment, and a well-tailored black blazer or a sharp black sheath dress instantly signals power. In business, black eliminates visual distractions. It tells clients, partners, and competitors that you are serious, focused, and entirely in control of the room.

3. The High-Society Party: The Apex of Glamour

The moment the sun sets, black sheds its conservative corporate skin and transforms into pure allure. Whether it is a silk slip dress, a velvet agbada, or a shimmering sequined gown, black under party lights becomes theatrical. It hides imperfections, accentuates motion, and provides the perfect contrast to glittering diamonds, rich gold embroidery, or a striking red lip.

4. The Economic Savior of the Modern Wardrobe

Beyond its aesthetic supremacy, embracing black is a masterstroke in sustainable fashion economics. In an era where consumer budgets are squeezed by inflation, building a wardrobe around high-quality black staples is a form of financial empowerment.

"A person can never be overdressed or under-dressed with a Little Black Dress." — Karl Lagerfeld

Because black is incredibly difficult to date, a premium black outfit can be worn repeatedly without anyone tracking its frequency. It resists visible stains, survives rigorous washes, and outlasts the hyper-specific color trends that look dated within six months.

Setting the Pace

Ultimately, fashion is about communication. When you wear bright yellows or fiery reds, you are telling the world how you want them to feel.

But when you step out in black, you are letting the world know that you are comfortable in your own skin, regardless of the venue. From the quiet steps of a final farewell to the pulsing beat of a celebration, black doesn't just fit the occasion—it sets the pace.

Insight

BERNARD APA

$1tr economy: Tantita's surveillance operations, Niger Delta stability to help govt achieve target

Achieving the Federal Government's vision of growth for businesses and $1 trillion economy size for the country by 2030 will not be a walk on the park. It requires a stable and prosperous economy that is driven by peace and stability. The peace and stability of in Niger Delta and protection of national assets, especially oil assets through Tantita Security Services Nigeria Ltd (TSSNL) operations will be central in achieving the revenue streams required to grow the economy to quantum $1 trillion size.

Nigeria has a big dream, achieving $1 trillion economy size by 2030, with significant support from the oil sector. The Policy Advisory Council report on the national economy, had set an ambitious goal of achieving a GDP of $1tr, with clearly defined priority areas and strategies.

Gaining the oil sector backing in this milestone joruney requires more than policy pronouncements from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

It requires investment drive, attractiveness to global financial markets and strong revenue streams, from the oil sector, which contributes over 75 percent of Nigeria's FX earnings.

Effectively harnessing the oil revenue requires that the Niger Delta, a region severally described as the goose that lays the golden eggs, must also be at peace and oil infrastructure across the region well secured.

That is where the Federal Government of Nigeria's appointment of Tantita Security Services Nigeria Ltd (TSSNL) to protect oil assets and ensure peace and stability in the Niger Delta comes to play.

That singular act, will contribute positively to Nigeria's vision of achieving $1 trillion economy by 2030.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu had appointed Tantita Security Services Nigeria Limited (TSSNL) led by High Chief, Dr. Government Oweizide Ekpemupolo, alias Tompolo, to protect Nigeria's oil assets in the Niger Delta region.

The apointment was to enable TSSNL, through its security operations, support the national economy in getting the full benefits of oil resources.

The TSSNL works in collaboration with other security outfits to achive its goals of securing oil assets and ensuring peace and stability in the Niger Delta region.

Tantita's operations had ensured the security of oil pipelines, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of petroleum resources, and ensuring that Nigeria migrated from a position of constant loss management to stability, planning, growth and development.

The TSSNL operations have transformed the oil and gas landscape and allowed Nigeria to expand oil production quota and significantly cut rampant oil theft.

Its track record in mitigating risks associated with oil pipelines has positioned it as a reliable partner in preserving Nigeria's economic backbone.

As stakeholders advocate for the continued collaboration with TSSNL, the imperative of securing oil infrastructure remains at the forefront of efforts to ensure the nation's sustainable development.

In the development process of any society, certain assets contribute to the advancement of society and its people. These assets ensure economic or monetary benefits for the people. These assets could be regarded as operating assets, non-operating assets or leased assets, among others.

The impact of TSSNL's operations was captured in a recent survey, with majority of the respondents attributing the

Government Oweizide Ekpemupolo, alias Tompolo

de-escalation of security incidents in the Niger-Delta region to the pipeline surveillance operations executed by TSSNL.

With TSSL, South-south peace sustainable

As captured in the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED), violent events declined by 20.9 per cent in the South-South geopolitical region between 2023 and 2025. The rate of fatalities arising from such violent events in the oil rich region declined by 8.3 per cent within the same period of time.

Although the rate of similar conflicts declined by a higher margin of 26.9 per cent in the South-East region, the rate of fatalities resulting from such events increased within the region by 8.3 per cent.

The violent events tracked by ACLED within the period under review include violence against civilians, battles between the authorities and armed groups, protests, strategic developments, riots, and explosions/remote violence.

The South-West recorded a decline of 14.1 per cent in the total number of incidents between 2023 and 2025. However, the fatality rate increased by 12.21 per cent. The picture takes a different look in the three geopolitical regions of Northern Nigeria.

Further analysis of the database showed that North-West incidents increased by 127.9 per cent between 2023 and 2025 and in the process, recorded an increase of 99.1 per cent in fatality rate.

What the statistics say:

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria's statistical body, had released the rebased Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figure for the first time in more than a decade. It puts Nigeria's GDP at N372.8tr in 2024, after the base year for calculating the figure was shifted to 2019. Investment drive, attractiveness to global financial markets and facilitating Nigeria's quest for $1tr economy by 2030 are flashpoints for the rebased economy.

Adeyemi Adeniran, Nigeria's statistician-general, explained how the economy had fared in the rebased GDP report. He said: "In nominal terms, the rebased GDP for 2019 stood at N205.09tr; N213.63tr in 2020; N243.30tr in 2021; N274.23tr in 2022; N314.02tr in 2023, and N372.82tr in 2024".

Adeniran revealed that incorporated new and emerging sectors, consumption baskets update, and data collection refining methods helped produce a more complete picture of national output.

Udy Ntia, executive vice president of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Ltd., said during the CERAWeek conference hosted by S&P Global in Houston that "Nigeria has transformed into an investor's haven. With the Petroleum Industry Act and robust regulatory reforms, we have already attracted $17bn in new investments."

What other stakeholders are saying

In a published report, President General, Niger Delta Progressive Alliance, Nse Victor Udoh, said pipeline protection enabled national institutions to progress from reactive crisis management to strategic foresight, from temporary containment to durable systems-building, and from uncertainty-driven decisions to calculated national ambition.

"It is important to clarify the role of pipeline surveillance within the wider energy landscape. Energy security encompasses the full value chain, from exploration and production to refining, distribution, pricing policy, and subsidy frameworks. Pipeline surveillance does not manage these domains," he said.

He added: "Its mandate is precise: safeguarding critical infrastructure that transports petroleum resources. Yet this single function has proven foundational. Without secure transportation channels, production targets falter, refining plans collapse, exports decline, and fiscal projections become unreliable."

Continuing, he wrote: "Asset protection, in this context, is not a supporting activity. It is a precondition for economic order. In effect, the pipeline is the hinge on which the entire petroleum value chain turns. When that hinge is weak, every other link in the chain carries strain. When it is secure, the entire system gains coherence."

The immediate impact has been operational. Sustained monitoring and rapid response systems have sharply reduced pipeline breaches and illegal tapping. Receipt rates have climbed toward full recovery, with national output rising to levels not seen in recent memory.

This redirection has restored Nigeria's credibility in international oil markets, allowing Nigeria to reclaim market share lost to Angola and Libya.

"Economic stability follows predictability. When crude flows are secure, refineries can plan feedstock intake with assurance. Export commitments can be met without fear of sudden shortfalls. Gas-to-power projects can operate without recurrent shutdown risks.

"Investors can assess Nigeria's petroleum sector with clearer risk profiles. Surveillance therefore does more than stop theft. It reintroduces reliability into national energy planning. And reliability is the bedrock upon which sustainable economic growth is built. With predictable flows, national budgeting becomes more credible, infrastructure planning becomes more precise, and long-term contracts become easier to negotiate. Predictability is the silent currency of modern economies, and pipeline surveillance has begun restoring it," he stated.

Further benefits extend into public finance. Higher accounted-for production translates directly into increased export revenues, improved foreign exchange inflows, and strengthened fiscal capacity. National oil company performance in recent years illustrates this shift toward profitability and efficiency, driven in part by reduced losses and enhanced operational continuity.

As revenues stabilise, government budgeting gains credibility. Development planning becomes less speculative. The national economy gains breathing space to invest in infrastructure, social services, and diversification. This breathing space matters. It allows policy makers to think beyond survival and begin shaping structural reforms, industrial expansion, and long-term social investment. It also reduces dependence on emergency borrowing and short-term fiscal patchwork.

Traditional rulers and community leaders in the Niger Delta have called for continued support for Tantita Security Services Limited following a vote of confidence passed on the firm by the National Assembly of Nigeria.

The leaders said the company's involvement in securing oil and gas pipelines has led to visible improvements in oil-producing communities, particularly in reducing crime and creating jobs for youths.

Speaking on the development, the President-General of the Isoko Development Union, Christopher Akpotu, praised the joint committee of the Senate and House of Representatives for dismissing petitions filed against the firm.

He described the decision as a positive step for the Niger Delta and urged stakeholders to focus on economic gains rather than internal disagreements. "That is the right way to go," he said. "There are many opportunities in the oil and gas sector. We should focus on how to derive more benefits rather than fighting over what has already been allocated."

Akpotu warned that continued disputes among communities could allow outsiders to take over opportunities meant for host communities. "At the end of the day, if we continue fighting, we give room to those who have no stake in our communities to take what rightfully belongs to us," he added.

While acknowledging concerns over unequal distribution of benefits, he said the surveillance contract has made a clear difference in the lives of many young people. "The truth is that many communities and youths have benefited from the surveillance contract. It may not be evenly distributed, but the impact is evident," he said.

He also urged the company to involve more stakeholders, including traditional rulers, youths, and community leaders, to ensure fairness and long-term success.

Similarly, the President-General of the Ughelli Descendants Union, Sam Akpemegi, said the company has improved security since it began operations, noting that both visible and intelligence-based strategies have been deployed. "They have done very well and improved security since they began operations," he said, adding that the firm's activities now cover a large number of communities.

Akpemegi said the company's presence has brought benefits to both traditional institutions and residents, and called for continued backing.

In the same vein, the Odiologbo of Ofagbe Kingdom, Ogaga Ikpoku, supported the decision of the National Assembly, describing it as timely and beneficial to peace and stability in the region.

Overall, asset protection has also produced environmental and social dividends, particularly in the Niger Delta. Illegal refining and pipeline sabotage once left waterways polluted, farmlands infertile, and communities trapped in cycles of hazard and insecurity. With sustained surveillance operations dismantling illegal sites and preventing repeated breaches, ecological recovery has begun.

. **Apa** writes from Yenagoa, Bayelsa State

L-R: Daniel Mueller, executive director and chief operating officer, InfraCredit; Vivien Shobo, independent non-executive director; Chinua Azubike, managing director and chief executive officer; Sanjeev

Sport

2026 WAFCON: Nigeria's Super Falcons fire up for mission XI

Stories by JOHN SALAU

Nigeria's senior women national team, the Super Falcons is fired up for 'Mission XI' as the competition's most successful nation chase an 11th Women's Africa Cup of Nations title in Morocco.

As defending champions and Africa's highest-ranked women's national team, Nigeria head to Morocco with familiar expectations for the TotalEnergies CAF Women's AFCON Morocco 2026.

The Super Falcons have been drawn in Group C, alongside Zambia, Egypt and Malawi.

Group C presents a competitive challenge, with Zambia emerging as one of the continent's promising sides, while Egypt and Malawi will also be eager to make their mark.

The Super Falcons secured qualification for this year's WAFCON by defeating fellow West Africans Benin 3-1 on aggregate in the second round of qualifying.

Having received a bye in the opening round, the Super Falcons took control of the tie with a 2-0 away victory in Cotonou.

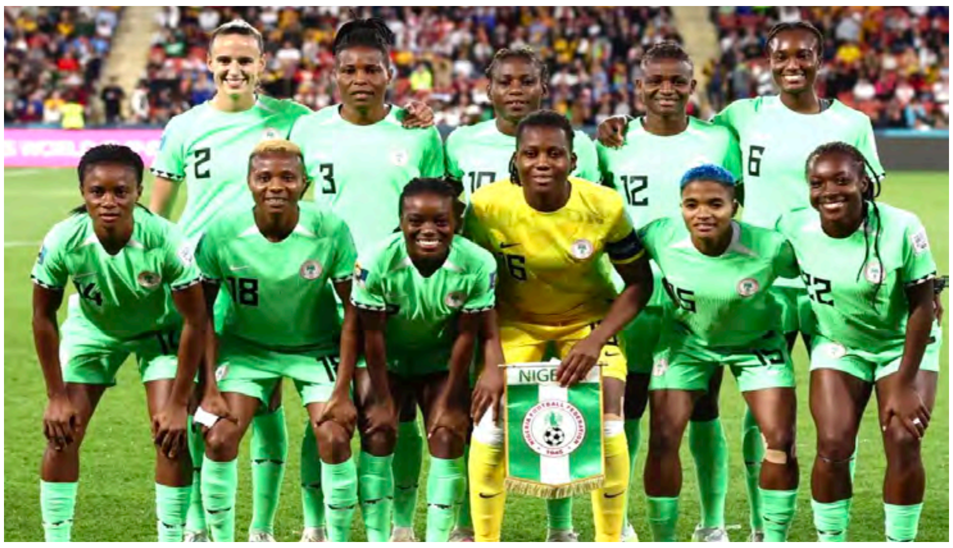
The Nigerian women completed the job in Abeokuta, drawing 1-1 in the second leg after Ashleigh Plumptre opened the scoring before Benin equalised through Yasmine Djibril.

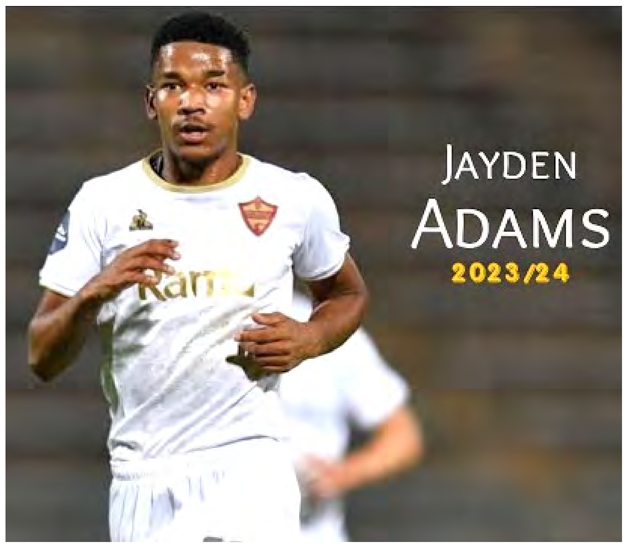
The result ensured another successful qualification campaign for the reigning African champions.

The Super Falcons have appeared 14 times at the TotalEnergies CAF Women's AFCON, ranked first by CAF and 36th by FIFA.

The Super Falcons last appear at the 2024 WAFCON in Morocco, and also emerging as African champions beating the host to the title right in front of the home fans.

iThe Super Falcons were champions in 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2016, 2018,





CAF conveys condolences to South Africa over Jayden Adams

Patrice Motsepe, president, Confederation African Football (CAF), has conveyed the football governing body's condolences on the passing of South Africa International and Mamelodi Sundowns player, Jayden Adams.

Adams, 25, played for Bafana Bafana during the FIFA World Cup 2026 and was part of the Mamelodi Sundowns that won the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League 2026 in Rabat.

"CAF is deeply saddened by the passing of South Africa international and Mamelodi Sundowns player, Jayden Adams."

Motsepe conveyed his heartfelt condolences on behalf of CAF and its 54 Member Associations, to the South African Football Association (SAFA), and its president, Danny Jordaan, Mamelodi Sundowns Football Club and to Jayden Adams' family.

"May Jayden Adam's soul rest in peace."

Before joining Mamelodi Sundowns, Adams played for Stellenbosch FC and has recently become a regular feature in Bafana Bafana.

Ghana picks 2026 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup qualification

Ghana booked their place at the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup Morocco 2026 after defeating Senegal 7-6 on penalties.

Both teams played out a 1-1 draw in the second leg, which left the tie level at 2-2 on aggregate.

The Black Maidens held their nerve in a dramatic penalty shootout in the fiercely contested West African derby.

Senegal made the brighter start and took the lead after 10 minutes when Mame Diarra Diallo found the back of the net, putting the visitors ahead on the day and increasing the pressure on the hosts.

Ghana responded just before half-time through Seidatu Wahab, who capitalised on a defensive lapse to level the match and restore parity in the tie.

Both teams created opportunities after the break but neither could find a decisive goal as the contest remained deadlocked through the remainder of normal time.

With the aggregate score still level at 2-2, the tie was settled by a penalty shootout.

The two sides matched each other before Ghana eventually prevailed 7-6, converting seven of their eight penalties to seal qualification for the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup.

The victory sends Ghana to Morocco later this year, where they will represent Africa on the global stage.

Oyo appoints Adejumon-Smith as Crown FC technical director

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan.

The Oyo State Government has taken another bold step towards repositioning sports development with the appointment and unveiling of Akande Fatai Adejumon-Smith as the new technical director of Crown Football Club, Ogbomoso.

The government also reaffirmed its determination to return the club to the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL), with Adejumon-Smith leading the charge.

Wasilat Adegoke, the Commissioner for Youth and Sports, announced this during the official signing of the contract agreement with the newly appointed Technical Director, held at her office described the appointment as a strategic move by the government to remodel and strengthen Crown FC into a formidable side capable of securing promotion to the Nigeria Premier Football League.

The Commissioner charged Coach Adejumon-Smith to approach his new assignment with diligence, professionalism, discipline, and unwavering commitment, noting that the state government has confidence in his wealth of experience and technical competence to deliver the desired results.

She reiterated the Makinde administration's unwavering commitment to sports development, emphasizing that the government will continue to invest in talents, infrastructure, and quality personnel to ensure Oyo State remains a leading force in Nigerian sports.

Responding, Coach Akande Fatai Adejumon-Smith expressed profound appreciation to Governor Seyi Makinde and the Honourable Commissioner for Youth and Sports for finding him worthy of the appointment.

He described Wasilat Adegoke as a goal-driven leader whose passion for sports development is inspiring.

He assured the government and the people of Oyo State that he would deploy his wealth of experience and expertise to rebuild Crown FC and guide the club to greater heights.

The newly appointed Technical Director further solicited the support and cooperation of all stakeholders, expressing confidence that with the collective commitment of the government, management, supporters, and players, Crown FC would achieve its set objectives.

Sport

FIFA, SAFA lead tributes as South Africa's Jayden Adams dies at 25

ANTHONY NLEBEM

The football world is in mourning following the death of South Africa and Mamelodi Sundowns midfielder Jayden Adams at the age of 25, with FIFA, the South African Football Association (SAFA), government officials and the wider football community paying tribute to one of the country's brightest young talents.

Adams, who represented Bafana Bafana at the ongoing FIFA 2026 World Cup and featured in all three of South Africa's group-stage matches, died on Saturday. South Africa's World Cup campaign ended in the Round of 32 after defeat to co-hosts Canada.

South Africa's Minister of Sport, Gayton McKenzie, described Adams' death as a devastating loss for the nation.

"It is with profound shock and a heavy heart that I have learnt of the passing of Jayden Adams, midfielder for Mamelodi Sundowns and Bafana Bafana, at the age of 25," McKenzie said.

"South African football has lost one of its brightest young talents, and our nation mourns alongside his family, his team-mates and the millions of supporters who watched him grow from a promising academy prospect into a full Bafana Bafana international."

FIFA president Gianni Infantino also expressed his condolences, saying Adams' death had saddened the global football community.

"It is so incredibly sad to hear that South Africa midfielder Jayden Adams has passed away just weeks after featuring in his nation's historic FIFA World Cup campaign," Infantino said.

"My thoughts and condolences, as well as those of everyone at FIFA and the global football community, are with his family, friends and teammates. The Bafana Bafana and Mamelodi Sundowns star will be sorely missed. May he rest in peace."

The South African Football Association (SAFA) joined the tributes, mourning the loss of a player widely regarded as one of the country's finest emerging midfielders and extending condolences to his family, teammates and supporters.

His club, Mamelodi Sundowns, also confirmed the tragic news in a heartfelt statement.

"The chairman and the Motsepe family, the board of directors, technical team, players, management, staff, supporters of Mamelodi Sundowns FC and the entire Yellow Nation express their deepest condolences to the family and friends as we mourn the loss of Jayden," the club said.

"We pray that the Almighty God comforts and strengthens the Adams family, his friends and everyone who knew him."

The South African Football Players Union (SAFPU) described Adams' passing as an immeasurable loss to South African football.

"The SAFPU is devastated by the untimely passing of Mamelodi Sundowns and Bafana Bafana midfielder Jayden Adams," the union said.

"Jayden had only recently represented South Africa at the 2026 World Cup, carrying the hopes of the nation with pride, courage and distinction.

"His passing is an immeasurable loss to his family, teammates, clubs, the football fraternity and the country at large. We extend our deepest condolences to the Adams family, Mamelodi Sundowns, Stellenbosch FC, Bafana Bafana and all those whose lives he touched."

Adams' death has cast a shadow over the FIFA 2026 World Cup, with tributes continuing to pour in for the talented midfielder, whose performances for club and country had marked him out as one of South Africa's brightest football prospects.

Yamal shrugs off goal drought, says Spain's success matters

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Spain teenager Lamine Yamal says he is unconcerned about his lack of goals at the ongoing FIFA 2026 World Cup, insisting that helping his country win the tournament is far more important than individual statistics.

The 18-year-old Barcelona star made the remarks after Spain's 2-1 quarter-final victory over Belgium in Los Angeles on Friday, a match in which he once again failed to get on the scoresheet.

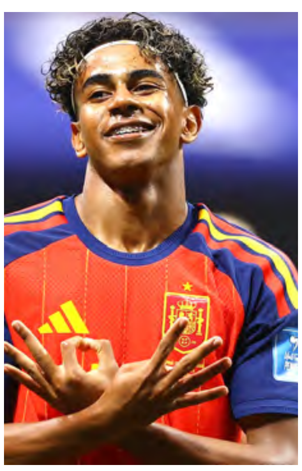
While stars such as Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappe, Erling Haaland and Harry Kane have dominated the scoring charts, Yamal has scored only once so far at the tournament, in Spain's 4-0 group-stage win over Saudi Arabia.

"Obviously I want to score, but I don't go onto the pitch thinking about that. I do it thinking about helping the team," Yamal said.

"If we win the World Cup, no one will remember whether I scored goals. The important thing is winning."

Yamal believes his contribution goes beyond goals, pointing to the attention he attracts from defenders and the space he creates for teammates.

"I know I can contribute even if I don't score. I know my movements draw in many opponents, so I do everything I can to help the team," he added.



The winger was Spain's breakout star at Euro 2024, where he also scored just once, a spectacular strike in the semi-final against France, before helping his country lift the trophy.

"There's an idea that I should be scoring more, like at the Euros, but we won the Euros with me scoring just one goal. And I have one goal here too, so I'm relaxed about it," he said with a smile.

Spain's victory over Belgium has set up a blockbuster semi-final against France, with Yamal set to turn 19 on the eve of the encounter.

Despite France's formidable attack, the young forward insisted Spain have nothing to fear.

"There are two possibilities; either they reach three consecutive World Cup finals, or we beat them three times in a row. We'll see what happens.

"We aren't afraid at all."

Spain will hope Yamal can add to his solitary goal when they face the free-scoring French side for a place in the FIFA 2026 World Cup final.

Scaloni urges Argentina to show grit against Switzerland

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Lionel Scaloni wants Argentina remembered as a team that never gave up ahead of Sunday's FIFA 2026 World Cup quarter-final against Switzerland.

La Albiceleste cruised through the group stage but have been pushed to the limit in the knockout rounds, surviving stern tests against Cape Verde and Egypt to extend their unbeaten World Cup run to 11 matches.

Argentina are now bidding to become the first nation since Brazil in 1962 to successfully defend the World Cup title, but Scaloni expects another difficult challenge against a disciplined Switzerland side in Kansas City.

'I want this team remembered for never giving up'

Speaking at his pre-match press conference at Arrowhead Stadium on Friday, the 48-year-old said the team's greatest legacy should be its resilience and fighting spirit.

"I would like this national team to be remembered as a team that never gave up," Scaloni said.

The Argentina boss revealed he had been deeply moved after watching a young fan passionately express his support for the national team.

"We, the technical staff and the players, play football for this. We do not play football just for a win," he said.

"When you see those things that come out of our heart, it is just outstanding.

"When you see a 10-year-old saying those things and talking with that passion, and everyone shouting 'Argentina', that is just so emotional. That is the legacy I want."

Sport

How FIFA 2026 World Cup is driving multimillion-dollar sales for Nike, Adidas

ANTHONY NLEBEM

The FIFA 2026 World Cup is proving to be more than just football's biggest tournament; it has become a major commercial battleground for sportswear giants Nike and Adidas, both of whom are using the event to boost sales and cement soccer's growing popularity in the United States.

With matches being staged across 11 American cities, the two global brands are investing millions of dollars in marketing campaigns, sponsorships and fan activations, viewing the World Cup as their biggest opportunity in more than three decades to grow soccer merchandise sales in one of the world's most lucrative sports markets.

Football has rapidly evolved into one of the fastest-growing sports in the United States, fuelled by the rise of Major League Soccer and increasing interest in international competitions. According to Nielsen, more than 62 million people already followed the sport in the U.S. before the World Cup kicked off, making America the world's fourth-largest soccer fan base.

The month-long tournament has only accelerated that momentum, with millions more tuning in to matches at home, in sports bars and at fan festivals.

Although brands such as Puma, Umbro and Reebok are also capitalising on the tournament, none have matched the scale of investment made by Nike and Adidas.

Nike sponsors 12 national teams competing at the World Cup, while Adidas backs 14. Both companies have launched extensive marketing campaigns across the United States, Canada and Mexico, unveiling limited-edition boots, jerseys and training apparel alongside high-profile advertising campaigns featuring many of football's biggest stars.

For both brands, success at the World Cup extends far beyond the results on the pitch; it is about winning the battle for consumers.

"It's critical for us", said Camilo Andrade, Nike's global vice-president and general manager for soccer.

"This is an accelerator of growth."

Adidas shares the same view.

"It's hard to overstate this," said Chris Murphy, senior vice president of brand marketing at Adidas.

"It's massive."

The tournament carries added significance for Nike, which has been working to revive sales after a difficult period.

The American sportswear giant has struggled since 2024 following a series of strategic missteps, including an overemphasis on lifestyle products at the expense of technical performance footwear that helped build its global reputation.

After issuing cautious financial guidance in June, Nike has identified football, alongside basketball and running, as a key pillar of its turnaround strategy under chief executive Elliott Hill.

"The World Cup is always a moment to prove ourselves," Hill told analysts.

"It's one of the toughest battlegrounds in sport, and we're coming with our best."

ANTHONY NLEBEM

How Gossy Ukanwoke is redefining responsible leadership in Africa's gaming industry

In Africa's rapidly expanding gaming and entertainment industry, success has traditionally been measured by market share, customer acquisition and revenue growth. But Gossy Ukanwoke, Managing Director of KingMakers and CEO of BetKing, is championing a different leadership philosophy, one that places social impact alongside commercial performance.

As expectations grow for businesses to demonstrate measurable environmental, social and governance (ESG) commitments, Ukanwoke believes corporate leadership should extend beyond balance sheets to creating lasting value in the communities companies serve.

That philosophy has become increasingly visible through BetKing Cares, the company's flagship employee-led corporate social responsibility initiative, which has evolved into one of the gaming industry's most sustained community impact programmes.

Now in its fifth year, the 2026 edition of the initiative, tagged "Month of Good", delivered healthcare services, maternal support, nutritional assistance and food relief across Lagos, Abia, Cross River and the Federal Capital Territory.

Rather than focusing solely on charitable donations, the programme reflects a broader strategy to embed social responsibility in the company's culture by encouraging employees to lead and participate in community initiatives.

Moving beyond corporate philanthropy

Across Africa, gaming companies have increasingly faced scrutiny over their social responsibilities, with regulators, investors and consumers expecting operators to contribute meaningfully to community development.

Under Ukanwoke's leadership, BetKing has sought to reposition corporate social responsibility from a periodic exercise into an integral part of its business identity.

This year's intervention placed particular emphasis on maternal healthcare, providing more than 500 pregnant women with prenatal consultations, essential medications, nutritional support, hygiene kits and health education.

For many beneficiaries in underserved communities, the initiative offered access to healthcare services that remain out of reach for many households.

The campaign also extended support through food distribution, clothing donations and essential relief materials, helping vulnerable families cope with rising economic pressures.

Building a culture of employee-led impact

One distinguishing feature of BetKing Cares is its employee-driven structure.

Rather than limiting social investment to corporate donations, staff members actively volunteer in identifying communities, organising outreach programmes and delivering assistance directly to beneficiaries.

The model reinforces a culture where community engagement is viewed as a shared responsibility across the organisation rather than the exclusive function of a corporate affairs department.

Industry observers say such approaches increasingly align with global ESG expectations, where employee participation has become an important indicator of authentic corporate citizenship.

Leadership with a social purpose

Speaking on the initiative, Ukanwoke said businesses have a responsibility to ensure that commercial success translates into meaningful social progress.

"BetKing Cares represents our belief that business success must translate into meaningful social impact. As leaders, we have a responsibility to use our platforms not only to grow industries, but to uplift people. That is the kind of legacy we are building at BetKing, one rooted in access, dignity and sustainable community impact."

His comments reflect a growing shift among African business leaders who increasingly view long-term corporate success as inseparable from the wellbeing of the communities in which they operate.

Setting a new standard for the gaming industry

The African gaming and entertainment sector has witnessed rapid expansion over the past decade, driven by mobile technology, digital payments and a growing youth population.

Making the best use of young Nigerian geniuses

AYO OYOZE BAJE

Baje is Nigerian first food technologist in the media and author of 'Drumbeats of Democracy'

They are immensely talented, creative and ingenious minds breaking academic boundaries to set global records. From humble background, they defy all odds, muster the intellectual will to scale over high hurdles placed on their paths to finally reach the finishing lines of the race of global competitions, far ahead of their peers from several other countries.

But are their salutary efforts duly recognized by the governments-both federal and state - as well as the private sector? That is the million naira question.

In fact, they àre supposed to be well positioned so as to solve some of our recurring challenges concerning infrastructural development, education and healthcare delivery, food security from the agricultural sector as well as addition to that of transportation?

For instance, three Nigerian students, sponsored by tech CEO Alex Onyia, brought home four gold medals at the 2026 International STEM Olympiad held at the Università Campus Bio-Medico di Roma in Italy between July 2-8, 2026. The brilliant young minds competed against over 11,500 contestants, as

representatives from over 150 countries.The standout scholars included:Don-Anele Munachimso (17) who won two gold medals, securing world titles in both Science and Mathematics (Senior Division). Similarly,

Egejurum Onyedikachi (11) won gold and emerged as the World's Best in Mathematics for the Primary Category while Chimdiebube Onwubiko (13) also won gold in Mathematics for the Junior Division.

Additionally, students from Gonzaga Jesuit College (Okija, Anambra State) made the country proud by securing 8 gold medals at the same International STEM Olympiad. Yet, they are not the first set of young Nigerian geniuses to put Nigeria on the global academic map.

Next came, Chimfumnanya Aghaduno and Ikenna Enwere also represented the country at the 2026 Pan African Mathematics Olympiad in Ivory Coast. Aghaduno made history as the first Nigerian female to win a silver medal at the competition. As for Faith Odunsi, at just 15 years old, this student from The

> **"All of the great geniuses of the world were inspired and driven by their desire to enrich the lives of others."**
>
> — Robin Sharma

Ambassadors School (located in Ota, Ogun State) won the Global Open Mathematics Competition, crushing the competition with an incredible 40 points against a second-place score of 10.

Similarly, Victor Ominizibe Oforji-Oboku, a robotics prodigy hailing from Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, was the sole African to win a bronze medal in the Coding Category at the International Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (ISTEM) Olympiad in the Netherlands.

In a similar vein, these phenomenal teenagers,

Rukayya Muhammad Fema and Nafisa Abdullahi Aminu, representing Yobe state, competed at the 2025 TeenEagle Global Finals in London, with Rukayya, 15, crowned the world's best in the debate category. She triumphed over 20,000 students from 69 countries to claim the Global English Award in London, United Kingdom.

On his part, Ovie Okpako-Onyokoko won double gold medals at the global International STEM Olympiad held in Barcelona, Spain. Described as a prodigy from Graceland International School, Port Harcourt, his award-winning streak also includes a gold medal in the Vandal International Junior Science Olympiad (VIJSO) and a silver medal in the International Junior Mathematics Olympiad (IJMO).

Also, at the Enactus World Cup Nigerian university chapters (including teams from Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi) regularly win national championships to compete on the global stage at the Enactus World Cup, pitching entrepreneurial and sustainable community-impact projects.International Festival of Engineering, Science and Technology (I-FEST).

In fact, Nigerian tertiary-level student teams regularly sweep grand prizes at the global ICT finals held in China. Competing against hundreds of global teams, Nigerian students have claimed championship titles in networking and cloud tracks, reinforcing the nation's status as a growing digital talent hub. Microsoft Imagine Cup: Nigerian university teams—such as Team TREP from the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA)—have excelled in regional and global tiers of the Microsoft Imagine Cup, engineering Internet of Things (IoT) solutions that tackle global healthcare challenges.

On a general note, therefore, Nigerian students have a strong track record of securing top honors in prestigious global academic and innovation competitions. They have been consistently excelling in STEM Olympiads, global English assessments, technology hackathons, and vocational challenges against peers from over 150 countries

On the way forward, our young geniuses should be seen as great blessings to the country. There should be a credible data base on them and their innovations by the Ministry of Science and Technology, that of Agriculture and Economic Development.

Both the federal and state governments should identify with them and find ways and means to provide the enabling environment for the products of their creative ingenuity to thrive and fund them for mass production through Public Private Partnerships, PPP. To do so we should learn lessons from the partnerships between the United States and the South East Asia.

For instance, in the 1980s, the United States learned from Southeast Asia and broader East Asia primarily by shifting from domestic manufacturing to embracing international production networks. To counter rising competition from Japan, US firms adapted by relying on the region for cost-effective semiconductor assembly, outsourced manufacturing, and new models of strategic R&D consortia.

The key ways the US adapted and learned during this period include: Outsourcing Assembly and Testing: Facing high operational costs at home, US tech companies began offloading labor-intensive manufacturing and assembly processes to Southeast Asian nations like Malaysia and Singapore, transforming the region into a major hub for electronics.

The US learned from the success of East Asian economic models—characterized by strong government-industry collaboration and targeted investments in vocational training—forced the US to re-evaluate its own laissez-faire approach. Forming R&D Consortia: In response to state-sponsored technology programs abroad, the US tech industry learned the value of cooperation. This led to the creation of collaborative entities like Semiconductor Research Corporation (SRC) in 1982 and SEMATECH in 1987 to pool resources and restore American semiconductor dominance.

To curb the rapid expansion of foreign competitors, the US learned to use legislative tools, such as the Semiconductor Industry Association's (SIA) Section 301 filings and bilateral agreements, to monitor and protect its domestic technology supply chains.

In all of these, we need to make the best use of our young geniuses because: "Intellectuals solve problems, but geniuses prevent them" as Albert Einstein rightly stated.

To Tinubu, who doesn't know Jakande, builder of modern Lagos

IKEDDY ISIGUZO

Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues

AN embarrassing narrative about Bola Ahmed Tinubu is that he built Lagos and was going to transfer that same passion to building Nigeria. Not only is the tale dumb but more embarrassing was that it refused to fly.

Tinubu was and remains an affliction to Lagos - and Nigeria. Tinubu has nothing to show for eight years of being Governor of Lagos. His policies can be destructive, to the shock of those who have been lured to the deceptive stories of Tinubu's deeds in Lagos.

Some of his propagandists claim Tinubu is the one who built what they nebulously called "modern Lagos". Tinubu didn't build anything and is proving incapable of using the vast resources under his control to work for the common good.

He did the same in Lagos and today his principal boast is his expertise in tax collection.

In only four years in office, Alhaji Lateef Kayode Jakande built the modern Lagos State, to the shock of his successors who have been unable, all combined, to do a tiny fraction of what Jakande did.

Their underground campaign against Jakande lists working for Sani Abacha and being originally from Kwara State, when every civilian Governor of Lagos State is known to originally to hail from outside Lagos State.

Jakande's name evokes jealousy instead of inspiring the later day owners of Lagos to continue to treat Lagos with the zeal with which Jakande administered Lagos.

. Built the current Lagos State Secretariat which houses all the state ministries as well as the Governor's occupied by all subsequent governors of the state.

Some of the things Jakande did in just four years -

. Built the Lagos State House of Assembly complex.

. Built the Lagos State Television and Radio Lagos

. Lagos State University which they will not name after Jakande because the modern builders of Lagos do not want the world to keep remembering Jakande. They want to re-write the history of Lagos to cover Tinubu's emptiness.

. General Hospitals in zones all over the State with free health care.

. Teacher Training College and the College of Education.

. Thousands of low costs, medium cost, and high-cost houses in Ijaiye, Dolphin, Oke-Afa, Ije, Abesan, Iponri, Ipaja, Abule Nla, Epe, Amuwo-Odofin, Anikantamo, Surulere, Iba, Ikorodu, Badagry, Isheri/Olowu, Orisigun, Maryland etc.

. Water Management Board and Waste Disposal Board.

. Incinerators in Oshodi, Epe, Ilubirin, in Lagos Island. The Lagos State never used them, instead Babatunde Fashola built one incinerator in Agege towards the end of his tenure.

. Constructed the Adiyan Water Works to increase water supply in the State to 18.16 million litres per day.

. Modernized and expanded the Iju Water Works, first commissioned in 1915 to increase daily capacity from 159 million to 204 million litres per day.

. Commissioned the giant car crusher equipment to crush derelict vehicles in Lagos State. It had the capacity to crush 45 vehicles per day.

. Rehabilitated and resurfaced Epe/Ijebu-Ode Road, Oba Akran Avenue, Toyin Street, Town Planning Way, Alimosho-Idimu-Egbe Road, Idimu-Iba-LASU Road, the new secretariat road and several others.

. Constructed Victoria Island/Epe Road which someone said was worth more than "an oil well". The construction created the Lekki- Ajah- Epe corridor on which seats property businesses reckoned in trillions of Naira. Other businesses the opening of Epe produced include Dangote Refinery, Lekki Deep Seaport, Lagos Business School, and Pan-Atlantic University. The road, if you are distracted by the cosmetic improvements on it, is almost where Jakande left it, 43 years, more than half of that time, 27 years, under Tinubu-controlled administrations.

Jakande left in 1983 at the instance of Muhammadu Buhari, who APC gifted eight years of civilian presidency on Tinubu's orders. The Epe Express is supposed to have two bridges approaching Epe, only one has been in use, 43 years after Jakande, and in 27 years of Tinubu's effective control of Lagos.

. Asphalt Plant for the Department of Public Works.

. Established Electricity Board for Rural Electrification with provision of street lights.

. Modernized, expanded and commissioned Onikan Stadium in 1982.

. Established a singular school system and ensured genuine free education in Lagos State. Lagos ran a three-stream educational system before Jakande.

. Raised primary schools in Lagos State to 812 with 533,001 pupils (against 605 primary schools with 434,545 pupils he met in 1979) and secondary schools to 223 with 167,629 students (against 105 schools with 107,835 students in 1979).

. Constructed 11, 729 classrooms with the maximum of 40 children per class between March and August 1980, by 1983, he had constructed over 22,000 classrooms. The buildings derided as "chicken pen", are still in use.

. Commercial passenger boats christened "Baba Kekere and "Itafaji" to run the Mile 2 - Marina (CMS) route via the lagoons were inaugurated to mark the official launch of the Lagos State Ferry Services.

. Lagos State Printing Corporation and Lagos Television.

. State Traffic Management Authority (Road Marshals).

. The metroline that Jakande was building was also aborted by Buhari's coup. Nigeria had to repay the loan for that project.

. Small scale Industries Credit Scheme which preceded the Eko Bank.

. Established LASACO Insurance.

Expanded existing markets and built new ones.

. Established Traditional Medicine Board.

Lagos State ran a prudent financial system that it had enough money in reserves that it once lent money to Borno State.

All these and more Jakande did in four years. What did Tinubu do in 27 years?

Tinubu did some remarkable things:

Enron scandal, an $800 million Independent Power Project in year 2000 as Governor of Lagos State was one of his biggest projects. The federal government and the World Bank kicked against the technology, the cost of the project, its sustainability, and the outrageous contract terms that favoured Enron, among them a 20-year tax holiday and requirements that Lagos would settle vast financial obligations if the contract was terminated, and protection for Enron from penalties. Tinubu denied any wrong doing. The contract eventually collapsed after Enron filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in the United States in late 2001. Tinubu had campaigned to end the epileptic power supply in Lagos State.

Only in 2022, Tinubu made the needless claim that he brought Econet, now Airtel, to Nigeria. Everyone, except Tinubu, remembers that it was the Zimbabwean businessman Strive Masiyiwa who secured the licence. Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Lagos States made investments that they later withdrew under controversial circumstances.

With all that Jakande did that the Lagos State government refuses to acknowledge, Tinubu believes that he could hoodwink people through ownership of the development of Lagos.

This is the man who claims he developed Lagos - his latest addition being the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway, that has increased flooding in the Lekki area, and that is being re-designed as it is being constructed, to manage flooding, wants Nigerians to believe he has interest in making Nigeria better.

In three years, Tinubu has proven himself incapable of leading Nigeria. Our circumstances are already too dreary to contemplate more years of Tinubu.

Finally...

AFTER almost two months in captivity, pupils and teachers abducted in Orire Local Government Area of Oyo State have been "released" or "rescued". Bayo Onanuga, Tinubu's spokesman is uncertain which happened. "Finally, the kidnapped pupils and teachers in Orire, Oyo, have been freed by their abductors," Onanuga wrote. He would later write that the security agencies freed the captives.

WHAT is the place of ICPC in investigating the alleged phantom agency when the President has pressed absolute confidence in the integrity of his Chief of Staff? Is it expected that ICPC will doubt Tinubu's word? Moreover, what will ICPC be investigating when the matter is already in court? Why did the police arrest the father of the defendant? What was his link with the agency?

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