

NATHANIEL GBAORON, JOS; ADEOLA AJAKAIYE, KANO; FAITH AWA MAJI, KATSINA; SIKIRAT SHEHU, ILORIN; BENJAMIN AGESAN, KADUNA AND HEMBADOON ORSAR, MAKURDI

The controversy over the All Progressives Congress

(APC)'s Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket began in 2022 after the party's presidential candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, announced Kashim Shettima, former Borno State governor, also a Muslim, as his

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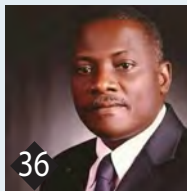


From Creditor to Debtor: Nigeria's long descent from oil wealth to borrowing nation

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■ Lent \$240m to World Bank in 1974; \$120m to IMF in 1975

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Enugu constitutes inter-ministerial taskforce on medical quackery



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Divergent reactions as NASS criminalises preaching on commercial buses

JOHN SALAU

There have been divergent reactions to the recent passage by the Senate of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC)

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L-R: Olusegun Obasanjo, former president; Azuta Mbata, president general, Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide; Emir Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, former Central Bank governor; Alex Otti, governor of Abia State; Bart Nnaji, celebrant and former minister of Power; his wife and GMD of Geometric Power Group, Agatha Nnaji; Peter Mbah, governor of Enugu State, and Uche Azikiwe, wife of Nigeria's former President, Nnamdi Azikiwe, during the cake-cutting ceremony at the 70th birthday anniversary of Prof. Nnaji in Enugu, recently.

FG's long embargo on employment raises concerns, queries

■ Citizens allege job racketeering in corridors of power

OBINNA EMELIKE

For over six years now, there has been a blanket 'embargo' on employment imposed on the Federal Civil Service by the government, with no sign of lifting soon.

In March 2020, the government, under Muhammadu Buhari, former president, placed the em-

bargo, citing the COVID-19 pandemic and a failing economy.

Buttressing the rationale for the embargo, in 2021, Chris Ngige, the then Minister of Labour, explained that the embargo was due to paucity of funds caused by the economy, which was in a bad shape then.

Then, he also pointed the unemployed to government's

Continues on Page 49

Beyond the rescue: How weak local governance fuels insecurity in rural communities

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

For nearly two months, fear hung over the remote communities surrounding the Old Oyo National Park.

Parents waited anxiously for news. Schools became symbols of vulnerability. Villages that had long com-

plained of abandonment suddenly found themselves at the centre of a national security crisis.

The victims, pupils and teachers abducted on May 15, 2026, from schools in Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State, were eventually freed after a coordinated operation involving the Nigerian Army, intelligence agencies and local securi-

ty outfits. Security officials said the operation disrupted the kidnappers' network and forced the captors to release the victims without collecting ransom.

While the rescue brought relief to families and renewed confidence in the capabilities of security agencies, it also reignited a deeper national

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News

2027: Adekanmbi, Peller Ignite Oyo North as APM "Thank You" Tour Hits Iseyin

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

The political landscape of Oyo North Senatorial District was electric with immense energy weekend as the Allied People's Movement (APM) senatorial candidate, Shina Peller, mobilised thousands of passionate supporters, party faithful, and residents to accord a heartwarming, carnival-like reception to the party's gubernatorial candidate, Bimbo Adekanmbi, in Iseyin.

The high-octane gathering, which held at the historic Iseyin City Hall, served as the latest and last stop of Adekanmbi's statewide "Thank You" tour across all federal constituencies in Oyo North solidifying the APM's rapidly growing momentum ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The atmosphere inside and around the Iseyin City Hall was electric. Drumming, singing, and passionate chanting echoed through the streets as a massive crowd of party stalwarts, market women, youth organizations, and community leaders from

across the Iseyin/Itesiwaju/Kajola/Iwajowa federal constituency gathered hours before the convoy's arrival.

When Shina Peller, alongside the governorship candidate Bimbo Adekanmbi, stepped into the venue, the hall erupted in thunderous applause. The reception sent a clear and unmistakable signal to political observers that the APM has established a formidable, deeply rooted structure in the Oke-Ogun zone.

Speaking at the event, Shina Peller expressed profound gratitude to the people of Iseyin and Oyo North for their unwavering loyalty. He noted that the sheer scale of the turnout was a testament to the people's desire for refreshing, result-oriented leadership.

"What we are witnessing today is not just a political gathering; it is a movement of the people, by the people, and for the people," Peller declared.

"Iseyin and the entire Oyo North are ready for real progress. With Bimbo Adekanmbi at the helm of Oyo State and our team working relentlessly, we are building an inclusive future where Oke-

Ogun and indeed all of Oyo State will thrive."

In his remarks, a visibly moved Bimbo Adekanmbi thanked Shina Peller for his exemplary leadership and the entire Oke Ogun party faithful for their unmatched grassroots mobilisation. He noted that the warmth of the Oke-Ogun people has renewed his commitment to liberating the state and delivering the dividends of democracy directly to the grassroots.

Adekanmbi emphasized that his "Thank You" tour was vital to reconnecting with the party's foundation and listening directly to local stakeholders to ensure that the APM's eventual roadmap for the state directly reflects the immediate needs of the populace.

The mega-reception brought together an array of highly influential political players in the region such as prominent Oyo State APM executives, youth and women leaders from all four local governments of the federal constituency and beyond.

Recall that following recent internal fractures within the People's Democratic Par-

ty (PDP), a strategic alliance was forged between Governor Seyi Makinde's faction and the APM.

Some of the prominent personalities in attendance were the Alliance chairman, Dayo Ogungbenro, Alliance Vice chairman, Wasiu Adeleke, renowned political stakeholder, Omokunmi Mustapha, Iseyin local government chairman, Bisi Ras- aq Fadiran, Iseyin APM LGA Chairman, Musediq Adele, APM State Assembly candidate for Iseyin/Itesiwaju Constituency, Dasola Fadiran and others.

Also, the event witnessed traditional representatives and key opinion leaders from the Oke-Ogun, as well as thousands of enthusiastic volunteers donning APM colors and carrying banners of support for both Peller and Adekanmbi.

With the success of the Iseyin rally, the APM has once again proven that its coalition of youthful energy, experienced leadership, and deep local connection is positioned to be the defining force in Oyo State's upcoming 2027 electoral cycle.

Oyo launches digital land survey to boost transparent, efficient administration

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

The Oyo State Government has launched the Digital Land Survey Plan Registry to enhance transparency, efficiency, and accountability in land administration, marking a significant step towards modernising the state's land management system and improving access to survey records and related services.

Speaking at the launch ceremony held at the Office of Surveyor-General, Secretariat, Ibadan, Ak-in-Funmilayo Williams, Commissioner for Lands, Housing and Urban Development, said the Land Survey Plan Registry is an innovative platform designed to modernize the registration, management, verification, and spatial analysis of survey plans.

The commissioner who spoke through Adesoji Adeoye, Oyo State Surveyor-General, explained that (DLSPR), is a landmark initiative that reinforces its commitment to digital transformation, transparency, and efficient land administration across the state.

He maintained that digitizing the Land Survey Plan Registry will make the platform provide faster, more secure, and more reliable services to licensed surveyors, land professionals, investors, government agencies, and the general public.

"The DLSPR represents a major milestone in strengthening the integrity of land records, improving service delivery, reducing processing times, and enhancing public confidence in Oyo State's land administration system."

"It also supports evi-

dence-based planning and sustainable development by providing improved access to accurate and reliable geospatial information.

"As part of the implementation process, the training of 40 personnel commenced today to equip participants with the skills and knowledge required for the effective operation and management of the Digital Land Survey Plan Registry."

"The Office of the Surveyor-General encourages all trainees to demonstrate dedication, commitment, and professionalism throughout the programme, recognizing the critical role they will play in ensuring the successful deployment and long-term sustainability of the initiative."

He therefore confirmed that the digital platform and training programme are sponsored by the Oyo State Government through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) between the Oyo State Government (OYSG) and Private Networks Nigeria Limited.

While explaining that upon successful completion of the training, participants will be offered temporary employment opportunities to support the deployment and operation of the Digital Land Survey Plan Registry, he however appreciated the Federal School of Surveying, Oyo, for its invaluable support and technical contributions to the successful implementation of the initiative.

He noted that the institution's partnership has further strengthened the state's efforts to build local capacity and advance modern land administration practices.



L-R: Oyebola Morakinyo, general manager, Cavista Technologies Nigeria; Dr. Taiwo Ganiyat Olusesi, registrar/chief executive, Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM) Chartered; Abimbola Ayuba, president/chairman of council, NIM (Chartered); Dr. Kola Adesina, group managing director, Sahara Power Group; and Clara Ijeoma Okere, national treasurer, NIM (Chartered), at the institute's Women in Management and Leadership conference 2026 in Lagos, recently.

Kwara distributes learning materials to 127 students

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

The Kwara State Government has distributed learning materials to 127 newly admitted students of Government Technical College, Ilorin for the 2025/2026 academic session, reaffirming its commitment to strengthening technical and vocational education across the state.

The intervention was funded by the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education in partnership with the Kwara State Ministry of Education and Human Capital Development.

Lawal Olohungebe, commissioner for Education and Human Capital Development, stated this during the distribution ceremony in Ilorin, disclosing that the

intervention reflected Governor Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq's commitment to developing skilled manpower through sustained investment in technical and vocational education.

Olohungebe, who was represented by Victoria Ajide, director, Human Capital Development, said the materials would improve learning, support practical training as well as prepare

students with skills required for employment, entrepreneurship and national development.

Sulaiman Abdulrafiu, the Principal of the College, described the intervention as the first of its kind in the institution and a major boost to teaching and thanked the Governor for facilitating the programme, while commending the federal government for supporting techni-

cal education in Kwara State.

Speaking for parents, Hadi Asileke, described the intervention as timely and beneficial to students pursuing technical and vocational education.

He urged beneficiaries to use the materials responsibly and appealed for improved workshops, classrooms and modern equipment to strengthen practical training.

Each beneficiary received

uniforms, workshop kits, identity cards, textbooks, exercise books, drawing materials, calculators, mathematical sets and refunded Parent Teacher Association charges.

Education officials, parents, community leaders, teachers and students attended the ceremony, reaffirming shared commitment to expanding access to quality technical and vocational education in Kwara.

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News

JOHN SALAU

Olisa Agbakoba Legal (OAL) has unveiled a legal framework to reduce lending risks under the \$700 million Cabotage Vessel Financing Fund (CVFF).

This was unveiled during the maiden Maritime Policy Roundtable, where stakeholders proposed stronger credit assessments, legal due diligence, effective risk management and enforceable security arrangements for CVFF implementation.

The roundtable was organised as stakeholders continued discussions on the implementation of the CVFF, which was established under the Cabotage Act to support vessel acquisition, strengthen indigenous shipping capacity and expand Nigerian participation in domestic coastal trade.

Olisa Agbakoba, Senior Partner at OAL, stated that the Cabotage Act established the CVFF to support the acquisition of vessels by indigenous shipping operators and to increase Nigerian participation in domestic coastal trade.

He further provided a historical overview of the CVFF, tracing its development within

Nigeria's broader efforts to promote indigenous ownership and participation in the shipping industry.

Agbakoba examined major developments in Nigeria's maritime policy, including the establishment of the Nigerian National Shipping Line and the enactment of the Coastal and Inland Shipping (Cabotage) Act 2003.

Collins Okeke, Partner at OAL, presented a legal and credit-risk framework to assist participating financial institutions in assessing maritime finance risks, protecting their loan portfolios, and reducing exposure to non-performing loans.

Okeke identified credit-risk assessment, corporate and regulatory due diligence, security and facility structuring, and clear default and recovery procedures as important safeguards for sustainable CVFF lending.

He stated that financial institutions should independently assess applicants'



L-R: Capt. Nicolas Bernard, managing director, NBC Maritime Ltd.; Yvonne Ezekiel, managing partner, Olisa Agbakoba Legal (OAL); Capt. Ladi Olubowale, president, African Shipowners Association in Nigeria; Vera Odu, representative, Fidelity Bank Plc; and Olisa Agbakoba, SAN, senior partner, Olisa Agbakoba Legal (OAL), at the maiden edition of the OAL Maritime Policy Roundtable on De-Risking Cabotage Vessel Financing Fund Lending.

financial capacity, existing debt obligations, operational experience and projected cash flow rather than rely solely on information provided by applicants.

He also highlighted the need to verify beneficial ownership,

regulatory compliance and the source of applicants' mandatory equity contributions before financing is approved.

Nicolas Bernard, the managing director of NBC Maritime Ltd., stated that acquiring a vessel was only the

beginning of the investment process, noting that successful operations were essential to generating returns and maintaining asset value.

He made this known in a presentation on professional ship management and its role in

protecting maritime investments and preserving the long-term value of financed vessels.

Bernard identified technical management, preventive maintenance, crew management, regulatory compliance, procurement, financial oversight and digital monitoring as important components of professional ship management.

He also emphasised the importance of involving professional ship managers from the early stages of vessel selection and acquisition.

Participants at the roundtable also noted the need to examine cargo reservation systems in other jurisdictions, given the close link between cargo reservation arrangements and banks' ability to finance vessels on viable terms.

Discussions at the roundtable extended beyond the immediate implementation of the CVFF to the development of a sustainable framework for long-term maritime financing in Nigeria.

ASo Multimedia reaffirms commitment to promoting investment, leadership excellence

...Announces 6th South West Investment Summit and Advancement Awards

EMMANUEL SALAWU

ASo Multimedia has reaffirmed its commitment to promoting investment, leadership excellence, youth empowerment, enterprise development, and sustainable socio-economic advancement through impactful initiatives that continue to contribute meaningfully to national development.

It also announced its 6th South West Investment Summit and Advancement Awards 2026, one of Nigeria's foremost investment and economic development platforms, to hold on Friday, 4th September 4, 2026, at Lagos Oriental Hotel, Victoria Island, Lagos.

The summit, it stated, is organised in partnership with the Bank of Industry (BOI),

and will convene an impressive gathering of government officials, policymakers, investors, development finance institutions, captains of industry, business executives, entrepreneurs, diplomats, development partners, traditional rulers, youth leaders, and members of the international business community to discuss practical strategies for accelerating investment, industrialisation, innovation, enterprise development, and sustainable economic growth across South West Nigeria.

Kingsley Tolulope Agboola, co-convenor, said that the summit was designed to serve as a catalyst for economic transformation by bringing together decision-makers and stakeholders committed to building a more prosperous and investment-friendly South West.

"The South West re-

mains one of Africa's most vibrant economic regions with immense potential for investment, innovation, enterprise, and industrial growth. Through this summit, we aim to create meaningful conversations, strategic partnerships, and actionable solutions that will unlock new opportunities for businesses, empower young entrepreneurs, attract local and foreign investments, and contribute significantly to Nigeria's economic development," Agboola said.

He further noted that the South West Advancement Awards would recognise and celebrate distinguished Nigerians whose exceptional leadership, integrity, innovation, and service continue to inspire national development and promote excellence across various sectors.

The organising committee

has extended invitations to serving governors, ministers, heads of federal agencies, lawmakers, development finance institutions, corporate executives, traditional rulers, diplomatic representatives, international organisations, investors, entrepreneurs, and youth leaders to participate in this landmark event.

Corporate organisations, financial institutions, development partners, and private sector stakeholders are also invited to partner with the summit through sponsorships, exhibitions, corporate branding, and strategic collaborations.

The summit aligns with Nigeria's broader agenda of promoting economic diversification, strengthening public-private partnerships, encouraging entrepreneurship, improving access to finance, supporting innovation, creating employment opportunities, and enhancing regional competitiveness.

The South West Investment Summit has, over the years, established itself as a credible platform for fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors, creating opportunities for investment promotion, policy dialogue, business networking, and regional economic integration.

According to the organisers, the 2026 edition is expected to attract participants from across Nigeria and beyond, providing an opportunity to showcase the enormous economic potential of the South West region in sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, technology, digital economy, renewable energy, real estate, transportation, infrastructure, healthcare, education, creative industries, and small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

Union Bank employees promote cleaner waterways, coastlines with beach cleanup

BLESSING ADIMABUA

Union Bank of Nigeria, in furtherance of its commitment to building a cleaner and more sustainable environment, organised a beach cleanup in partnership with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) at Alpha Community Beach, Lekki, Lagos, recently.

The cleanup was held to mark the Bank's 2026 Employee Volunteer Day under its Employee Volunteering initiative, powered by Union-Cares, its Corporate Social Responsibility proposition. The event reinforced Union Bank's commitment to environmental stewardship, sustainable community development, and collective action for a cleaner future.

Nigeria currently generates an estimated 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, with Lagos alone accounting for approximately 870,000 tonnes of that figure. More than 88 percent of this waste is never recycled, and a significant proportion finds its way into rivers, lagoons, and the ocean, posing grave consequences for marine biodiversity and coastal communities.

It is against this backdrop, and in direct alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) and Life Below Water (SDG 14), that Union Bank organised

this exercise.

Bringing together more than 50 Union Bank employee volunteers, representatives of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, and students from Rodan High School, Ajah, Lagos, the exercise embodied the spirit of SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals, by uniting corporate, civil society, educational, and government stakeholders around a shared environmental purpose. The Lagos State Government, through the Lagos Waste Management Authority (LAWMA), provided critical logistical support, ensuring that all collected waste was properly sorted and disposed of in line with environmental best practices.

Volunteers were organised into eight groups, collectively gathering in excess of 200 kilograms of waste from the beach, with additional waste recovered by participating individuals outside the groups. The collected waste was weighed at the end of the exercise to underscore the initiative's measurable environmental impact.

Speaking at the commencement of the cleanup, the Bank's Chief Brand and Marketing Officer, Olufunmilola Aluko, reaffirmed Union Bank's commitment to environmental stewardship:

"At Union Bank, we understand that protecting the environment is a shared responsibility, and we are committed to playing our part.



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News

Students' group commends Nigeria Police for insisting on autopsy in Mary Habila's death

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

The Youth and Students Advocates for Development Initiative (YSAD) has commended the Ebonyi State Command of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) for insisting on autopsy on the remains of Mary Habila, who was allegedly found dead naked, with blood smear in her mouth, on the premises of David Umahi's country home at Uburu, Ebonyi State.

YSAD also called on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to immediately suspend David Umahi, as a minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, pending the outcome of the

investigation.

The group in a statement signed by Nwagbara Obinna, its executive director, explained that their demand in the matter followed disturbing explicit videos and pictures obtained from traditional and online news sources.

The group noted with grave concern that the family of the deceased has requested that no autopsy be carried out, and that no investigation be pursued, while demanding that the corpse be handed over for burial, a demand YSAD viewed, as deeply troubling and contrary to the principles of justice, transparency, and accountability.

"In a matter involving

mysterious death of a citizen within the residence of a high-ranking public official, the full weight of the law must prevail. An autopsy is not optional, it is a necessary legal and medical procedure to establish the cause of death, and no family request or political influence should override this procedure."

They urged the Nigeria Police Force to remain resolute and uncompromising in the case, stressing that no pressure, whether from the family, powerful individuals, or any quarters, should deter the police from conducting a thorough, independent, and transparent investigation.

According to YSAD, the sanctity of Mary Habila's life demands nothing less.

YSAD called on the Inspector General of Police to personally monitor this case and ensure that all standard operating procedures are strictly followed.

"Given the gravity of the circumstances: a young woman losing her life in the residence of a sitting minister. It is only proper that Umahi steps aside to allow an unhindered and unbiased inquiry. This is not a presumption of guilt, but a necessary measure to uphold public confidence in the integrity of the investigation process.

"Justice must not be sacrificed on the altar of influence or convenience. Mary Habila deserves the truth, and the Nigerian people deserve accountability," YSAD stated.

Beverage recycling alliance, UNIDO partner to deepen community-based waste collection

JOHN SALAU

The Food and Beverage recycling alliance (FBRA) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) recently partnered to deepen community-based waste collection in Lagos.

The initiative featured the official launch of a new FBRA-UNIDO recyclables collection centre Igando, Lagos, which will be managed by West Africa ENRG.

The facility is one of three completed collection centres under the project and will provide households and small businesses with a reliable channel for the collection and recovery of recyclable materials.

The newly launched collection centre is designed to serve as a permanent community-based collection hub where residents and small businesses can deposit recyclable materials for collection and processing.

The facility is expected to improve access to recycling services in the area while supporting Nigeria's broader transition to a circular economy.

"We are building the generation that will change the narrative on improper waste disposal by taking action," Agharese Onaghise, executive director of FBRA, stated.

According to Onaghise, the initiative was to commemorate the 2026 World

Environment Day, with a FBRA organised environmental education sessions for over 250 secondary school students.

"When we reach young people in their schools, we are not just educating them about recycling," Onaghise stated.

She disclosed that the alliance also conducted a recycling awareness campaign that reached over 1,000 residents, and recovered more than three metric tonnes of recyclable waste from over 400 households through a community buy-back programme in Igando, Lagos.

According to her, the alliance remains committed to working with other stakeholders to expand recovery infrastructure, strengthen participation and improve the systems needed to track Nigeria's progress in packaging waste recovery.

Onaghise added that FBRA acknowledged the contribution of its member companies, whose support helped make the activities possible; indicating the value of collaboration among producers, regulators, recyclers and local communities.

According to her, FBRA will continue to encourage stronger support for the Extended Producer Responsibility framework across all levels of government and calls for increased participation by producers in organised packaging waste recovery systems.



L-R: Registrar/Chief Executive, Oluwatoyin Naiwo, Chartered FCIPD; National Treasurer, Adeyemi Ajayi, Chartered FCIPD; President and Chairman of the Governing Council, Ahmed Ladan Gobir; Vice President, Chidinma Obiejesi, and Guest Speaker at the 71st Induction Ceremony, Collins Edebiri, during the historic first-ever virtual Induction Ceremony of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (CIPM), held recently in Lagos, recently.

NINLAN sets up language laboratory to strengthen language teaching, others

...Holds 8th matriculation ceremony

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Ogbonna Onuoha, a professor and executive director, National Institute For Nigerian Languages, Aba, Nigeria, has reaffirmed the determination of the school's management to position NINLAN, as a globally recognised centre of excellence in Nigerian languages, multilingual research, indigenous knowledge systems and innovations.

Onuoha, in an address at the 8th matriculation ceremony of the institution, held recently, said that in keeping with global trends in language education that the management has prioritised

transforming the institute's language laboratory, by providing state-of-the art information and communication (ICT) facilities and contemporary language learning applications.

He stated that the initiative was aimed at strengthening language teaching, translation, interpretation, digital scholarship and multilingual research, while ensuring that the graduates are equipped with the technological competencies required in today's knowledge-driven world.

To strengthen NINLAN's role, as a centre for intellectual discourse and international collaboration, he said that the institution's management has started to upgrade its conference centre to international

standards.

He also affirmed that the modernised facility will provide an enabling environment for international conferences, professional workshops, policy dialogue and scholarly engagements, thereby positioning the Institute, as a preferred destination for academic and cultural exchange.

While congratulating the matriculating students on their successful admission into the Institution, the Executive Director, NINLAN, urged them to take advantage of every opportunity to develop themselves academically, morally and socially.

He advised them to read widely, think critically, ask questions, pursue innovation and prepare themselves to become worthy ambassadors of NINLAN and responsible

citizens of Nigeria.

"My dear students, today marks the beginning, not the end of your tertiary academic journey. Make integrity your watchword, discipline your habit and excellence your daily pursuit. Respect your lecturers, support one another, embrace diversity and always remember that your conduct will reflect not only on you, but also on this institution," he said.

Onuoha said that the National Institute for Nigerian Languages occupies a unique position in Nigeria's educational landscape, noting that as the nation's premier institution dedicated exclusively to Nigerian languages and cultures, its mandate extends beyond teaching.

"We are committed to the documentation, preservation,

development and promotion of Nigeria's rich linguistic heritage, while advancing multilingual education, research and cultural preservation," he noted.

He expressed gratitude to its regulatory agencies and strategic partners, especially Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, for its continued collaboration and mentorship, the National Commission for Colleges of Education for its guidance and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for ensuring transparency and credibility in the admission process.

"These partnerships demonstrate the power of collaboration in advancing educational excellence and we look forward to strengthening the relationships, while forging new partnerships

with Universities, research institutions, professional bodies, development agencies and other stakeholders," he stated.

Celestine Agoziem, Abia State Coordinator of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), who represented Is-haq Oloyede, Registrar, JAMB, commended the management of NINLAN for their efforts towards upgrading facilities at the institution.

He said, "I am highly impressed with the facilities available here, especially the ICT facilities and contemporary language-learning applications".

He congratulated the matriculating students for choosing to study at NINLAN and urged them to be good ambassadors of the institution.

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News

2027: INEC to conduct mock presidential election, audit electoral technology systems

AKOMBO AONDONA

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is considering conducting a comprehensive audit of all its electoral technology systems, alongside a mock presidential election, as part of measures to strengthen preparations for the 2027 general election.

Joash Amupitan, chairman of the Commission, disclosed this while receiving the British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Richard Montgomery, on a courtesy visit to the Commission's headquarters in Abuja.

The INEC Chairman said the proposals, which were under consideration by the Commission that same day, were informed by concerns arising from the 2023 general election, particularly regarding the reliability of election technology.

According to him, the Commission was looking at the possibility of auditing all its systems ahead of the 2027 election, as well as conduct-



Richard Montgomery and Joash Amupitan

ing a mock presidential election, to test the readiness of its processes and technology before the actual polls.

Amupitan noted that the proposed exercises were not originally captured in the Commission's budget, but stressed that INEC would explore ways to actualise them if required, given their potential value in strengthening the credibility of the general election.

He linked the proposals to the Commission's broader efforts at technological reliability, which include continued deployment of the Bimodal

Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IREV), as well as an ongoing review of the Commission's cyber-security architecture covering system redundancy, penetration testing and disaster recovery mechanisms.

The INEC Chairman explained that public confidence in the electoral process depended significantly on the reliability of the Commission's technology and processes, adding that INEC remained committed to addressing any gaps identified from previous elections ahead of 2027.

He listed election technology and cyber-security as one of the key areas of continued collaboration between INEC and the United Kingdom, noting that the Commission valued the technical partnership it had enjoyed with the UK and other international partners, including the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), in strengthening its electoral processes.

Amupitan reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to delivering elections that are credible, transparent and reflective of the will of Nigerians, stating that electoral credibility remained a shared responsibility requiring the cooperation of political parties, security agencies, civil society, development partners and citizens.

Earlier, on the purpose of his visit, Montgomery said his team had been keenly following INEC's preparations for the 2027 general election, including updates on the recent off-cycle elections in Ekiti, the Federal Capital Territory and Anambra, as well as ongoing preparations for the Osun State governorship election.

We will harness Ganye's natural resources to attract investment – Adamawa LG boss

HAPPY ZAROKADA, Yola

Puren Kamsobi, newly sworn-in chairman of Ganye Local Government Area of Adamawa State, has pledged to harness the area's abundant natural resources to attract investors and drive economic growth in the council.

Kamsobi made the commitment shortly after taking the oath of office, saying his administration would focus on creating an enabling environment for investment that would unlock the economic potential of the local government and improve the lives of residents.

He said that Ganye was richly endowed with natural resources and agricultural potential, stressing that these assets would be strategically promoted to attract both local and foreign investors capable of establishing businesses and creating employment opportunities.

According to the chairman, his administration will work closely with relevant government agencies, development partners and the private sector to explore the council's untapped resources and stimulate sus-

tainable economic development.

Kamsobi noted that attracting investment would not only boost internally generated revenue but also improve infrastructure, support small businesses and expand economic opportunities for youths and women across the local government.

He assured residents that his administration would pursue transparent and people-oriented governance, with priority attention to rural development, road construction, health-care, education and agricultural development.

The chairman called on the people of Ganye, community leaders and stakeholders to support his administration, emphasising that meaningful development can only be achieved through unity, cooperation and collective commitment.

Kamsobi reaffirmed his determination to deliver on his campaign promises, expressing confidence that with effective leadership and the support of the people, Ganye Local Government would witness significant economic growth and sustainable development during his tenure.

Over 110 youths graduate from NEPL/Seplat entrepreneurship programme, renovates school in Edo

IDRIS UMAR MOMOH, Benin

Over 110 young Nigerians have graduated from the NNPC Exploration and Production Limited (NEPL)/ Seplat Energy Joint Venture (JV) Youth Entrepreneurship Programme (YEP) in Edo State.

The programme was geared towards equipping the youths with practical renewable energy skills and start-up support to build sustainable livelihoods, serve their communities and contribute to Nigeria's clean energy future.

The Joint Venture also commissioned a renovated classroom block and modern learning facilities for the Visually Impaired Unit at the Ihogbe College, Benin City.

Speaking at the ceremony, Samson Ezugworie, Chief Operating Officer, Seplat Energy Plc, described YEP as a strategic investment in people, communities and the nation's future.

Ezugworie also added that the commissioned renovated classroom block was to expand access to quality education for underserved learners and reinforcing its commitment to inclusive community development.

The Youth Entrepreneurship Programme (YEP) graduation's titled, "Lighting Up the Nation: Empowering Youths in Renewable Energy Solutions," featured exhibitions of practical solutions developed by participants during the programme, including solar home systems, mini-grid.

According to Ezugworie, the Youth Entrepreneurship Programme is here to stay. We have sustained it over the years with our Joint Venture partner because we believe that investing in young people is fundamental to nation-building.

"Together, the initiatives demonstrate the NEPL/Seplat JV's strategic approach

to creating long-term value in its host communities through education, enterprise development, youth empowerment, energy access and social inclusion.

"The programme is designed to help young people convert technical training into income-generating enterprises, while also addressing real needs in homes, schools, health centres and small businesses that require reliable, affordable and cleaner energy solutions," he said.

Ezugworie added that the programme goes beyond skills acquisition by providing graduates with take-off grants to support the launch of their businesses and enable them

to begin creating value within their communities.

"Today, we celebrate your achievement, but tomorrow, we want to celebrate your impact. Your contribution should extend beyond personal success to creating opportunities, solving problems and transforming communities," he added.

Earlier, Chioma Afe, director, External Affairs and Social Performance of Seplat Energy Plc, said the YEP reflects the JV's commitment to building community resilience by connecting young people with skills that are relevant to the future of work and the evolving energy landscape.

Afe noted that the initiative was conceived to bridge the gap between learning and enterprise, ensuring that training translates into practical outcomes for individuals, families and local economies.

"Across Nigeria, families, schools, healthcare facilities and small businesses are seeking reliable, affordable and cleaner energy. By equipping young people with renewable energy skills, we are helping them create new sources of livelihood while empowering them to become problem-solvers in their communities," she stated.



L-R: Gregory Anokwu, representative of the Edo State Secondary Education Board, standing in for Rita Erewele, Board chairman; Samson Ezugworie, COO, Seplat Energy Plc, and Chioma Afe, director, External Affairs & Social Performance; at the commissioning of the NEPL/Seplat Energy JV newly renovated classroom block and modern learning facilities for students of the Visually Impaired Unit at Ihogbe College, Benin City.

Again, beheaded woman's body recovered in sack at Plateau refuse dump

NATHANIEL GBAORON, Jos

Residents of Angwan Durun-Uwa community in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State were thrown into panic on Thursday following the discovery of the decomposing body of a beheaded woman inside a sack at a refuse dump.

The discovery came two days after the headless body of a middle-aged man was found on farmland within the University of Jos, raising fresh concerns over a string of gruesome killings in Plateau State.

Danjuma Ibrahim, a youth leader in Barkin who confirmed the incident, said he received a distress call early Thursday morning informing him that a body had been abandoned at the refuse site.

"I received a call at

about 7 a.m. that a beheaded woman's body had been dumped inside a sack at the refuse dump in Angwan Durun-Uwa.

"We immediately alerted the police, who responded to the scene," Ibrahim said.

He explained that the body had already begun decomposing by the time it was discovered, making identification difficult.

The identity of the deceased was yet to be ascertained as of the time of filing this report.

The corpse was later evacuated from the scene, while investigations have commenced to determine the identity of the victim and track down those responsible for the killing.

Efforts to obtain confirmation from Alfred Alabo, the spokesperson of the Plateau State Police Command were unsuccessful as of the time of filing this report.

France marks National Day with push for deeper Nigeria economic, trade ties

TOMISIN FATOBA

France marked its National Day on Monday with a renewed push to deepen economic and trade ties with Nigeria, its largest partner in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Laurent Favier, consul general of France in Lagos, during the celebration said that the French bilateral co-operation with Nigeria has gained “remarkable momentum” in recent years, backed by high-level exchanges and new agreements across trade, culture, education and infrastructure.

The French National Day commemorates the historic transition of France from monarchy to republic and embodies the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, which became the motto of the French Republic. It is celebrated annually on 14 July.

Nigeria remains France’s top destination for investment in West Africa, accounting for about 60 percent of the



Abayomi Oluyomi, commissioner for finance in Lagos State and Laurent Favier, consul general of France in Lagos, at the French National Day celebrations in Lagos held recently.

total. More than 100 French companies operate in Nigeria and employ over 16,000 Nigerians, according to data released by the Consulate.

The French Development Agency, AFD, has been central to that push. Over

17 years it has supported 57 projects across 23 states with more than €3.3 billion in financing, including over €1.1 billion through its private-sector arm Proparco.

Its portfolio spans water, electricity, agriculture and

transport, and now includes Expertise France to deliver technical cooperation.

In Lagos, AFD is funding Omi Eko, Africa’s first electric inland waterway transport system, aimed at cutting congestion and transport costs.

At the federal level, over one million Nigerians have gained access to safe drinking water through French-backed projects, with more benefiting from improved power and rural infrastructure.

The partnership is also ex-

panding beyond traditional sectors. France and Nigeria signed multiple MoUs over the past year targeting job creation and entrepreneurship in vocational training, digital innovation, e-sports and the creative industries.

The Creation Africa Forum held in Lagos in October 2025 brought together artists, investors and policymakers to build creative ecosystems in music, film, animation, fashion and gaming.

Energy remains a core of trade. Business France led an Oil & Gas mission to Nigeria in June 2026 with a dozen French firms, while the French Treasury is funding a pilot for small hydroelectric plants in Katsina.

Favier said “Team France” — including Business France, AFD, the Franco-Nigerian Chamber of Commerce and Campus France — will continue working to convert political goodwill into investment and jobs.

“France reaffirms its commitment to supporting Nigeria’s growth, innovation and sustainable development,” he said.

Society of Engineers seeks strategic collaboration with Abia Govt on project execution

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), Umuhia Chapter, has expressed interest in collaborating with Abia State Government in the execution of housing projects across the State.

Nwachukwu Christ, chairman, Umuhia chapter of the Nigerian Society of Engineers, expressed the interest, Wednesday, when he led a delegation on a courtesy visit to the Abia State Ministry of Housing, aimed at strengthening collaboration and promoting professionalism in the housing sector.

Nwachukwu congratulated the Ministry of Housing and the Commissioner, for the remarkable strides recorded within a short period of the Ministry’s establishment, especially the ongoing housing projects that have already begun to redefine the housing landscape in Abia State.

He noted that the delegation came not only to commend the Ministry, but also to seek stronger collaboration and partnership with the government in the execution of housing projects across the State.

According to him, engineering professionals across all levels and cadres, should be adequately represented and involved in government

housing projects to ensure proper professional composition, technical alignment, and quality project delivery.

The NSE Chairman further appealed to the State Government to consider the employment of more engineers in order to enhance professionalism and technical competence within the system.

He stated that members of the Nigerian Society of Engineers remain readily available and willing to serve the State Government in whatever capacity their expertise may be required, stressing that the Society, would appreciate being invited to participate in ongoing and future housing projects in any role deemed fit by the Ministry.

Nwachukwu reiterated that engineers in Abia State are on ground, united, and fully prepared to cooperate with the present administration in achieving its developmental aspirations.

He therefore called on the Commissioner for Housing to look inward and ensure that relevant engineering professionals are incorporated into the project implementation teams for the overall success and sustainability of government housing initiatives.

Chiemela Charles Uzoiye, Abia State commissioner for Housing, in his response expressed delight and appreciation over the visit, describing it as timely and highly com-

mendable.

The Commissioner noted that the collaboration being sought by the Society aligns perfectly with the vision of the administration of Governor Alex Otti, who according to him, strongly encourages inter-professional collaboration and inclusiveness in governance.

Uzoiye used the opportunity to express profound appreciation to Governor Otti, for his visionary leadership, unwavering support to the housing sector, and commitment to delivering quality infrastructure and improved living conditions for the people of Abia State.

He commended the Governor’s unwavering commitment to excellence, accountability, and fulfillment of promises, stating that the Governor believes in giving professionals the opportunity to make positive contributions within their various fields of endeavour.

Uzoiye further disclosed that the Governor is intentionally restoring the dignity and values of professionalism in public service and project execution, while encouraging independent minds and innovative ideas capable of driving development.

The Commissioner also made reference to the government’s Public Infrastructure and Building policies, aimed at ensuring proper coordina-

tion and avoiding professional conflicts within the system.

According to him, the State Government is consciously building institutional capacity to eliminate unnecessary conflicts and improve efficiency in service delivery.

He revealed that the Umuhia Development Control Agency (UDCA), which was previously non-existent, has now been established and integrated into the system to address many of the developmental and regulatory challenges previously experienced in the built environment sector.

Speaking about the on-going and proposed housing projects, Uzoiye highlighted the Ministry’s plans for the Site and Services Estate at Obehie in Ukwa West Local Government Area, as well as the Pocket Housing Estate, located at the Old Civil Service Commission premises, which is expected to be flagged off soon.

He emphasized that Governor Otti, has good intentions for Abia State and is investing heavily across various sectors of the economy with the aim of improving the standard of living of Abians.

The Commissioner explained that the main objective of the housing estates is to elevate the living conditions of citizens and address the unprecedented rise in house rents within the State.

He pointed out that the

housing deficit remains a major challenge and that the housing projects constitute one of the strategic interventions of the present administration in reducing housing difficulties experienced by residents.

He disclosed that the Pocket Housing Estate will comprise semi-detached houses, detached houses, as well as two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartments, designed to cater to different categories of home seekers.

He further revealed that the government is currently carrying out due diligence and verification processes on contractors and expressed optimism that physical construction activities would commence in earnest in the coming weeks.

According to the Commissioner, beyond housing delivery, the projects are also designed to create employment opportunities, restore professionalism, and rebuild the dignity of workers and professionals across sectors.

He stated that the transformation currently taking place in Abia State has restored confidence and pride among citizens, adding that today many people proudly identify themselves, as Abians, because of the positive changes being witnessed across the State.

The Commissioner also expressed interest in having

structural engineers and other relevant professionals from the Society participate actively in the housing projects, reiterating his administration’s commitment to job creation and professional inclusion.

Aji Okoroji, Senior Special Assistant to the Governor on Housing, commended the leadership of the Nigerian Society of Engineers for demonstrating commitment to the development of the State through partnership and professional engagement.

He described the visit as a demonstration of confidence in the administration’s housing agenda and assured the delegation that the government remains open to constructive partnerships capable of accelerating development and delivering quality housing infrastructure for the people of Abia State.

Okoroji further encouraged members of the Society to continue to offer professional advice and technical support towards the realisation of the government’s vision for a modern and prosperous Abia State.

According to Carol Igboke, Public Relations Officer, Ministry of Housing, the meeting also featured robust exchanges of ideas and suggestions on improving housing delivery, project execution, and professional integration within the state’s development framework.

News

How Arc-Lights Foundation is shaping Africa's next-generation digital future

BLESSING ADIMABUA

Determined to groom the next generation of resilient, technologically innovative youths for Nigeria and Africa, Arc Lights Foundation hosted the 2026 World Robot Olympiad (WRO) Nigeria National Tournament and the Astro League Africa Games in Lagos.

The event brought together talented students, dedicated coaches, and forward-looking educators from across the nation to foster rigorous teamwork, virtual reality simulations, and hands-on mechanical building, helping students develop critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving.

Abisola Obasanya, founder of the Arc Lights Foundation, said at the event that the true essence of the WRO lies not in the final scores but in the transformative journey of learning.

According to her, the tournament is uniquely designed to mirror real-world business and technological challenges. Recognising that some robots will inevitably fail during testing, the organisers use these moments to teach invaluable life lessons about resilience.

"This is where ideas become solutions, dreams take shape, and future engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and



Cross-section of students displaying their robotic skills at the World Robot Olympiad tournament in Lagos

technology leaders begin their journey to global impact. Competition for us is not the focus; education is the focus. The change in your life is what we always focus on", Obasanya said.

She urged participants to troubleshoot, rebuild, and continuously iterate skills that directly translate to future entrepreneurial endeavours and scientific breakthroughs.

Beyond technical acumen, the WRO fosters crucial soft skills, notably through initiatives like "Friendship Night," which teaches young innovators how to network, collaborate across diverse backgrounds, and exchange ideas globally.

Obasanya further said

that a central pillar of the 2026 tournament is its compelling theme: "Robots Meet Culture." This thematic focus serves as a powerful reminder that while technology is rapidly advancing, it should be harnessed to strengthen and preserve cultural identity rather than replace it.

She said that by presenting their cultural narratives alongside cutting-edge robotics, the children demonstrate the renowned resilience, excellence, and kindness of the Nigerian spirit.

Innovation, according to the founder, is most powerful when it is deeply inspired by culture, adding that the overarching goal is to cultivate a profoundly positive

mindset among the youth regarding their country, equipping them to engineer targeted solutions for Africa's greatest systemic challenges, spanning healthcare, sustainable agriculture, and industrial development.

On his part, Olubowale Sangosanya, founder and CEO of Isecure Academy, while delivering a critical keynote presentation titled "Data Privacy, Digital Footprint Management, and Responsible Use of Technology," noted that the modern digital space can be highly unsafe for the unprepared.

He introduced the concept of the "fourth pillar of education." Where traditional curricula relied on reading,

writing, and arithmetic, the modern world demands a fourth, non-negotiable pillar: Digital Safety. Children today face a barrage of sophisticated online risks, including cyberbullying, predatory grooming, identity theft, phishing scams, gaming fraud, and the rising threat of AI-generated deception, such as deepfakes.

"A child who understands digital safety is better equipped to navigate the modern world confidently, responsibly, and securely. If you know how to stay safe online, you will not be afraid to use the internet because you know what to do to prevent being compromised," Sangosanya said.

The conversation expanded beyond individual student safety to address the vulnerabilities of educational institutions. Schools currently house vast amounts of sensitive digital data from student records and examination results to financial data and staff information. A cybersecurity breach could devastate a school's reputation and severely compromise student welfare. Isecure Academy called upon school leaders to actively integrate cybersecurity awareness into their institutional frameworks, transforming them into cyber-resilient entities.

Furthermore, Sangosanya addressed the rapid proliferation of Artificial Intelligence technologies like ChatGPT and Claude. Framing AI as

a "double-edged sword," he warned against its potential misuse for plagiarism, misinformation, and deepfake manipulation.

However, he stressed that the goal is not to fear AI, but to master it. By teaching children to use AI ethically and responsibly, they can leverage it as a powerful tool to accelerate learning and solve complex socio-economic problems.

Isecure Academy outlined its core mission through four strategic pillars: protecting children from cyber threats, securing school infrastructures, developing unshakable digital resilience in youth, and preparing the next generation of African cybersecurity professionals. The organisation issued a unified call to action for all stakeholders present:

He urged Teachers to integrate digital citizenship into their daily lesson plans beyond standard academia and called on school leaders to embed comprehensive cybersecurity awareness into the core curriculum.

Sangosanya said that by collectively embracing these digital safety practices, Nigeria and the broader African continent can build a stronger, more secure digital economy, drastically reduce cybercrime, and cultivate a highly skilled workforce ready to dominate the emerging global cybersecurity landscape.

Olu of Warri, Queen Consort unveil initiative to unite Itsekiri people worldwide

BLESSING ADIMABUA

His Majesty Ogiame Atuwatse III, the Olu of Warri, and Her Majesty Olori Atuwatse III, Mama Iwere, have spearheaded a cultural identity movement and digital platform known as Iam Itsekiri, aimed at uniting Itsekiri people and their friends across the world around a shared heritage and sense of belonging.

The initiative, set to be launched soon under the authority of the Palace of the Warri Kingdom, is designed to connect Itsekiris at home and in the diaspora through a media-driven cultural campaign and a dedicated mobile application that

serves as a digital gathering place for members of the community.

Speaking on the vision behind the project, His Majesty said the movement is built around a central truth that the name Itsekiri means "blessing surrounds us," adding that the platform seeks to strengthen identity, pride and unity among the people while extending that sense of belonging to friends and allies of the kingdom.

According to them, the initiative redefines Itsekiri identity beyond geography and population size, stressing that history has shown that communities driven by a strong idea can grow into influential movements.

"To say 'I am Itsekiri' is to make an active declaration



that one belongs to a people that blessing follows," His Majesty stated.

Their Majesties explained that the movement welcomes three groups into one community those born Itsekiri, those who became part of the family through marriage, and friends of Itsekiri who identify with the values and ideals of the people.

The approach, they noted, broadens participation while preserving the cultural pride and heritage of the kingdom.

Their Majesties further disclosed that the Iam Itsekiri application functions as a digital village where users can access updates from the Palace and the kingdom, connect with fellow Itsekiris across the globe, and engage with cul-

tural content that promotes language, traditions, customs and indigenous cuisine. The app will soon be available on both the Apple Store and Google Play Store.

They added that the movement is being amplified through the #IAMItsekiri Challenge, which encourages participants to share personal stories, testimonies and experiences that reflect the Itsekiri identity.

According to His Majesty Ogiame Atuwatse III, the Olu of Warri, the initiative is "not nostalgia, but strategy," aimed at preserving Itsekiri heritage, strengthening community bonds and projecting the blessing and values of the Itsekiri people onto the global stage.

News

Otti promises to pay entitlements of workers disengaged by previous administrations

...As Imo indigenes in Abia endorse him for 2027

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State, has assured workers disengaged from the state's public service by previous administrations that they would receive their full outstanding entitlements after verification.

Governor Otti made this known Wednesday in an address at a civic reception held in his honour by Imo State indigenes in Abia State, held at the Ogbonnaya Onu Polytechnic, Aba.

The governor said that his administration has considered appeals for the reinstatement of workers disengaged between 2011 and 2012, but explained that many of those affected had become old to return to active service.

He therefore, directed that their outstanding entitlements be computed and paid after the necessary verifications.

"I have also listened to a plea about recalling those, who were disengaged a long time ago, about 2011-2012. I had given that directive when Anambra people received me; it was not just for Anambra people, it was for everyone.

"The reality is that some of those people, who were disengaged 15, 16, 17 years ago have become old that they can no longer go back to their work. So, what we are saying is that we will calculate their entire entitlements and pay them.

"So, if you have not received your entitlement, may-

be you need to show up for verification and you will be paid", Governor Otti assured.

The governor, while thanking the leadership of Imo indigenes in Abia for organising the civic reception, described it as an honour and a demonstration of support and encouragement for his administration.

He reaffirmed his administration's policy of equal opportunity for all residents, stressing that employment into the state workforce is based on competence rather than state of origin.

"All of you know that in Abia State there is nothing like state of origin. When we are employing both for the healthcare and for the teaching, etc, nobody wants to know from where you come from.

"What we are interested in is your capacity, what you have inside your head. We don't care where you come from", he said.

Governor Otti said that the relationship between Abia and Imo transcends political boundaries, insisting that residents of Imo extraction living in the state enjoy the same rights and privileges as Abia indigenes.

Adding to him, many families of Imo origin have lived in Abia for generations, adding that any attempt to treat them as outsiders is unjustifiable.

"But for us also, we believe that the distinction between Abia and Imo is of no consequence. We are all one and the same people.



Governor Alex Otti

"So, when you live in Abia, we consider you an Abian and every benefit that is accruable to Abia people is also accruable to you.

"There are people whose grandparents lived here. Their grandparents gave birth to their parents. Their parents gave birth to them. And you want to explain to me that they are not from Abia; it's a lie", he said.

The governor said that his administration will continue to promote unity and inclusiveness across ethnic divides adding that the achievements recorded by his government in the last three years represented only the foundation for greater accomplishments.

He further assured Imo indigenes resident in Abia of their safety and continued inclusion in the affairs of the state.

Governor Hope Uzodin-

ma of Imo State commended Governor Otti's performance in office, pointing out that the large turnout at the reception reflects the confidence of the people in his administration.

"I can see that the people are happy with you. I can also see that you are doing very well. And that's why they have decided to receive you today", he said.

Governor Uzodinma, represented by Perry Opara, his special Adviser on Political Matters, who identified himself as an indigene of Mbaise and a relation of the Abia First Lady, also commended Priscilla Otti for her support to the Governor.

He urged the Governor to sustain his people-oriented policies and assured him of the continued support and peaceful disposition of Imo indigenes resident in Abia.

Eze E.C. Okeke, chairman,

South-East Council of Traditional Rulers and Chairman of the Imo State Council of Traditional Rulers, represented by Eze Fred Nwachukwu, described Governor Otti as one of Nigeria's most outstanding-performing governors.

He said that the Otti led administration has transformed Abia into an attractive destination for investors and visitors, adding that the state's rapid development could only be compared with that of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

In separate goodwill messages, Emeka Dinwe, National President of the South-East Town Unions and Lilian Ezenobi, Abia South Zonal Women Leader of the Labour Party, lauded Governor Otti's developmental strides, describing the Governor as a worthy in-law and urged him to sustain the pace of development, particularly his road infrastructure programme.

MacDonald Oguoke, chairman, Steering Committee of the grand civic reception and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Imo indigenes in Abia, represented by James Odocha, the Board Secretary, said that Governor Otti had, within three years, revived Abia economy, which was previously on the brink of collapse.

He highlighted the present administration's achievements in education, healthcare, electricity supply, public transportation, urban planning and other people-centred policies that have improved the quality of lives and broken long-standing barriers to development.

Also, Chikwuma Azodo, state chairman of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and founder of the Local Boys Movement, described Governor Otti as the best leader Abia has produced since the state's creation, noting that the event underscores the commitment of Imo indigenes in Abia as a progressive partner in the Governor's re-election bid.

Azodo further noted that landmark infrastructure projects, including the Onuimo-Abia Tower Road and the Owerrinta-Umuikaa Road, had significantly improved connectivity and made travel safer and more seamless for commuters and lauded the Governor's wife, Priscilla Otti, for her support and contributions to the administration's success, assuring the Governor of the unwavering support of thousands of Imo indigenes resident in Abia.

Chibuike Achigbu, Chairman of the occasion, earlier in his opening remarks, commended Governor Otti for his transformational leadership, saying the Governor had rewritten Abia's development narrative through purposeful governance.

He noted that perennial flooding, which previously claimed lives and displaced residents in several parts of Aba, had become a thing of the past owing to the administration's intervention and pointed out that the civic reception was organised by Imo indigenes resident in Abia, as a demonstration of their appreciation, confidence and support for Governor Otti.

Nigerian education leaders seek private investment as schools adapt to rising costs, digital learning

CHISOM MICHAEL

Nigerian education leaders, policy-makers and private sector executives have called for stronger collaboration between government and the private sector, arguing that rising operating costs, teacher shortages and the growing demand for digital learning are reshaping how schools must be funded and managed.

The call came at the Nigeria Educational Supplies Summit (NESS) 2026 in Lagos, where stakeholders agreed that building a resilient education system will require sustained investment, stronger partnerships and practical innovation rather than relying solely on government funding.

Speaking at the summit,

Jamui Tolani Alli-Balogun, Lagos State Commissioner for Basic and Secondary Education, described education as a capital-intensive sector that requires long-term support from private investors to achieve meaningful and lasting reforms.

"We need assistance majorly from private investors," Alli-Balogun said. "Whatever we do must factor in sustainability. It is not about introducing programmes that disappear after two or three years, but policies that align with global best practices and stand the test of time."

Delivering his keynote address under the summit's theme, "Resilience in Motion: Schools Leading Change," Ndubueze Mbah, Enugu State Commissioner for Education, challenged education stakeholders to move beyond policy discussions to practical

implementation that transforms learning outcomes.

Mbah emphasised the need for education systems to shift "from policy to practice," encouraging school administrators and educators to adopt practical, future-ready teaching models centred on experiential learning rather than traditional rote methods.

He also showcased Enugu State's ongoing education reforms, highlighting the rollout of 267 Smart Green Schools designed to bring technology-enabled, project-based learning to every ward across the state. "The initiative combines modern infrastructure, digital tools and curriculum reforms to prepare students for the future economy," he said.

The commissioner further explained that Enugu State is deploying smart schools and artificial intelligence tech-

nologies across its education sector, describing the reforms as a model of how subnational governments can build resilient institutions capable of adapting to economic and educational challenges.

Building on the theme of innovation, Adetola Salau, Special Adviser to the Minister of Education on STEM and Corporate Sector Engagement and the summit's Special Guest of Honour, said schools must invest as much in teachers as they do in technology.

"You can have a fantastic computer lab, but if you don't have teachers who are trained, forget it," she said, urging school leaders to prioritise teacher upskilling and empower innovative educators to mentor their colleagues.

Salau also called for greater participation of girls in science, technology, engineering

and mathematics (STEM), noting that women currently account for only 35% of STEM graduates.

"Schools should strengthen mentorship programmes and intentionally encourage more girls to pursue STEM careers," she said, adding that practical action, rather than perfect funding, will drive meaningful education reforms.

Earlier, Tayo Osiyemi, Convener of NESS and Chief Executive Officer of SKLD Integrated Services, said the summit was designed to promote resilient schools capable of driving innovation and sustainable change by bringing together educators, policymakers, financiers, suppliers and technology providers to develop practical solutions for Nigeria's education sector.

According to him, Nigeria

has more than 213,000 primary and secondary schools serving over 40 million students and supported by nearly 1.2 million teachers, making it one of Africa's largest education systems.

"The scale of the sector, combined with rising operating costs, teacher recruitment challenges and cash-flow pressures, makes stronger partnerships between government and the private sector increasingly important," he said.

Highlighting how the private sector is responding, Temilola Adepetun, Founder of SKLD Integrated Services, said the company has evolved from a back-to-school retail business established in 2000 into an education solutions provider supporting schools, governments and development organisations across Nigeria.

News

Nigerian earns recognition for advancing trade, investment, private-sector collaboration

CHUKA UROKO

ANigerian, Onoja Atta Onoja, has been recognised and honoured by US congressional proclamation for his leadership in advancing trade, investment and private-sector collaboration between Africa, the Caribbean and the United States.

Onoja is a Nigerian business executive, international trade advocate and corporate leader with over 20 years of experience spanning shipping, marketing, distribution, energy and international commerce.

He currently serves as President of the Guyana Caribbean Chambers of Trade, Commerce and Industry, where he continues to champion stronger trade, investment and business collaboration between Africa, the Caribbean and the United States.

The congressional proclamation acknowledges his more than two decades of leadership across shipping, distribution, marketing and energy, as well as his work promoting commercial engagement between emerging economies and the United States.

As African businesses increasingly look beyond traditional markets to unlock new opportunities for growth, Onoja



Hakeem Jeffries, US Congressman (left), and Onoja Atta Onoja, President of the African Caribbean Chamber of Trade, Commerce and Industry (ACCTCI), at the presentation of a Congressional Proclamation recognising Onoja's contributions to strengthening trade and economic cooperation between Africa, the Caribbean and the United States.

ja has received a congressional proclamation from Congressman Hakeem Jeffries, who recognized his contributions.

Onoja's recognition was presented during the Guyana Independence Celebration Committee of New York's commemoration of Guyana's 60th Independence Anniversary, bringing together business leaders, diplomats, policymakers and members of the African and Caribbean diaspora committed to expanding economic collaboration across regions.

Besides acknowledging his more than two decades of leadership across various sectors, the congressional proclamation also recognizes

Onoja's contributions to international business development, his service on corporate boards, and his current leadership as President of the African Caribbean Chamber of Trade, Commerce and Industry (ACCTCI), where he continues to champion stronger trade, investment and institutional partnerships between Africa, the Caribbean and North America.

The recognition positions Nigeria for new markets as it comes at a time when Nigeria is seeking to maximize opportunities under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) while expanding commercial relationships with emerging global markets.

Business leaders increasingly acknowledge that beyond government-to-government agreements, sustained economic growth depends on stronger institutional collaboration, private-sector partnerships and investment facilitation.

Through the ACCTCI, Onoja has championed initiatives that encourage market access, business networking and commercial dialogue among enterprises operating across Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas.

"The future of African prosperity will depend on how effectively we build trusted commercial partnerships across borders," Onoja said after receiving the recognition, noting that it reinforces the importance of creating practical opportunities for businesses to trade, invest and innovate together. Our shared history must now evolve into shared economic prosperity."

Industry stakeholders have described the recognition as 'Recognition Beyond the Individual,' noting that the Congressional Proclamation reflects the increasing global visibility of Nigerian business leaders who are contributing to international commerce through institution-building, strategic partnerships and economic diplomacy.

Obi condoles Benue, Plateau States over renewed killings

AKOMBO AONDONA

Peter Obi, the 2027 presidential candidate of the Nigeria Democratic Congress, NDC, has decried the renewed heartless killings in Benue and Plateau States.

Obi, writing on his X handle, said the unending violence in the region was worrisome and deserved special attention.

According to the former Anambra State governor, "the tragic news of yet another round of killings in Benue and Plateau States is both painful and deeply disturbing."

"The reported murder of at least sixteen innocent Nigerians in the Otukpo-Nobi community of Benue State, alongside the horrific killing of nine members of the same family, including a two-month-old baby, in Riyom Local Government Area of Plateau State, once again reminds us that the relentless cycle of bloodshed in parts of our country has persisted for far too long."

"For years, families in Benue, Plateau and other communities across Nigeria have lived under the constant shadow of fear, violence and displacement. Mothers have buried their children, children have become orphans overnight, farmers have abandoned their lands, and entire communities have been left devastated. We

cannot continue to accept this tragic cycle as though it were normal. It is not.

"The primary responsibility of any government is the protection of lives and property. Every Nigerian life is sacred, and every life lost is one too many. These are not mere statistics; they are fathers, mothers, children, breadwinners and future leaders whose dreams have been violently cut short."

"The time has come to move beyond routine condemnations after every attack. Nigerians deserve a security architecture that is proactive rather than reactive, driven by intelligence, rapid response and accountability. Those responsible for these atrocities must be identified, arrested and prosecuted. The culture of impunity must end."

"I extend my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and to the governments and people of Benue and Plateau States. I pray that God grants comfort to all who mourn, healing to the injured, and strength to every community struggling to rebuild after these repeated tragedies."

"This is not about politics; it is about humanity. We must summon the collective will to secure our nation and restore hope to our people. No country can develop when its citizens live in fear, and no society can prosper when innocent blood continues to flow unchecked."

Yoruba Youth Council calls on leaders to promote unity, justice, mutual respect than ethnic superiority

... Cautions Gumi over comments

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

Alawode Rahmon Akintunde, president, Yoruba Youth Council (YYC), has called on leaders across the country to promote unity, justice and mutual respect rather than ethnic superiority.

The group urged Nigerian youth, particularly Yoruba youth, to remain peaceful and refuse to be provoked, stating that Nigeria belongs equally to all and that no region is superior to another, and no ethnic nationality should be treated as second-class.

Reacting to the recent statement credited to Ahmad Gumi, Sheikh and Islamic cleric, describing Arewa as "civilised" while asking IPOB and OPC to learn from the North, Alawode described the statement as reckless, provocative, insulting and capable of inflaming ethnic tensions at a time when Nigeria desperately needs responsible leadership, mutual respect and national unity.

According to the Yoruba youth leader, no ethnic group or region in Nigeria has the moral authority to arrogate superiority or civilisation to itself while denigrating others.

According to a statement he signed, the Yoruba people are peaceful, accommodating and civilised, but our restraint must never be mistaken for weakness. "Sheikh Gumi's statement is an insult to the collective intelligence, history and dignity of the Yoruba people and other ethnic nationalities in Southern Nigeria. The Yoruba civilization predates modern Nigeria, and our contributions to education, democracy, culture, commerce and national development are documented facts that cannot be erased by provocative rhetoric."

He questioned the moral basis for portraying the North as a model of civilisation amid the devastating activities of Boko Haram terrorists, bandits, kidnappers and other violent groups that have killed and displaced thousands of

innocent Nigerians across the region.

Alawode further called on the Federal Government and relevant security agencies to immediately invite Sheikh Gumi for questioning and investigate his persistent controversial interventions on matters involving armed bandits and terrorist groups, insisting that no individual should be treated as being above scrutiny under the law.

"We call for the immediate arrest and thorough investigation of Sheikh Ahmad Gumi over his persistent inflammatory statements and his publicly acknowledged interactions with armed groups. Nigerians deserve to know the full nature of these interactions. If no wrongdoing is established, the law will speak; but silence and selective enforcement only deepen public suspicion," he said.

The Yoruba youth leader stressed that freedom of expression must not become a licence for reckless ethnic comparison, incitement or statements capable of undermining peaceful coexistence.

FATE Foundation, Citi launch youth entrepreneurship incubation programme in Nigeria

JOHN SALAU

FATE Foundation, with funding from the Citi Foundation, has launched the youth entrepreneurship incubation programme to equip young Nigerians with financial literacy and entrepreneurship skills.

The programme aims to support the incubation and scaling of youth-led enterprises for income generation and job creation.

"This support enables us to equip young entrepreneurs in Nigeria with the financial literacy and skills needed to build and scale sustainable businesses," Ayomide Akindolie-Igwe, executive director of FATE Foundation, said in a statement.

According to Akindolie-Igwe, the programme addresses youth employability by tackling Africa's growing jobs crisis.

"We are excited to be selected for Citi Foundation's 2025 Global Innovation Challenge," Akindolie-Igwe added.

In October 2025, FATE Foundation was selected as a recipient of Citi Foundation's 2025 Global Innovation Chal-



Amaka Nwaokolo, former director, The FATE Institute; Nneke Enwereji, MD/CEO, Citibank Nigeria Limited; Adenike Adeyemi, former executive director, FATE Foundation and Bambo Adebawale, dean & director, The FATE School, during the recent presentation.

lenge to accelerate youth employability.

Joining the cohort of 50 organisations globally, the Foundation will receive \$500,000 over two years to advance its youth employability initiative.

"Through this innovative initiative, FATE Foundation is supporting low-income Nigerian youth to develop essential financial and entrepreneurial skills using accessible platforms," Nneke Enwereji, MD/CEO Citibank Nigeria Limited, stated.

She added that the support will not only help individuals succeed; but also contribute to building a solid foundation for sustainable enterprises that will drive job creation and contribute significantly to the

country's economic vitality.

"This initiative is empowering and investing in the future of Nigeria, one youth at a time," Enwereji stated.

In March 2026, FATE Foundation launched the first phase of the programme, delivering financial literacy training through a free, accessible WhatsApp-based platform powered by generative technology.

The platform offers a personalized, gamified, and self-paced learning experience. The second phase, began in June 2026 and will provide six months of business incubation, including entrepreneurship training, mentorship, advisory services, and financial support for 80 youth-led enterprises.

Politics

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Promoting electoral integrity and advancing voter education for women was a major focus at a three-day workshop held in Lagos.

The forum brought together women leaders, civil society groups, election stakeholders and the media to address barriers to women's political participation and equip them with tools to make informed choices ahead of the 2027 election.

Organised by the Foundation for the Internationalisation of the Public Administrations (FIAP) with the support of ECOWAS in Peace, Security and Governance (EPSG), the training drew representatives from 25 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Participants shared strategies to curb electoral violence and promote inclusive elections.

Speaking on, "Causes of electoral violence and the role of citizens in prevention", Consultant, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Bridget Osakwe emphasised that participation goes beyond voting and encompasses behavior before, during, and after elections.

Describing elections as high-stakes contests for power and resources, she added that electoral violence is often predictable and driven by underlying tensions such as weak institutions and unresolved grievances.

Explaining further, she said that such underlying tensions can escalate conflicts, emphasising that citizens can be both victims and contributors.

Osakwe stressed that electoral violence is not only physical but also includes; Psychological intimidation; structural inequalities and; manipulation through money and misinformation.

Also, she noted that peaceful participation ensures that electoral outcomes reflect the true will of the people.

To her, peaceful participation promotes respect, tolerance, and lawful engagement.

While stating that electoral processes begin immediately after the emergence of a government, she added that the quality and intention of participation determines electoral outcomes.

Enumerating benefits of peaceful participation, she said it includes; good governance and democratic stability; economic growth; public trust; promotion of tourism and

Electoral integrity, women's votes take centre stage at Lagos workshop



development.

On conflict analysis, Osakwe described it as a systematic process of examining the causes, actors, dynamics, and context of conflict to understand how and why it occurs.

Stating that conflict analysis matters, she affirmed that it helps anticipate risks; enables timely intervention; supports evidence-based decisions; strengthens coordination and; promotes prevention over reaction.

However, she emphasised the need for voter education; enforcement of accountability for electoral offences; counter misinformation effectively and; promote responsible citizen behavior.

On the other hand, Osakwe cautioned against reinforcing narratives that women oppose each other, emphasising the need for solidarity.

Speaking earlier Project Coordinator, ESPG/FIAP, Maria Belén Álvaro Sanches highlighted the importance of being practical and action-oriented.

Women and girls she said, should be kept at the center of all interventions so as to build a strong network of women across West Africa.

Speaking on, "Gender and social inclusion in women's political

participation in Nigeria". Adeniyi Aremu, began with an interactive exercise where participants reflected on the concepts of gender, inclusion, and politics in Nigeria.

Aremu, who is a legal practitioner as well as the Executive Director, Civil Society Organisation for Conflict Resolution in Nigeria (CS-CRIN), linked discussions to: Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality); Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions; Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

He observed that women often seek validation from men in political spaces adding, "structural barriers make politics male-dominated. Women are sometimes divided due to systemic manipulation."

The legal practitioner also discussed the proposed Special Seats Bill, which seeks to: create 108 additional temporary legislative seats for women.

To enhance women participation in politics, he encouraged women to obtain Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs).

Also, he advocated the support of young women in leadership pathways, leveraging social media for political engagement.

On "Community-based conflict prevention during elections", Adeniyi identified electoral violence to include;

coercion against people, property, and institutions emphasising that it can occur before, during, and after elections.

Enumerating forms of electoral violence, he said they include; Inter-party and intra-party violence; violent protests and excessive use of force by security agencies; assassinations and harassment; destruction of materials and voter intimidation.

He emphasised that community-based conflict prevention requires sustained, localised efforts and strong networks.

On the other hand, he stressed the importance of women's economic empowerment as a pathway to political participation, adding "politics is often driven by money and power, requiring strategic positioning.

"The importance of education and skill development for women beyond politics cannot be over emphasised.

"There is also need for female mentorship and "godmotherism" to counter existing power structures building a unified, diverse network of women across Nigeria," he added

Speaking on 'Barriers to women and youth participation in politics and how to overcome' Aisha Ali Tijjani described limited guidance, threats, harassment, and violence as major factors that discourage women from

politics.

For the youth, Tijjani who is a legal practitioner observed that high nomination fees and campaign costs exclude many young people from engaging in effective political participation.

Other barriers she said includes; preference for elder leadership; limited access to political training and information; dominance by older politicians.

To address these barriers, Tijjani said: "We need to consider; inclusive policies which involves implementation of gender and youth quotas.

"There is also need to establish funds for women and youth who are interested in politics.

"Old age dominance in politics should be challenged as it limits fresh perspectives of younger voices and their ideas might be overlooked.

"It totally disconnects the youth participation in the governance. That is why there is the possibility that policies made might not address younger generations. It also leads to stagnation in the sense that long-term leadership can hinder new leadership development".

The resistance to change, she said creates a situation where by older leaders are less open to innovation and reform.

Kaduna 2027: Can APC retain power as Uba Sani weighs ticket options and political realignments?

BENJAMIN AGESAN, Kaduna

WITH THE 2027 general election still months away, political calculations are already reshaping Kaduna State, where the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) faces one of its toughest electoral tests. At the centre of the unfolding contest are the governor's expected re-election bid, growing debate over the party's likely deputy governorship candidate, and shifting alliances that could determine control of the state's three senatorial districts.

For political observers, the outcome will depend not only on the governor's performance in office but

also on whether the APC can balance religion, regional interests and internal party dynamics in a state where voting patterns have often reflected both governance issues and identity politics.

The most frequently-asked question is whether Governor Uba Sani will retain a Muslim-Muslim governorship ticket or nominate a Christian running mate ahead of 2027.

A political analysts and lecturer at Kaduna State University in the Political Science Department, Usman Danfo argue that while the Muslim-Muslim ticket delivered victory in 2023, the political environment has evolved. He contends that choosing a Christian deputy could broaden the

APC's appeal, particularly in Southern Kaduna, where Christian voters form a significant proportion of the electorate.

Others like Inuwa Musa and Shahya however, believe the governor may prioritise political loyalty, administrative experience and electoral strength over religious balancing, insisting that governance performance will weigh more heavily than the faith of the running mate.

Beyond the governorship, the battle for the National Assembly is also attracting attention.

Former senator Shehu Sani has continued political consultations and campaigns after winning the just concluded APC primary elections for

the Kaduna Central Senatorial District.

Similarly, former Kaduna State governor, Labaran Yero having won the ruling party's tickets for Kaduna North Senatorial District seat for the forth-coming general election is gathering momentum banking on the already existing one as the former number one citizen of the state has shown the party's possibility of coming out victoriously in the 2027 election.

In Southern Kaduna, political attention remains focused on, whose influence in the district continues to shape discussions about the region's political future.

Southern Kaduna remains strategically important because of its

voting strength and predominantly Christian population. Historically, the area has largely supported the (PDP) in many elections, making it a key battleground in any statewide contest.

However, recent developments suggest that the political landscape may not remain static.

Salisu Ibrahim, a political stake holder in Kafancha local government area of southern Kaduna point to the appointment of Nigeria's Minister of Defence, Christopher Musa and the Federal Government's increased security focus in the North-West as factors that could influence political alignments. Some stake holders like, Yunusa Isa believe stronger collaboration between federal and state authorities on security and development could improve the APC's standing in parts of Southern Kaduna and other districts.

Others caution that ministerial

Politics

2027: Running-mate battle hots up as INEC opens governorship candidates' portal

SAAWUA TERZUNGWE

The battle for deputy governorship slots has intensified across the states as political parties move to upload the names and particulars of their governorship, deputy governorship and State Houses of Assembly candidates ahead of the 2027 election.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had opened its portal Saturday, with the exercise scheduled to run until August 8.

The development is coming after controversial party primaries, leaving the selection of running mates as one of the final major hurdles for several governorship candidates.

Across the states, religion, senatorial zones, local government areas, gender, age and political alliances are shaping the choices.

In Kaduna, Governor Uba Sani of the APC and Isa Ashiru of the ADC are yet to name their running mates. While Ashiru has reportedly ceded the slot to former governor Nasir El-Rufai's camp, the APC is also expected to look towards Southern Kaduna.

Hadiza Balarabe, the incumbent deputy governor, is ineligible for another term after completing two terms.

In Bauchi, Yakubu Adamu of the APM has picked Mahmoud Babamaji Abubakar; Muhammad Abdullahi Abubakar of the APC chose Farouk Mustapha, while Usman Adamu Suphi of the PDP settled for Abdulkadir Alin Bababa. Shehu Buba Umar of the PRP and Halliru Jika of the ADC are yet to announce their deputies.

Nasarawa presents a sharp contrast. Emmanuel Ombugadu of the PDP retained Yahaya Ohinoyi, while Ahmed Wadada of the APC, Jonathan Gaza Gbafwi of the LP and Nuhu Angbazo of the ADC are yet to unveil their running mates amid intense zoning and stakeholder negotiations.

In Borno, no fewer than 27 aspirants, including former deputy governors Usman Durkwa, Ali Jatau and Isah Lawan, are reportedly jostling for the APC slot, traditionally zoned to the southern part of the state.

Gombe's Gwamna Jibrin Barde, Mohammed Jibrin Danbarde and Pantami of the major parties are yet to announce their deputies, while in Yobe, Baba Wali of the APC and Muhammad Dawud of



the YPP have picked Sale Samanja and Abdullahi Batta respectively. The ADC and PDP are still consulting.

Taraba's Agbu Kefas is also shopping for Aminu Alkali's replacement, with two women and a National Assembly

member reportedly under consideration. In contrast, Abba Yusuf of Kano has settled for Murtala Garo, while

Ahmad Galadima of the APC in Adamawa has picked Adamu Kamale. Sharafadeen Alli of the Oyo APC has chosen Adesoji Adededeji.

In Rivers, Gabriel Pidomson of the ADC has picked David Okumgba, while Kingsley Chinda of the APC and Dumo Lulu-Briggs of the NDC are still consulting. Katsina's Dikko Radda is expected to retain his deputy, while PDP's Garba Lado and rival ADC factions are yet to announce running mates.

In Kwara, only Suleiman Kawu of the PDP has completed his ticket with Cornelius Fawenu. APC, ADC and NDC are still working on their pairings.

Benue has also recorded mixed developments. Mathias Byuan of the LP picked Juliana Obetta; Michael Aondokaa of the PDP chose 38-year-old Oyije Ogbenjuwa; and Sebastine Hon of the SDP selected Margaret Ogah. Hyacinth Alia of the APC is expected to retain his deputy, while the ADC and NDC are yet to unveil their choices.

With INEC's portal now open, parties and candidates face growing pressure to settle their last-minute calculations and present final tickets for the 2027 governorship contests.

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

Experts have begun serious review and studies to identify the relationship between electoral integrity and responsible communication.

The major focus is said to be to confirm why strengthening electoral integrity would need to begin with responsible communication, weighing what to say and gravity a piece of communication.

The essence may be toward identifying communication agents as the custodians or agents of modern democracy.

An expert, John Best Uche, whose work in the communication ecosystem has spanned areas and locations across Africa, says in an era where information travels faster than verification, the future of democracy may well depend on the choices people make before clicking the "Post" button.

John Best spoke with BusinessDay after a training organised by Fundación para la Internacionalización de las Administraciones Públicas (FIAP), F.S.P. in collaboration with FactCheck Africa under the European Union Support to ECOWAS in Peace, Secu-

Expert traces link between electoral integrity and responsible communication



John Best UCHE

ity and Governance (EPSG) Project.

He was the Rivers State

Representative at the three-day training on 'Social Media Influencers Training Camp

for Electoral Integrity' held in Enugu State.

The three-day intensive capacity-building programme brought together carefully selected young voices, media practitioners, digital creators, and social media influencers from Nigeria's South-South and South-East geopolitical zones to strengthen their capacity to counter misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, hate speech, and other emerging digital threats to electoral integrity.

He admitted that his invitation may have been in view of his work within the communication ecosystem, seeing the experience itself reaffirmed as a conviction he had held throughout his professional journey, that communication is not merely about visibility—it is about responsibility.

The Port Harcourt-based expert said: "For years, I have worked across media, public relations, development communication and civic engage-

ment, using communication as a tool for education, advocacy, institutional trust-building and social development. Through The Social Voice Africa (TSV Africa) and the Diplomacy and Corporate Communication Conference (DCCC), I have consistently championed conversations around ethical communication, public diplomacy, democratic participation, media literacy, youth leadership and responsible civic engagement.

"Participating in this programme therefore was not simply attending another training. It was an opportunity to deepen practical knowledge, exchange ideas with some of Nigeria's brightest digital communicators from the South and strengthen the capacity required to respond to one of democracy's greatest emerging threats, the weaponisation of information."

Democracy in the digital age:

John Best looked at how

the digital revolution has transformed every citizen into a potential publisher. "With a smartphone and internet connection, anyone can shape conversations capable of influencing elections, public perception and even national stability.

"Unfortunately, the same technologies that have expanded civic participation have also accelerated the spread of misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, manipulated media, hate speech and increasingly sophisticated Artificial Intelligence-generated content."

The consequences, he found, are significant. "False narratives can suppress voter participation. Manipulated content can erode confidence in democratic institutions. Hate speech can deepen existing social divisions. Coordinated disinformation campaigns can distort electoral outcomes before citizens even arrive at polling units.

"For democracies across Africa, these are no longer hypothetical concerns; they are present-day realities requiring coordinated action from governments, civil society, media organisations, technology platforms and citizens alike."

Politics

PFIPC, BCDA controversies put government oversight under scrutiny

EMMANUEL SALAWU

Successive controversies surrounding the alleged Presidential Foreign Investment Promotion Council (PFIPC) and the Border Communities Development Agency (BCDA) have intensified scrutiny of the federal government's oversight mechanisms, with lawyers, opposition figures and lawmakers arguing that the incidents point to broader weaknesses in institutional accountability rather than isolated administrative lapses.

The latest concerns come as President Bola Tinubu directed the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to investigate the PFIPC controversy within 30 days, while the BCDA leadership dispute has fuelled fresh debate over compliance with due process in government appointments.

In the PFIPC case, attention has shifted beyond the criminal charges against its self-acclaimed Director-General, Adeniyi Adeyemi, to questions about how a body the Presidency insists never existed allegedly operated within government circles, interacted with public institutions and appeared in the 2026 Appropriation Act with a N1.3 bil-



lion allocation.

Adeyemi is facing charges bordering on alleged forgery, impersonation and obtaining money by false pretences. He has denied the allegations, and the matter is before the court.

Akinwale Okenile, a human rights lawyer, said the criminal trial should not overshadow broader questions about institutional accountability. He argued that if the PFIPC was never an authorised

government agency, investigators must determine how it allegedly circulated official-looking documents, engaged public institutions and attracted public confidence before authorities intervened.

According to him, governments are judged not only by how they prosecute alleged offenders but also by how effectively they prevent institutional failures. He called for an independent review of the circumstances surrounding the alleged op-

erations of the organisation and any weaknesses that made them possible.

Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar also called for an independent investigation, arguing that the controversy cannot be explained solely by Adeyemi's alleged actions. He said investigators should establish who authorised or facilitated the activities of an organisation now described by the Presidency as non-existent.

The Senate, however, declined for the second time in one week to investigate the alleged budgetary allocation to the PFIPC. Senate President Godswill Akpabio ruled that the matter was already before a court and under executive investigation, making a separate legislative probe inappropriate at this stage.

The controversy widened after Atiku linked the PFIPC case to the ongoing BCDA leadership dispute, describing both as symptoms of deeper governance challenges.

According to him, the BCDA controversy follows a series of avoidable incidents that have weakened public confidence in government and exposed alleged deficiencies in institutional coordination, legal vetting, consultation and adherence to due process.

"When one incident occurs, it may be dismissed as human error.

When it happens repeatedly, it becomes evidence of systemic failure. From NIPOST to PFIPC and now BCDA, this administration has demonstrated an alarming inability to coordinate even routine governmental decisions," Atiku said.

He urged the Presidency to clarify the legal status of the BCDA leadership and ensure that future appointments strictly comply with the law. He also argued that the recurring controversies should prompt the government to focus on addressing governance challenges rather than early political calculations.

The Presidency has maintained that the ICPC investigation into the PFIPC is sufficient to establish the facts. Presidential spokesman Temitope Ajayi said the anti-corruption agency has the legal mandate to investigate the matter and questioned calls for a separate inquiry.

As investigations continue, analysts say the debate has evolved beyond the alleged actions of individuals to the strength of the institutions responsible for safeguarding public administration. For many observers, the recurring controversies have become a test of whether existing oversight mechanisms are capable of preventing administrative failures before they undermine public trust.

If agencies that allegedly do not exist can appear to function, and disputes over statutory appointments continue to emerge, are these isolated incidents, or warning signs that Nigeria's system of government oversight requires far deeper reforms?

Muslim-Muslim ticket's debate returns as Northern groups warn APC of 2027 electoral risks

BENJAMIN AGESAN, Kaduna

As political realignments gather momentum ahead of the 2027 general election, growing opposition from several northern groups to the possibility of the All Progressives Congress (APC) retaining a Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket is emerging as one of the party's biggest political challenges, with analysts warning that the controversy could influence voting patterns, deepen religious divisions and reshape Nigeria's electoral landscape.

The renewed debate follows calls by the Northern Ethnic Nationality Forum (NENF) and other Christian-based northern organisations urging President Bola Tinubu and the APC to adopt a more religiously balanced ticket if the party hopes to retain broad national support. The groups argue that while the Muslim-Muslim ticket secured victory in 2023, repeating the strategy could prove politically costly in 2027.

The NENF, led by Dominic Anchana, said that national unity, justice and electoral viability demand a ticket that reflects Nigeria's religious diversity. The forum warned that another same-faith ticket could weaken the APC in politically stra-

tegic states across the Middle Belt, including Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, Kogi and the Federal Capital Territory, where religious balance often plays a significant role in voting behaviour.

Similarly, the Christian Media Forum (CMF) recently expressed concern over reports suggesting the continuation of the Tinubu-Shettima ticket, arguing that such a decision would reinforce perceptions of exclusion among Northern Christians and undermine confidence in inclusive governance.

The controversy is not new. When Bola Ahmed Tinubu selected Kashim Shettima as his running mate in 2022, the decision sparked widespread opposition from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Middle Belt Forum, church leaders and several prominent northern Christian politicians, including former Secretary to the Government of the Federation Babachir Lawal and former Speaker Yakubu Dogara. Despite the backlash, the APC won the 2023 presidential election.

Political observers, however, note that 2027 presents a different electoral environment.

Unlike the 2023 election, the APC now faces growing economic pressures, heightened insecurity in

parts of the country and the emergence of stronger opposition alliances. Analysts believe that religious inclusiveness could become a more decisive campaign issue than it was four years earlier.

Some political scientists argue that while performance in office remains the dominant factor in elections, perceptions of fairness and inclusion often influence undecided voters, particularly in ethnically and religiously diverse states.

The debate also has implications beyond electoral arithmetic.

Experts warn that retaining

or rejecting the Muslim-Muslim ticket could affect national cohesion by either reinforcing or easing long-standing concerns over religious representation in Nigeria's highest political offices. Since the return to democracy in 1999, successive administrations have largely maintained an informal tradition of balancing presidential tickets across religious lines, making the 2023 APC ticket a significant departure from that convention.

Supporters of the current arrangement maintain that compe-

tence, experience and electoral strength—not religion—should determine candidate selection. President Tinubu defended the choice in 2022 by arguing that the overriding consideration was assembling the team best positioned to govern effectively, regardless of religious affiliation.

Critics disagree

They insist that Nigeria's complex social fabric requires visible inclusiveness at the highest levels of government, arguing that religious balancing is not merely symbolic but an important confidence-building measure capable of reducing political tension and strengthening national unity.

Beyond the APC, the controversy is expected to influence the strategies of rival political parties, many of which are likely to present religiously balanced tickets in an effort to attract swing voters and dissatisfied blocs across Northern Nigeria.

Political analysts say whichever direction the APC eventually takes, the decision will shape campaign narratives, coalition building and voter mobilisation in the months leading to the 2027 election.

Ultimately, the renewed debate underscores a broader national question: whether electoral success alone should determine political strategy or whether preserving Nigeria's delicate religious and regional balance remains essential for long-term democratic stability and national cohesion.



Politics

Beyond infrastructure, Governor Otu's administration has touched all other sectors in C/River - Ankpo

Can you give us an overview of the performance of the ministry since you assumed office?

Well, the ministry has performed in what I will call high capacity because His Excellency, the Governor of Cross Rivers State ties infrastructural development in the state and that is borne out of infrastructural deficit that we met when we came into office in 2023. And for power to return to the people, the people must see the value of that power meaning that dividends of democracy must be reaped. How do you measure democracy performance and development is via infrastructural development, human capital development and all that enhance rural communities' capacity and urban development at the same speed and level of development. But as the commissioner saddled with the responsibility of handling Infrastructural development. I can say that since 2023 when we came in, we have done a whole lot of work. We have done a lot of road networks in Cross River State. The state is made up of three senatorial zones. We have the Southern Senatorial Zone, Northern Senatorial Zone and Central Senatorial Zone. However, you know that the governor is from the Southern Senatorial Zone but he didn't look at that to domicile all the projects in the Southern Senatorial Zone alone. He also spreads the projects across all the eighteen local government areas of Cross River State. In the Central Senatorial Zone, we have done a lot of road networks in various places, but calculatively, since we came on board we have awarded about 426.72 kilometers of roads. Presently as I speak, we have asphalted and completed about one 126 kilometers of roads that has been completed just in a space of three years in office. Furthermore, these roads in question are just enormous and time will not allow me to mention them because they are too many and we have done both rehabilitation, maintenance and construction. We have Muritala Mohammed; we have rehabilitation of Parliamentary Extension. We have undertaken rehabilitation and maintenance of traffic lights and rehabilitation and maintenance of roads within Calabar metropolis. In fact, like I said, we have a lot of activities that span up to that 426.72 kilometers of roads which I have mentioned. We are constructing roads in the central area of Cross River which the people of the Central Zone are pleased with. We have done roads in Ikom, Ugep, Obubra Local Government and also in Boki East/West Road. We are presently working on Ikom/Obudu which is a federal highway. We have created other highways. Coming back to the South there is a project that was initiated during

Pius Edet Ankpo is the commissioner for Works and Infrastructure in Cross River State. He has successfully been supervising the infrastructural development of the Cross River State Governor, Bassey Edet Otu. And before venturing into politics. Ankpo had already made remarkable strides in business, particularly in shipping and haulage industry, creating a triple effect of prosperity in his community. In this interview, Ankpo spoke on the road and overall infrastructural development of the state under Governor Otu spread across all the three senatorial districts of the state. MIKE ABANG brings the excerpts:



the military era 34 years ago and there was no successive government or administration that has dim it fit to give a touch to such project but His Excellency, the Governor has taken the bold step to take that project though, it is a federal project, it is a project from the Tinapa section to Odukpani axis which is almost 10 kilometers road that is primed towards a swamp and a river and it is just like what our President Bola Tinubu is doing by constructing the Lagos/Calabar Road within the swamp areas and our own governor has taken the same bold step in ensuring that roads are being constructed no matter the terrain. This is a project no government has attempted to touch because it was assumed that it cannot be possible but this government under the able leadership of Apostle Bassey Edet Otu has made that to be possible. Then, there are two other bridges,

one we have finished, the other one is ongoing. Moreso, we have done about 29 kilometers of road in one local government called Akamkpa that is linked to Obansan Road, it's a project that links to Trans African Border Road. In fact, that project was conceived during the pre-colonial era and from that time through the military era till now no government has dimed fit to work on it but the Governor also took another bold step like we call him "Infrastructure Vasco Dagama" who discovered roads to the forest that never existed. So, the governor has been able to put all of that in place. That road today is where two communities in Akamkpa Local Government have never connected themselves before and that of course have always created disunity among them but with the construction of these roads the two constituency are coming back again. In Yala Local Government, the

Governor is presently constructing the Ukelle Road and I am sure many years ago as a journalist you must have heard how Ukelle people that is linked to Obansan Road, it's a project that links to Trans African Border Road. In fact, that project was conceived during the pre-colonial era and from that time through the military era till now no government has dimed fit to work on it but the Governor also took another bold step like we call him "Infrastructure Vasco Dagama" who discovered roads to the forest that never existed. So, the governor has been able to put all of that in place. That road today is where two communities in Akamkpa Local Government have never connected themselves before and that of course have always created disunity among them but with the construction of these roads the two constituency are coming back again. In Yala Local Government, the

is it is constructed and the whole place lightened up with cameras and it is likened to the roads in 3rd Mainland Bridge where you see cameras everywhere and that is what we have been able to put up in Ogoja. So, for Ogoja indigenes who has never been home for some time now, I am sorry to say that if you are coming these days, you may not be able to know access to your homes because the governor has transformed the entire place to a modern place. If you go to Stadium Road and many other streets in Ogoja all roads are constructed. Again, turning to this other section, we have Mbube Road and we are presently constructing 10 kilometers of Mbube Road which is near completion and if you go to Bekwarra Local Government where the governor recently did the flag off of the construction of Afrike Road which is presently ongoing and many other roads. I can go on and on and mention the massive roads infrastructural development that this administration has done. The government of Senator Bassey Edet Otu is just three years in office has done so credible and with the meager resources of the

state he has been able to achieve all these. So, if you want to measure the performance of a man is not the man that has so much but the man that has the little to achieve the results he wants. So, I can boldly say that indeed the government of Senator Prince Bassey Edet Otu has high level of managerial capacity to manage the small or cricket allocation to achieve results. With the present issue now on ground, he has been able to introduce concrete pavement in some roads in Cross River State, we did so because we have quarries in Akamkpa Local Government that has been on over the years and a Cement Factory over the years which has in a way given the state a sort of succour and the people are also pleased with we have done and what is happening here.

Moreover, we have done a whole lot in the last three years in office under Governor Bassey Edet Otu.

Then, we have come to look at it, having constructed all these roads and security is not put in place we will lose all the infrastructural development. So, to cater for the welfare of security agencies so we have constructed roads in the internal networks in the Air Force, we have constructed internal road networks in the Police Headquarters and their camps. We have also constricted even the Civil Defense Headquarters office in Calabar. We have fixed it. The MOPOL Elven, we have fixed it. We didn't look at the security agencies whether it is Federal or State because for them to put up their best you have to look at their welfare and if you go there, they can proudly invite any of their friends from any part of the country to come and see a very serene environment where they are staying now.

All of these are courtesy of this administration within three years in office.

Recently, you were in Boki Local Government Area of the state. You proudly and whole heartedly said that roads constructed by the government are of good standard. But there are complaints that the roads are not in good shape. How true is that?

Well, it depends on who releases the statement and what he means that it is not in good shape but we of the Ministry of Works are saddled with the responsibility of putting up a design of the roads which we are putting so by the designs what we put I can make bold to say that the roads are all in good shape. There is no deformity in any way and in case you see any natural occurrences like accidents in any way, form or manner it has happened. It has nothing to do with our standard because we don't compromise with our standard because we supervise our jobs that is given. If we say we want a contractor to put 0.50 feet thickness of sizeable pavement and that is what we will do.

In some areas like, if you are going to Ukelle for instance, we are doing the binding course and wearing course, we ensure that both 60/40 layers of asphalt are put in

place. In Boki East/West Road where we are now, I just left there. The roads that are ongoing there are all of good standard. When we go to a site and we realised that there is any misunderstanding with the contractor and engineers on site, we refer them back to Bid of Engineering Management and Evaluation. So, for anyone to say that we are not doing standard roads, they are all fabricated stories by the opposition parties to see how they can discredit the government and of course we are not ignorant of that because this is the characteristics of the opposition and if they don't exhibit that then they truly do not have a characteristic.

Aside roads Infrastructural development, which other areas like the education and healthcare delivery has the ministry supervised infrastructural development in Cross River State?

Well, we have inspected the hospital project in Ikom initiated by this government and it has got to very significant level which is near completion. We had hospital that was initiated by past government that was abandoned in different locations which this administration has revisited. Our Health Centres have been

renovated and equipped in different locations which we have gone there for inspections and we do so as the infrastructural cluster is concerned. We are the head of infrastructure that means Ministry of Works and Infrastructure happens to be the father of the infrastructure cluster and so any project executed by any of the infrastructural cluster members it is incumbent on us to ensure that we go there to do supervision. I can be bold to say that all of that has been done.

Even in schools and many other things in State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) has built quite number of schools across the 18 local government areas of the state and across the 196 wards of Cross River State are all spread with projects of SUBEB in schools and other things that have been done. I can't even talk about other projects that have been spread across the entire state within three years in office.

However, beyond roads, there are a lot of other things we have been able to fix across the 196 wards of the state to enhance development in the state.

What actually informed your decision to accept the appointment

as the Honourable Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure Development in Cross River State?

Well, I think it is said that success comes when opportunity makes preparation. I have prepared for this office for more than 32 years ago and in my line of construction I have been in construction industry for more than 30 years. Beyond being here too, I have been able to manage series of investments because before coming here I wasn't a pauper. I have been a chronic businessman who has handled a lot of contracts in different projects in different fields.

I have done a lot of contracts with NNDC and I have done jobs with states government and I have done jobs in different ways. With that I have been able to understand financial prudent and also understands what it takes to things in order and manage public funds. And even before becoming a Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure Development I have served as a party chairman for eight years in office. I have also served as a director in Safety Commission, I have also served as SA to the governor on Agriculture and I was also later promoted in the past administration to be a Commis-

sioner for Science and Technology. And so, this is part of the ladder I am still climbing that has really catapulted me to be the commissioner for Works and Infrastructure Development and like it was said any man that has not created wealth cannot manage wealth because over the years I have created sustainable wealth and so that gives me the ability to manage the office as the commissioner for Works and Infrastructure Development.

What has been the most challenging aspect of your office since you assumed office as the Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure?

Well, the major challenge in my office is the challenge of the state. The challenge of the state is lack of funds because you may have the willingness to do the implementation of the projects across all the communities. Cross River State is made of about twenty thousand and three square meters and all the infrastructural development are planted on the landmarks and it would be our desire to ensure that all of these projects enter all the communities of the state but because of lack of funds we cannot be able to achieve all of that. So, we prioritise the projects and see how we can be able to reach everywhere.

Then, my challenge is when you go for inspection, communities that don't have roads will be calling because everybody want roads but yet the resources is not enough. So, my major challenge is tied to the challenge of the state paucity of funds you would have implemented a whole lot of projects for the people of the various communities.

Was it a political sacrifice for you to accept the appointment considering your personal relationship with the governor to support the administration?

No, it was not a political sacrifice rather the governor knows those that he can work with to achieve his administration agenda.

With political activities gradually building ahead of 2027 general election, do you believe that the APC in Cross River State remain united focused for the battle ahead?

Let me tell you that All Progressive Congress in Cross River State is united and focused for the 2027 general elections because the governor has performed creditable well to win a landslide victory. I don't see anybody that can beat the governor in Cross River State. For President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, he will receive our full support in this state come next general election.



Politics

2027: Nigerians must be decisive in their voting this time around - Yabagi

Yusuf Sani Yabagi is the national chairman of the Action Democratic Party (ADP) and has served as a former presidential candidate in Nigeria, energy analyst, and the immediate past chairman of Inter-Party Advisory Councils, (IPAC). He spoke with AKOMBO AONDONA on his party's preparation ahead of the 2027 general election and other key issues on the Nigeria's electoral system. Excerpts:

Since after the ADP presidential primary, nothing has been heard about your party's strategic plans for the campaign and the 2027 general election. What is going on Sir?

Yeah, as a political party, we definitely have our plans. But like you know, we are still in the process of uploading the data of our candidates to INEC Portal. You know, that has not yet ended. This is why you have not been hearing much about what we have in terms of preparations for 2027 election. But nevertheless, as a party, we are working on that. We are also trying to work on how we can sort out some of the internal problems in the party. You know, in all parties, not just peculiar to ADP, after primary elections, there are always issues that you have to resolve internally, of course. So, that's what strengthens the parties. So, we are doing that process. We are also, like I said, getting ready to launch our campaign. But today, as we speak, we are still on the issue of uploading the names of our candidates to INEC Portal.

But the INEC deadline for uploading of the candidates list has expired about a week ago. Why are you still in the process of uploading candidates' details?

No, no, it has not finished. There are two batches. We still have the governorship and the States House of Assembly. You know, we have just finished the National Assembly and the presidential.

How can you refute the claim that your party, ADP presidential candidate is a place holder for ADC presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, should in case he misses the ADC legal squabbles considering the fact that you have series of meetings

with Atiku before your party's primary elections?

Well, that's speculative. Like you said yourself. I cannot react to speculations. Even people can speculate whatever they want to speculate, I cannot control it. I don't even know why they are thinking that way. But it is speculative.

Running a nationwide campaign requires massive financial outlay. How does ADP plan to fund its 2027 presidential campaign without relying on the controversial political fathers?

You know, politics, like you know especially like you rightly said, campaigns are not normally funded by just one source. Even the All Progressives Congress that you will say have in-depth access to our country's treasury, is also looking for funds from other sources. So, we are going to launch our campaign appeal funds. We are going to also talk to Nigerians who feel very strongly about having a change of leadership which we are poised to do. So, it is not so much the party itself will have money enough to run the campaign for the candidates as the case maybe. But it is normal; we have members of the party, stakeholders and those who are interested in helping our cause. So, we are very much, you know, doing that too as part of our plans to help fund our campaigns.

With the current economic challenges in Nigeria, what is ADP's immediate and concrete plans to stabilising the Naira and curb inflation in Nigeria, if elected?

Well, like I am sure you know, the life wire of Nigeria economy, the mainstream, is a oil and gas. Regardless of what some people



may be telling you, for now as we speak, oil and gas remains the main source of income for government to fund its activities. The problem that we are having is that, that sector of the economy is the most disorganised sector. Is the most corrupt sector. So, the ADP government will definitely reorganise the oil and gas sector. We will chase the corruption out of it so that we can properly fund the activities of government because without money, you cannot do anything. We need the revenue. Revenue today, as you know is being stolen. You know, crude oil theft is still going on and crude oil terminals are even source where money are kept. These are going on. So, we have to fight that cankerworm of our problems. That is the issue of corruption especially in the oil and gas sector. Once we curtail

that, I am sure Nigeria's economy will move to its promised greatness. The issue of insecurity is also a very big challenge which we can also tackle. That too cannot be far away from corruption especially in the military. So, these two sectors of the economy must be tackled head-on. Unless we do that, our economy can never see the kind of progress that it deserves. So, this is why a vote for ADP is vote for progress of Nigeria, its people and economic development.

Let's look at the insecurity as you rightly said. What specific unconventional approach will ADP-led Federal Government take to end banditry and terrorism that the current administration is missing?

Well, we will hold people to account for their responsibilities especially security heads. If you are appointed as a commander for instance, of a particular platoon or formation of the army and

something happens there, you will be held accountable. And that's what is not happening today. You know, if I ask you how many times have you heard about anybody being court-martialed by the military or even the military itself, have not been held accountable by the government. You know, you will give them billions of dollars and nobody accounts for it, that's corruption. That's why I said these two sectors of the economy, we are going to chase out corruption from them. That is the only time, that Nigeria's economy can breathe and that's the only time it can achieve its greatness which I told you before. So, it is not the magic science to really tackle Nigeria's economic problems. If these two sectors can be reorganised properly, Nigeria will get it right. Nigeria would accelerate in terms of economic progress and then, you know, Nigerians will begin to now enjoy what God have given to us in terms of resources. But today these resources are being stolen and

not putting it in use for productive end. That is where the problem lies.

Looking at INEC, do you have confidence in the current INEC leadership to conduct a free and fair election in 2027?

Well, you keep asking this issue of free and fair election. Even the recent ones they conducted they got it wrong. They are always missing the point. The problem is not the INEC, in particular, the point is how did INEC come to be? You know, who put INEC in place? The crux of the matter is we are not addressing the core problem itself. We are always looking at the effects or chasing shadow. You literally undermine INEC's independence by allowing one individual to appoint them and fund them. Is like a football match like I always said. Where you have two teams and one team appoints all the officiating crew there including referees and everybody. So, how then do you expect the other team to win? There is no level playing field in that game, and that's why we keep complaining. It's not about Amupitan or anybody. If you put another person there under this current arrangement that we have, he cannot perform credibly.

So, what are the technology or polling unit strategies that ADP is deploying to protect its votes and prevent rigging at the grassroots level?

My brother, the point I want you to understand is that votes don't count. Votes don't count because, deliberately, the procedure for conducting elections has been compromised. From the beginning, we know it. We have been shouting. We have been saying that we want direct transmission of results from the polling units to the IReV. That has not happened. So, we don't want manual operations, manual



counting, manual collation. But it is still happening. Manual collation is there. Manual counting is there. So, which system are we going to put in place that would check what? What are we checking?

Has your party nominated a Vice-Presidential Candidate for the 2027 general election?

Well, we have. We have uploaded all the necessary data that we need to upload for all our candidates not only presidential and vice presidential but also Senatorial and House of Representatives. We have done that and we have finished with that.

What is your message to Nigerian as we move towards the 2027 general election?

Yes. Nigeria should look at themselves in the mirror and see if they are happy. Are they happier than they were in the 2023? And

if they are not happier, then, they should check themselves. You can't be doing the same thing always and expect different results. So, we have to change our ways. Change our ways means that, change in the rules and laws and the guidelines governing the process of the elections especially from the constitution points of view. You know, because leadership recruitment matters in the life of a nations. If you are not able to put in place a system that will guarantee you quality people that have empathy for the people and have the knowledge to govern them. If you have a fraudulent system of election, you are going to have fraudulent people in leadership. And that's what have been happening. Until we change the system we cannot get it right. Nigeria needs to take a second look at what we have as our laws especially as far as elections are concerned and do the needful. We all know what to do.

Politics

Kwankwasiyya's grip on Kano politics faces fresh test as top allies continue to exit

ADEOLA AJAKAIYE, Kano

The political dominance of Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso's Kwankwasiyya movement in Kano is facing one of its most difficult periods in recent years, with a growing list of influential allies abandoning the camp amid deepening internal disagreements and shifting political alliances ahead of the 2027 general election.

What was once regarded as the state's most formidable political structure has witnessed a wave of defections involving key figures who helped build and sustain the movement over the years. The departures have fuelled debate over whether Kwankwasiyya is gradually losing its hold on Kano politics or merely undergoing another phase of political realignment.

Among prominent figures who have distanced themselves from the movement are Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, who parted ways with Kwankwaso years ago before becoming one of his fiercest political rivals; Murtala Sule Garo, a former deputy governorship candidate; Sha'aban Ibrahim Sharada, a former House of Representatives member; Kabiru Alhassan Rurum, a former Speaker of the Kano State House of Assembly; Abdulkadir Jibrin, a former federal lawmaker; and more recently Rufa'i Sani Hanga, whose latest comments have drawn fresh attention to cracks within the political bloc.

Others who have either exited the movement or openly aligned with rival political platforms include, Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf, and several former commissioners, local government politicians and grassroots coordinators who once formed the backbone of Kwankwasiyya's expansive political network across Kano.

The latest indication of discontent came from Rufa'i Sani Hanga, who represents Kano Central Senatorial District in the Senate, as he publicly reflected on what he described as the painful outcome of his years of loyalty to the movement.

Speaking during the Danuwa' Rano podcast, Hanga said his unwavering commitment eventually



left him disappointed.

"I followed the Kwankwasiyya movement with absolute loyalty, but in the end, I was left facing the mockery of my enemies and the tears of those who cared about me," he said.

Although Hanga avoided mentioning any individual by name, political observers in Kano interpreted the statement as a direct reflection of his deteriorating relationship with the Kwankwasiyya leadership.

His remarks have resonated across the state's political landscape because Hanga was widely regarded as one of Kwankwaso's most dependable allies. His emergence as senator in the 2023 elections under the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), which was powered by the Kwankwasiyya movement, reinforced his position within the political family.

However, the relationship appears to have deteriorated following recent developments within the movement.

The immediate trigger for Hanga's disappointment is believed to be the loss of his senatorial ticket in the National Democratic Congress (NDC) to Nasiru Yusuf Gawuna, a development that surprised many supporters because of Hanga's longstanding loyalty to Kwankwaso.

Political analysts say the episode reflects a broader restructuring within Kwankwaso's political organisation as it prepares for

another electoral contest.

The emergence of the NDC as Kwankwaso's new political platform after his exit from the NNPP has further reshaped Kano's political equation, forcing politicians across the state to reconsider their alliances.

The transition has also generated fresh competition among long-standing loyalists and newcomers seeking political relevance within the new arrangement.

For many observers, Hanga's comments represent more than personal disappointment. They are viewed as evidence of increasing dissatisfaction among some founding members who believe their years of sacrifice are no longer being recognised.

Several political commentators argue that the growing list of exits from the movement reflects the changing dynamics of Kano politics, where personal ambitions, succession calculations and party restructuring are beginning to outweigh long-standing political loyalties.

Despite the setbacks, Kwankwaso remains one of Nigeria's most influential opposition politicians with a loyal grassroots following, particularly in Kano. The Kwankwasiyya movement continues to command significant support among youths and urban voters through its distinctive red-cap identity and extensive political network.

Nevertheless, recent

developments suggest that maintaining unity within the movement has become increasingly challenging.

The rivalry between Kwankwaso and Ganduje, once close political associates, marked one of the earliest and most significant fractures within the movement. Since then, successive waves of defections have continued to reshape Kano's political landscape.

The departure of Abdulkadir Jibrin further underscored the widening divisions. Once among Kwankwaso's vocal supporters, the former lawmaker eventually aligned with the All Progressives Congress (APC), where he became one of the movement's outspoken critics.

Kabiru Alhassan Rurum also moved away from the Kwankwasiyya camp after years of political association, while Sha'aban Ibrahim Sharada charted an independent political course before joining rival political interests.

Similarly, Murtala Sule Garo has emerged as a major figure within the APC in Kano, adding to the list of influential politicians who have left Kwankwaso's fold.

These departures have altered political calculations across Kano's 44 local government areas, where Kwankwasiyya's organisational strength has traditionally determined electoral outcomes.

Political observers note that although defections are common

in Nigerian politics, the exit of high-profile figures from the same political family within a relatively short period raises questions about internal cohesion.

Some analysts attribute the trend to competition over political tickets and leadership succession, while others believe ideological differences have played only a limited role, with personal political survival becoming the dominant consideration.

Hanga's latest remarks have therefore, intensified speculation about his next political destination.

While he stopped short of announcing any immediate plans, political watchers believe his public expression of disappointment may signal the beginning of another realignment ahead of the 2027 election.

His statement has generated mixed reactions across Kano.

Supporters sympathetic to the senator argue that loyal party members deserve recognition for years of commitment, while defenders of the movement insist that political organisations must evolve and make difficult decisions in selecting candidates.

Others have cautioned against reading too much meaning into Hanga's comments, noting that disagreements within political movements are not unusual and do not always result in permanent separation.

As political activities gather momentum ahead of the next election cycle, Kano is expected to remain one of Nigeria's most closely watched battlegrounds.

The state has historically played a decisive role in national elections because of its large voting population, making every political realignment significant.

Whether the recent exits ultimately weaken the Kwankwasiyya movement or simply pave the way for a new generation of loyalists remains to be seen.

For now, Hanga's emotional reflection has added another chapter to the evolving story of Kano politics, highlighting the strains within a movement that has shaped the state's political direction for more than a decade.

As of the time of filing this report, neither Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso nor the leadership of the Kwankwasiyya movement had publicly responded to Hanga's remarks.

Politics

Gbenga Hashim receives SDP Presidential Candidate as talks intensify with Sowore, pro-democracy leaders

EMMANUEL SALAWU

Fresh indications of a possible realignment within Nigeria's opposition political landscape emerged on Friday as the presidential candidate of the Accord Party, Gbenga Olawepo-Hashim, received his Social Democratic Party (SDP) counterpart, Adewole Adebayo, amid intensifying consultations among leading pro-democracy figures ahead of the 2027 general election.

The meeting, held in Abuja, is the latest in a series of strategic engagements involving presidential candidates and political leaders with long records in Nigeria's pro-democracy struggle and a shared commitment to centre-left political ideals.

Highly placed sources disclosed that the consultations are exploring avenues for democratic cooperation, institutional reforms and a coordinated response to what participants describe as the growing constraints on Nigeria's democratic space.

The latest engagement comes as discussions between Hashim and the presidential candidate of the African Action Congress (AAC), Omoyele Sowore, have also intensified, fuelling speculation that a broader pro-democracy platform



Adewole and Gbenga Hashim

may be taking shape ahead of the 2027 election.

According to sources, the talks are driven by concerns over the state of Nigeria's democracy, the future of

opposition politics and the need to build a credible national alternative, capable of defending constitutional governance, electoral integrity and democratic freedoms.

Although details of the consultations remain closely guarded, insiders said the conversations have gone beyond routine political meetings and are increasingly fo-

cused on long-term cooperation among political leaders who share similar democratic values and reform agendas.

The consultations come months after Hashim, alongside leaders of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), launched the Movement for Democratic Renewal (MDR), a national platform established to promote democratic renewal, strengthen institutions and mobilise citizens around governance reforms.

Promoters of the movement argue that Nigeria's democratic institutions have suffered serious setbacks arising from persistent internal crises within political parties and declining public confidence in electoral and governance institutions, making broad based democratic reforms an urgent national priority. Hashim Co-Chairs MDR with NLC President, Comrade Ajero, one of the last standing trade Unionist with clear ideological clarity in the Trade Union Movement.

While none of the political leaders has publicly disclosed the full scope of the ongoing consultations, sources confirmed that engagements with other opposition presidential candidates, civil society leaders and pro-democracy stakeholders are expected to continue in the coming weeks.

Tinubu signs Executive Order on Virtual Assets

...Establishes Council to harmonise regulations of Digital Economy

TONY AILEMEN, Abuja

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on Friday, signed the Presidential Executive Order on Virtual Assets Coordination, 2026, to harmonise the regulation of virtual assets, strengthen cooperation among the nation's financial, revenue and capital markets agencies.

The Executive Order also contained mechanism to protect citizens from fraud, and safeguard the integrity of the financial system while enabling responsible innovation.

Bayo Onanuga, Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, said the President signed the Order pursuant to Section 5 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as altered), while it is also expected to take effect immediately.

The new Executive Order, he said "responds to a regulatory environment that has become fragmented as virtual assets increasingly blur the traditional boundaries between currencies, money, commodities and securities

"With relevant agencies operating in silos, overlapping in some areas and leaving gaps in others, the country has been exposed to risks, including money laundering, terrorism financing, cybersecurity and data privacy threats, fraud, and revenue losses. Too often, unregistered and

fraudulent operators have exploited these gaps to prey on unsuspecting Nigerians, costing families their savings"

The Order is designed to close these gaps through supervisory coordination, without introducing new layers of regulation or displacing the mandates of existing agencies.

"To achieve this, the Order establishes a Virtual Asset Council, chaired by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), with the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as vice-chairs, and comprising the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) and the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA)"

He also announced that the Council would provide policy direction, promote synergy among the participating agencies, and work with the Attorney-General of the Federation to develop a harmonised legal and institutional framework that aligns the sector with Nigeria's national security, economic and social objectives.

The Order also establishes a Virtual Asset Office, the Council's operational body, with its secretariat domiciled at the CBN. The Office will be responsible for the day-to-day coordination of information sharing.

Others include "applications, and reporting among the agencies, supported by an integrated supervisory technology platform

that provides shared visibility while preserving each agency's ownership and control of its data.

"Significantly, the Order does not create a new regulator or transfer powers between agencies. Each institution retains its full statutory mandate and independence, and the framework coordinates their work rather than replacing it.

"To provide certainty for operators and protection for the public, registration will follow the nature of the activity and the asset involved: activities like securities will be registered by the SEC, while payment,

settlement, custody and related services involving non-security virtual assets will be registered by the CBN, with the Council resolving any case in which responsibility cannot be readily determined."

This closes the gaps through which unregistered operators have previously escaped oversight.

As part of the coordinated approach, the Central Bank of Nigeria is proceeding with a regulatory sandbox for virtual assets.

"The sandbox will provide a controlled environment in which eligible operators can test and operate



President Bola Tinubu

virtual asset products, services, and blockchain-based solutions under close supervision, enabling the participating agencies to assess the implications for monetary sovereignty, financial stability, market integrity, consumer protection, financial inclusion, and revenue administration before products reach the wider market. It will help ensure that innovations that reach Nigerians have been properly examined and supervised."

The CBN will announce further details of the sandbox.

In the same spirit, the Nigerian Revenue Service will release a tax policy for the virtual assets sector.

The policy operationalises Nigeria's tax laws as they apply to virtual assets, providing greater certainty for taxpayers and service providers, strengthening voluntary compliance, and ensuring that the sector contributes fairly to national revenue as it grows. It complements the coordination framework by aligning revenue administration with the work of the other participating authorities. The NRS will provide further details.

The statement disclosed that the Federal Government is also finalising a comprehensive Virtual Assets White Paper, which will set out the country's longer-term policy direction and implementation priorities and serve as a roadmap for stakeholders across the sector.

The Council has been directed to develop a Harmonised Implementation Framework within 30 days to guide the participating agencies in giving effect to the Order and to ensure its expedited implementation.

From The Other Land

US, Iran intensify strikes across Middle East as battle over Strait of Hormuz escalates

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN WITH AGENCY REPORT

The United States and Iran exchanged fresh attacks across the Middle East on Friday, targeting infrastructure and military installations as their confrontation over control of the Strait of Hormuz deepened.

The latest wave of strikes came after Washington expanded its campaign against Iran by attacking bridges, energy infrastructure and a surveillance tower at a key Iranian port, in line with President Donald Trump's pledge to pressure Tehran into loosening its grip on the strategic waterway.

Iran retaliated by launching missiles at several U.S.-allied countries in the Gulf, including Qatar, which has been mediating the conflict, and Kuwait, where a desalination plant supplying much of the country's drinking water was damaged.

The renewed hostilities have further undermined an already fragile ceasefire, with no clear path to ending the conflict that has now lasted more than four months.

Late Friday, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said it had carried out its seventh consecutive night of strikes aimed at weakening Iran's military capabilities.

Iranian officials said recent American attacks had killed dozens of people and wounded hundreds more, while the U.S. military also confirmed additional injuries among its personnel.

The conflict has increasingly centred on the Strait of Hormuz after Iran effectively closed the shipping route when the United States and Israel launched military operations on Feb. 28.



The disruption has driven up global energy prices and strengthened Tehran's negotiating position.

Oil prices climbed above \$86 per barrel on Friday, close to a one-month high, as shipping through the strait fell to its lowest level in three weeks, according to maritime tracking data.

Addressing Americans on Thursday evening, Trump maintained that U.S. operations were succeeding.

"We are likewise winning big in Iran, and you will see the fruits of that labor very, very shortly," he said.

Before the conflict erupted, Washington and Tehran had been negotiating over Iran's nuclear programme. Trump now faces increasing domestic pressure to bring the fighting to an end and avoid a prolonged Middle East war.

U.S. targets bridges, energy infrastructure

Iranian state television reported that overnight U.S. airstrikes hit bridges in Hormozgan province, including in the coastal city of Bandar Khamir.

The attacks appeared designed to disrupt transport links connecting Bandar Abbas, Iran's principal port, with the country's interior and the capital, Tehran.

For the first time since the war began, Iran's Energy Ministry acknowledged damage to the country's electricity infrastructure.

The ministry urged residents in southern provinces "experiencing extreme heat" to reduce electricity consumption but did not specify which facilities had been struck.

Iranian authorities said at least 46 people had been killed and more than 400 injured in recent U.S. attacks, including eight fatalities from Friday's bridge strike.

The U.S. military said 13 additional service members—10 Army soldiers and three Navy sailors—had been injured since Monday.

According to U.S. figures, 14 American personnel have been killed and 427 wounded since the conflict began.

CENTCOM said Friday's operation targeted dozens of military facilities and related infrastructure.

Among the sites struck was a tower at Iran's Chabahar Port on the Gulf of Oman.

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported that the structure oversaw commercial shipping entering the port.

The U.S. military, however, said it formed part of a Revolutionary Guard maritime surveillance system used to "track and target" commercial vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran fires missiles at Gulf states

Iran responded by launching missiles toward Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait.

Qatar twice instructed residents to seek shelter as air defence systems intercepted incoming missiles.

Authorities said debris from intercepted missiles injured a child.

Qatar, alongside Pakistan, has been playing a leading diplomatic role in efforts to end the conflict.

Kuwaiti officials said an Iranian strike damaged a power generation and water desalination facility.

Because around 90 per cent of Kuwait's drinking water comes from desalination, authorities moved quickly to contain the damage.

Officials said the fire had been extinguished while engineers assessed the facility.

Jordan's military said it intercepted three Iranian missiles on Friday morning.

Explosions were also reported in Irbil and Sulaymaniyah in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region.

According to a security official, the apparent target was the Iranian Kurdish opposition group Komala. At least nine people were killed and several others wounded.

Iran did not immediately acknowledge responsibility, although it has previously targeted the group.

Separately, the British military said a commercial tanker sailing near Oman's coast came under attack while transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

The vessel sustained minor damage and no crew members were injured.

Iran did not comment on the incident.

Strait of Hormuz remains central to conflict

The strategic waterway has become the central issue in the conflict.

Iran insists it should exercise exclusive control over the Strait of Hormuz and argues that vessels should pay transit fees to Tehran, despite the international community regarding it as an international waterway.

In recent days, Trump has renewed threats to target Iranian bridges and power infrastructure in an effort to force Tehran to reopen the route.

The United States has also reinstated a naval blockade on Iranian ports to curb the country's crude oil exports.

According to MarineTraffic.com, only eight vessels passed through the Strait of Hormuz on Thursday, the lowest daily figure in three weeks.

Although some regional energy exports have shifted to pipelines, analysts say current alternatives remain insufficient to offset the sharp decline in maritime traffic through one of the world's most important energy corridors.

US, Iraq sign \$60bn deals as both seek alternatives to Strait of Hormuz

US companies on Friday signed agreements and partnerships worth about \$60 billion with the Iraqi government, including major energy projects aimed at creating alternative export routes for oil that bypass the Strait of Hormuz.

The agreements, signed at the US Chamber of Commerce, also cover healthcare, communications and infrastructure, reflecting broader efforts to deepen economic ties between Washington and Baghdad.

The energy deals come as renewed conflict involving Iran has heightened concerns over the security of the Strait of Hormuz, through which about one-fifth of global oil supplies normally pass.

Although the new pipeline projects are expected to diversify export routes, analysts say they are unlikely to provide an immediate alternative.

Goldman Sachs estimates that constructing pipelines within a single country typically takes at least two and a half years, while cross-border projects involving multiple countries could take even longer.

Since the U.S.-Iran conflict began on Feb. 28, Tehran has repeatedly sought to restrict traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, triggering sharp swings in global oil and gas prices.

West Texas Intermediate crude climbed nearly 5 percent on Friday to around \$88 per barrel, compared with about \$67 before the conflict. Prices had surged above \$110 in early April before easing after a temporary truce, only to rise again amid renewed hostilities.

Thomas Barrack, the U.S. ambassador to Turkey, said the planned pipeline projects would eventually reduce the strategic importance of the waterway.

He said the agreements would create a programme "that will make the Strait of Hormuz an afterthought."

Iraq seeks long-term investment

The signing ceremony followed Iraqi Prime Minister Ali Falah al-Zaidi's meeting on Thursday with Chevron executives in Houston, where he urged the American energy company to expand and accelerate its investments in Iraq.

Speaking on Friday, al-Zaidi said Iraq was looking for strategic investors rather than companies focused solely on executing contracts.

He said Iraq's economy was seeking long-term investment and partnerships, not merely contractors to carry out projects.

The prime minister also reaffirmed Baghdad's commitment to strengthening ties with American businesses.



He described the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as "the place where economic decisions are made."

Chevron expands Iraqi operations

Chevron signed three agreements with the Iraqi government during Friday's event.

Jake Spiering, Chevron's president for corporate business development, said two of the agreements would boost Iraq's oil production.

The third agreement, he said, would focus on pipeline infrastructure.

It involves "investing in a pipeline that's going to create another export route out of Iraq to world markets. This is very important for energy security," Spiering said.

Iraq-Syria pipeline project advances

vances

The U.S. State Department also welcomed an agreement between Iraq and Syria to rehabilitate and reconstruct the Iraq-Syria crude oil pipeline.

In a statement, the department said it supported efforts "to advance the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Iraq-Syria crude oil pipeline as a priority infrastructure project."

"The United States welcomes the engagement of a U.S.-led international consortium to execute the technical and financial aspects of this project," it added.

According to Iraqi officials, the proposed pipeline will transport crude from Basra in southern Iraq through Haditha in western Iraq before continuing to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan and Syria's coastal port of Baniyas.

The pipeline is expected to carry around two million barrels of oil per day.

New routes aim to reduce dependence on Hormuz

Analysts at Goldman Sachs estimate that seven pipeline projects currently under development across the region could collectively transport about 14 million barrels of oil per day by the end of 2028.

That would amount to roughly 60

percent of the estimated 23 million barrels that moved daily through the Strait of Hormuz before the conflict.

The search for alternative export routes has accelerated since the war began.

Oil-rich Iraq, home to both U.S. military bases and Iran-backed armed groups, has found itself caught between the competing sides.

Syria, meanwhile, has largely stayed outside the conflict and has promoted itself as an alternative transit corridor despite continuing to recover from its 14-year civil war.

Following the disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, some Iraqi oil exports have already been transported overland into Syria before being shipped to European markets through Baniyas port.

Officials also reopened a major border crossing between northern Iraq and Syria in April after more than a decade, describing it as another potential route for energy exports.

While transporting oil by road remains more expensive and less efficient than maritime exports, the proposed pipeline network is expected to provide Iraq with a higher-capacity and more reliable alternative route through Syria and Turkey.

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When the economy gets tough, integrity becomes a business strategy

Economic crises expose more than weak balance sheets. They expose leadership. When markets are expanding and profits are rising, almost every organisation can claim to value integrity, transparency and accountability. Those principles become harder to uphold when inflation erodes margins, exchange-rate volatility disrupts planning, borrowing costs rise and consumers spend less. It is during such periods that organisations discover whether their values are genuine or merely convenient.

Nigeria's current economic environment has made that test unavoidable. Businesses are struggling with rising operating costs, exchange-rate uncertainty and weak consumer demand. Under such pressure, ethical compromise can begin to look like commercial necessity.

That is why ethical leadership deserves greater attention in discussions about economic reform. Public debate focuses on inflation, taxation, debt and investment, yet pays far less attention to the quality of decision-making within the institutions that drive economic activity.

Markets ultimately depend on trust, and trust is sustained not by regulations alone but by leaders who choose integrity when compromise appears more profitable.

An unofficial payment is justified as the fastest way to secure approval. Product quality is quietly reduced to protect margins. Financial information is delayed until conditions improve. Procurement standards are relaxed in favour of familiar relationships. Individually, these decisions may seem insignificant. Collectively, they weaken corporate governance, distort competition and erode confidence in the business environment.

Nigeria has seen the consequences before. Corporate governance failures, procurement abuses and financial scandals have repeatedly shown that short-term gains secured through poor judgement often produce greater long-term losses. Restoring credibility after reputational damage is invariably more expensive than protecting it.

The choice is not between profitability and integrity. Strong organisations understand that this is a false dilemma. Ethical conduct reduces reputational risk, strengthens investor confidence, attracts better talent

and builds customer loyalty. In a competitive economy, credibility is a strategic asset.

This matters as Nigeria seeks greater domestic and foreign investment. Investors increasingly assess governance standards, regulatory compliance, board effectiveness and organisational culture alongside financial performance. Companies that demonstrate transparency and accountability are better positioned to attract long-term capital than those that rely on questionable shortcuts.

Ethical leadership also requires decisions that extend beyond quarterly results. Business choices affect employees, customers, suppliers, regulators, communities and shareholders alike. Responsible leaders therefore ask not only whether a decision is legally defensible but also whether it strengthens the institution over time.

Transparency becomes even more important during difficult periods. Stakeholders understand that businesses face setbacks. What undermines confidence is not bad news but attempts to conceal it. Organisations that communicate honestly, explain difficult decisions and acknowledge trade-offs are more likely to retain trust than those that rely on silence or shifting

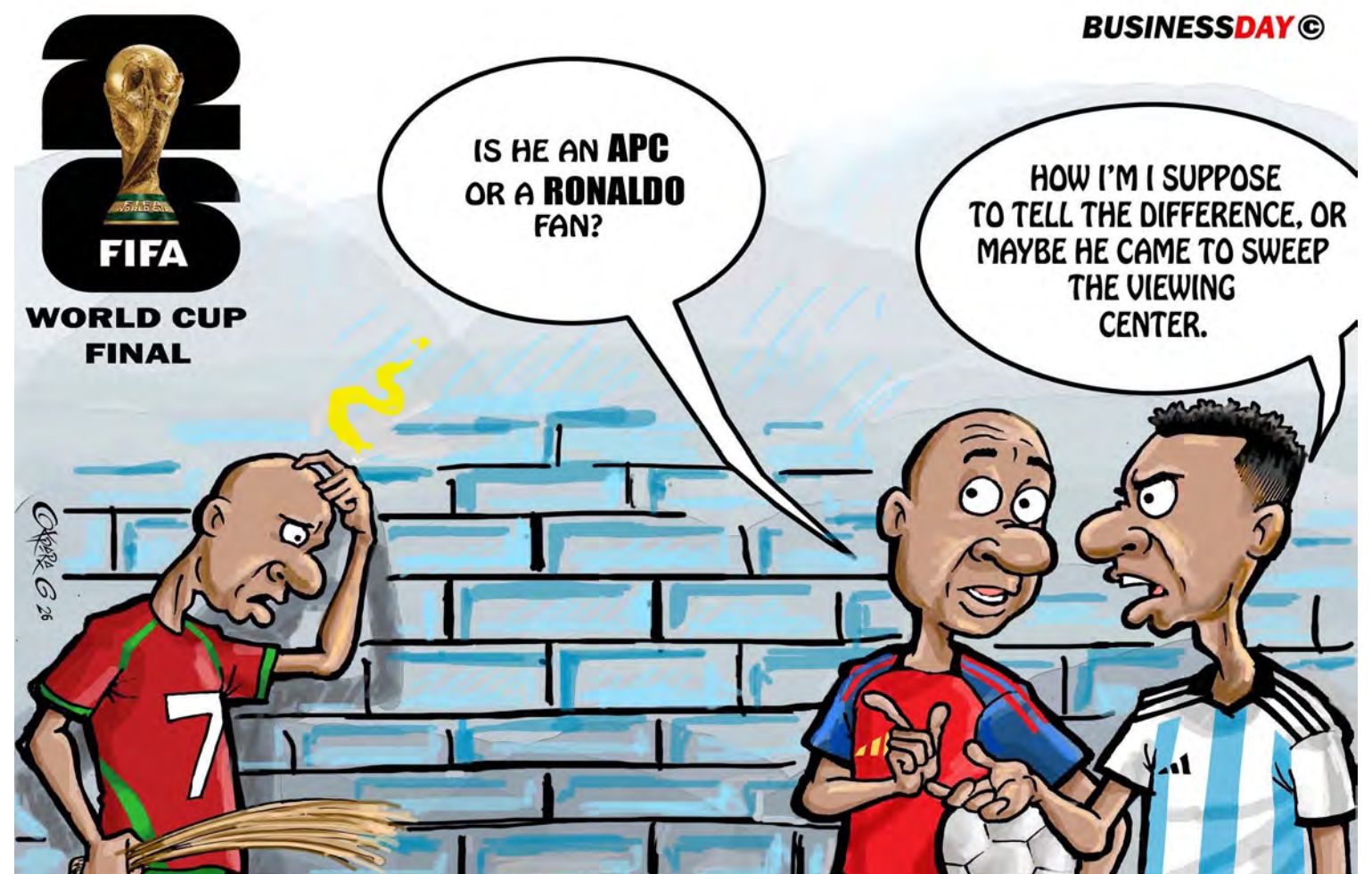
explanations.

Integrity should not depend solely on the character of individual executives. It must be embedded in governance through independent boards, effective internal controls, rigorous audits, whistleblower protection and transparent procurement. Institutions become resilient when ethical conduct is supported by systems rather than personalities.

Economic downturns eventually pass. What endures are the reputations organisations build during adversity. The businesses that emerge strongest are rarely those that pursue profit at any cost. They are those that protect public trust while navigating uncertainty with discipline and fairness.

In difficult times, ethics is often dismissed as an unaffordable luxury. The opposite is true. Economic pressure makes integrity more valuable, not less. Markets recover, inflation moderates and currencies stabilise. Trust, once lost, is far more difficult to rebuild.

The true measure of leadership is not how organisations behave when conditions are favourable. It is whether they uphold their principles when abandoning them seems easier. In the long run, integrity is not simply good ethics. It is good business.



Perspective



DAVE BARO-THOMAS

The First Lady's N50,000 grants: Reimagining sustainable empowerment

trader, the tomato seller, the woman roasting plantain by the roadside, the neighbourhood food vendor and countless others struggling daily to keep hope alive.

Lost in the controversy, however, is a far more important conversation. How do we transform small grants into sustainable economic empowerment? That is the conversation Nigeria should be having.

It is easy to dismiss N50,000 as a paltry sum, but anyone who truly understands Nigeria's informal economy knows that for a petty trader surviving, that is not an insignificant amount.

Across Nigeria, millions of micro-businesses/petty traders operate on remarkably small capital. Yet these micro businesses feed families, pay children's school fees, settle hospital bills, and keep local economies alive. They represent the first rung on Nigeria's economic ladder.

Supporting this segment, therefore, is neither charity nor political patronage. It is sound economic policy. The criticism of the First Lady's intervention should not revolve around whether N50,000 can make an impact. It certainly can. The more fundamental question is whether a one-off grant, however noble and well-intentioned, is sufficient to produce lasting transformation. Experience suggests otherwise.

The reality is that many beneficiaries face immediate pressures such as family obligations and accumulated debts. Under such circumstances, part, or even all, of the grant may inevitably be diverted to urgent household needs rather than business expansion. That should not be interpreted as failure or

irresponsibility. It is simply the harsh arithmetic of poverty.

This is precisely why Nigeria must begin to think beyond episodic empowerment programmes towards institutionalised economic empowerment.

Imagine a model where every beneficiary automatically becomes part of a structured ecosystem. Following the grant, each participant would be enrolled in a cooperative or registered savings association and encouraged to make affordable daily or weekly contributions from their proceeds. After three or six months of consistent savings, participants would receive their accumulated funds in bulk, complemented, where feasible, by a government matching contribution, particularly through active collaboration with state and local government councils. Such a framework would achieve several objectives simultaneously.

It would cultivate financial discipline, deepen the savings culture already familiar to many petty traders through informal thrift schemes, encourage expansion, strengthen cooperative financing and gradually build the credit history required for beneficiaries to access larger financing from microfinance institutions.

More importantly, institutionalising the process would remove the lingering perception that such interventions are merely political gestures that surface around election cycles. When empowerment becomes continuous, transparent, measurable and policy-driven, public confidence grows, and the narrative shifts from politics to genuine development.

None of these propositions diminishes the significance of the First Lady's initiative. On the contrary, they strengthen and enrich it. Every impactful public intervention deserves constructive refinement rather than cynical dismissal. Public policy evolves when thoughtful ideas are layered upon good intentions.

The First Lady has consistently demonstrated commitment to women, vulnerable groups and grassroots development. Her N50,000 grants acknowledge an undeniable reality: Nigeria's informal economy deserves deliberate support.

Those of us who regularly engage communities at the grassroots understand what many armchair critics may never fully appreciate—that N50,000 can mean survival for a struggling widow, renewed hope for a market woman, fresh stock for a roadside trader or another opportunity for a mother determined to keep her children in school.

For that recognition alone, she deserves commendation.

The next phase, however, should be more ambitious. It should transform cash disbursement into an enduring enterprise development framework that enables beneficiaries not merely to survive, but to scale their trade and attain financial independence.

If a N50,000 grant can become the foundation of a structured journey towards entrepreneurship, financial inclusion and economic resilience, then its true value extends far beyond the money itself. It becomes a catalyst for enterprise, dignity and inclusive national development. That is the legacy worth building.

The Green Covenant: Why Globacom's partnership with dealers is the living architecture of Nigeria's prosperity

HAMZA ARAB KABIRU

In every thriving economy, there exists an unseen architecture more enduring than steel, more resilient than concrete, and more valuable than the wealth it ultimately creates. It is the architecture of trust. In Nigeria's telecommunications industry, this invisible cathedral has been erected through the relationships between network operators and the thousands of dealers, distributors, retailers and business partners who carry connectivity from corporate boardrooms into the everyday lives of millions.

Across the industry, operators have cultivated productive commercial alliances. MTN has established an extensive distribution ecosystem underpinned by scale and operational discipline. Airtel has consistently strengthened its dealer network through structured market engagement and customer-centric initiatives. T2 has equally sought to deepen its presence by nurturing strategic partnerships within the evolving telecommunications landscape. These models have undoubtedly contributed to expanding digital access and supporting economic activity.

Yet, beyond commercial transactions lies a rarer philosophy—one that transforms dealers from channels of distribution into enduring partners in national development. It is within this higher covenant that Globacom has distinguished itself.

As Nigeria's only indigenous telecommunications operator, Globacom has never perceived its dealers merely as intermediaries in the movement of products and services. Rather, it has embraced them as co-authors of an economic narrative, fellow architects of enterprise, and custodians of a shared national aspiration. Its relationship with them resembles the life-giving roots of an ancient iroko tree: largely unseen, yet continuously nourishing every branch, every leaf and every new season of growth.

This philosophy extends far beyond periodic incentives. It is reflected in sustained investment, consistent engagement, capacity development, business expansion opportunities and an unmistakable culture of appreciation.

Globacom's celebrated Dealers' Reward Nights, where billions of naira, luxury vehicles and other remarkable prizes are presented to outstanding partners, are not extravagant spectacles designed for fleeting applause. They are visible affirmations of a corporate creed—that loyalty deserves honour, excellence merits celebration, and prosperity is most meaningful when it is shared.

Such a philosophy radiates beyond the dealer community. Every strengthened dealership translates into thriving small and medium-sized enterprises, expanded employment, improved household incomes and stronger local economies. Thousands of entrepreneurs have found sustainable livelihoods within Globacom's commercial ecosystem, while count-

less families have benefited indirectly from the opportunities generated through its nationwide operations. In this sense, every successful dealer becomes a tributary feeding the larger river of Nigeria's economic development.

Indeed, Globacom's contribution transcends telecommunications. Its expansive investments in network infrastructure, fibre connectivity, digital innovation and nationwide coverage stimulate commerce, enhance financial inclusion, support education, enable healthcare delivery and empower millions of businesses whose daily operations depend upon reliable communication.

Connectivity has become the bloodstream of the modern economy, and Globacom remains one of its most steadfast arteries. Equally significant is the company's broader social compact. Through customer rewards, youth-focused initiatives, cultural sponsorships, community development projects and sustained support for indigenous enterprise, Globacom demonstrates that corporate citizenship is measured not merely by financial performance but by the breadth of lives transformed. It is a philosophy that enriches customers, empowers partners, uplifts communities and complements government's aspiration for inclusive economic growth.

Perhaps this explains why Globacom occupies a distinctive emotional space within Nigeria's corporate landscape. It is not simply a telecommunications company founded on Nigerian soil; it is a national institution whose

investments continuously circulate value within the domestic economy.

Every network expansion project creates employment. Every dealer empowered strengthens commerce. Every customer rewarded reinforces confidence. Every investment becomes another green thread woven into the fabric of national prosperity.

The finest partnerships are seldom built upon contracts alone; they are sustained by conviction. Globacom's enduring relationship with its dealers exemplifies this timeless truth. It has transformed commerce into collaboration, distribution into development and profitability into shared prosperity.

Like the mighty baobab whose generous canopy shelters generations without diminishing its own strength, Globacom continues to demonstrate that authentic corporate greatness is measured not by what an organisation accumulates, but by what it enables others to become. In nurturing its dealers, rewarding its partners, empowering entrepreneurs and advancing Nigeria's digital future, the company has cultivated something far more enduring than market leadership. It has cultivated confidence, opportunity and hope.

And in a nation whose greatest resource has always been the enterprise of its people, that may well be the most valuable network of all.

.Kabiru is a telecoms dealer in Kano

Perspective



PEDRO MANUEL MORENO

The old commodity bargain is no longer enough

Much of the world is asking what Africa can supply: copper for grids, cobalt and graphite for batteries, minerals for data centres, energy systems and advanced manufacturing. But the more consequential question is what Africa can build.

In 2022–2024, more than half of the world’s economies still depended heavily on primary commodities, with the highest levels concentrated among vulnerable economies, including many in Africa.

Reliance on raw commodity exports exposes countries to price swings, external shocks and fiscal pressure. Natural wealth can generate export earnings without producing enough industrial transformation.

Processing, services, supplier industries, technology and skills can make economies more diverse and resilient. The central issue is not simply what countries extract, but how much value and capability they retain.

Investment is redrawing the production map

From extraction to transformation: Africa’s critical minerals moment

Investment, trade and production networks are being reorganized around AI-related digital infrastructure, semiconductors, critical minerals and energy-transition technologies.

Strategic sectors accounted for 44% of greenfield project values in 2025, up from 16% in 2020. They are shaping where future productive capacity is built and who captures value from the next generation of trade.

Africa is already central to this economy. Yet centrality in supply does not guarantee a central place in production.

If investment reinforces extraction without building local capabilities, the next production map will reproduce the old commodity model: resources in one place, production and value elsewhere.

Critical minerals can be a bridge, or a trap

Critical minerals are where the old commodity story and a new development opportunity meet. They underpin the technologies driving the energy and digital transitions.

Lithium demand alone is projected to grow by more than 350% between 2024 and 2040. But rising demand is not the same as development. What matters is where value is created, where it is retained and who builds the industries around it.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo accounted for 74% of global cobalt mine production in 2025. Refining and processing are even more concentrated. Much of the value is created after minerals leave the ground.

Without deliberate action, critical minerals could become the next commodity trap: mineral-

rich countries supply the next industrial era while others process, manufacture, innovate and capture the larger gains. Value addition is not simply a move from mining to processing. It also involves suppliers, services, skills, infrastructure and regional markets. Each country must identify where it can compete and progressively build capabilities.

Practical pathways are already visible

I saw this clearly in Madagascar during my recent visit. The country is a major producer of nickel, cobalt, graphite and ilmenite, yet much of the value generated from these resources is captured elsewhere.

UNCTAD’s work identified opportunities to connect mineral wealth to food processing, textiles, chemicals, plastics and supplier industries, with the potential to create formal jobs. Mineral production can support a broader productive base rather than remain an isolated export activity.

Earlier this year, UNCTAD presented similar assessments in Zambia and Namibia. The analysis identified 412 products in Zambia and 353 products across 23 sectors in Namibia and the potential creation of thousands of jobs in both countries.

These numbers turn a broad debate into a practical agenda: value addition can be mapped, costed, sequenced and connected to real firms, sectors and markets.

Africa must shape the next industrial era

Africa should not be treated as a passive supplier of raw materials for the energy transition, artificial intelligence infrastructure or advanced manufacturing

elsewhere. If the world needs Africa’s minerals, partnerships must help build African industries.

This is not an argument for withdrawal from global trade. It is about the terms on which trade and investment contribute to development.

Investment should be judged by what it leaves behind: suppliers, skills, infrastructure, jobs, links with domestic and regional firms, and a clearer path from extraction to production. Value addition must also be treated as a regional and global agenda, because many African markets are too small to sustain complex industrial ecosystems alone.

Critical mineral partnerships must go beyond extraction agreements. They should support technology transfer, processing, manufacturing, standards, infrastructure and finance, or risk securing supply for others without changing the development trajectory of producer countries.

This has nothing to do with isolation or resource nationalism. It is about ensuring that trade and investment build productive capacity where resources are found. Commodity dependence is not destiny, but breaking it requires building that capacity at home.

The world clearly needs Africa’s minerals. The defining choice is whether that demand preserves the old geography of extraction or helps create a new geography of production, capabilities and retained value in Africa.

. Moreno, acting secretary-general, UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)



EBUKA UKOH

Across West Africa, cities are expanding faster than infrastructure. Wetlands that once absorbed floodwaters have been built over. Natural waterways have narrowed under unplanned development. Drainage systems designed for smaller populations now serve millions more people. Climate change has intensified rainfall, but poor placement has multiplied its consequences.

Lagos State, like several others this year, was on the national news diet. You can trust that it was for the wrong reason.

Every rainy season, we say the same things: “The rain was too much.” “Flood everywhere.” “It happened unexpectedly. What do we do now?” Then, perhaps the waters recede. The television cameras leave. Relief materials are distributed. Promises are made. Committees are formed.

Whenever another rainy season arrives, the story begins again. It may be time to admit an uncomfortable truth. Floods do not merely reveal the force of nature. They reveal the society we have built.

As communities across Nigeria and Ghana mourn the lives lost, families displaced, businesses destroyed, and livelihoods washed away, our first responsibility is compassion. I grieve with those who have lost loved ones, homes, farms, businesses, and the memories attached to them.

No editorial can restore what has been lost. I pray that those affected find comfort, strength, and the support needed to rebuild their lives.

Our second responsibility is honesty. Flooding is not new to West Africa. Climate change has increased the intensity and frequency of extreme rainfall, but heavy rains alone do not explain why disasters repeatedly become humanitarian tragedies. Human decisions often determine whether rainfall becomes an inconvenience or a catastrophe. Across West Africa, cities are expanding faster than infrastructure. Wetlands that once absorbed floodwaters have been built over. Natural waterways have narrowed under unplanned development. Drainage systems designed for smaller populations now serve millions more people. Climate change has intensified rainfall, but poor planning has multiplied its consequences. Floods are becoming disasters because exposure and vulnerability have increased alongside the rain.

Water exposes what already exists. It exposes blocked drainage systems. It exposes buildings constructed on

Op-ed article for immediate release

Every year, destructive floods expose Nigeria's vulnerabilities

waterways. It exposes poor urban planning. It exposes projects existing in budgets but never fully materialise on the ground, drainage systems left unfinished, and environmental regulations enforced selectively rather than consistently. It exposes weak enforcement of environmental regulations. It exposes neglected infrastructure. It exposes governments that prepare only after disaster strikes. And it exposes citizens who sometimes contribute to the very conditions that later threaten their own communities. That is why floods are not only environmental events. They are governance events. They are public health events. They are development events. And they are moral events.

The United Nations estimates that climate-related disasters are becoming more frequent and severe globally. Across West Africa, rapid urbanisation, inadequate drainage infrastructure, informal settlements in flood-prone areas, and changing rainfall patterns have significantly increased flood risks. Nigeria has repeatedly experienced devastating floods over the past decade, including the nationwide floods of 2022 that affected millions of people and caused widespread destruction. Ghana, too, continues to face recurring floods that disrupt lives and livelihoods, particularly in densely populated urban areas. These tragedies should no longer surprise us. They should educate us. Too often, our response begins and ends with government.

The government carries an enormous responsibility and should be held accountable. Citizens rightly expect functioning drainage systems, effective urban planning, early warning systems, emergency shelters, enforcement of building regulations, and disaster preparedness. Leaders should be judged not only by whether or not they visit disaster sites, but also by how effectively they reduce the number of disasters that become national tragedies. Compassion is not measured by the number of condolence messages issued after floods. It should be measured by the number of lives protected before they occur. But the government cannot do everything.

Flood resilience begins much closer to home. It begins with us. Every rainy season, countless drainage channels become clogged with plastic bottles, food containers, nylon bags, and household waste. Refuse dumped into gutters does not disappear. It waits. Then, when the rains arrive, it returns to us as floodwater. Environmental responsibility is not merely an environmental issue. It is an act of protecting human life. Families also have responsibilities. Many households prepare for weddings. They prepare for funerals. They prepare for Christmas. Far fewer prepare for emergencies.

Every family should know what to do when flood-

waters begin to rise. Parents should teach children basic flood safety. Families should identify safer locations, protect important documents, maintain emergency contacts, and know which elderly relatives or neighbours may need assistance during an evacuation.

Preparedness saves lives. Communities matter too. Strong communities do not wait for disaster before organising. Residents’ associations can coordinate drainage cleanup before the rainy season begins. Community leaders can identify vulnerable households. Volunteers can check on older adults, persons living with disabilities, and families who may struggle to evacuate quickly. Disaster resilience is built long before disaster arrives. Schools have responsibilities. Do students know what to do during severe flooding? Do schools have evacuation procedures? Do they monitor weather alerts? Can parents be reached quickly during emergencies?

The same questions should be asked of hospitals, churches, mosques, markets, universities, and businesses. Preparedness should become part of institutional culture rather than an afterthought. There is another lesson these floods should teach us. Poverty magnifies disaster.

The wealthiest families rarely lose everything to floods because they often live in safer neighbourhoods, possess stronger buildings, have insurance, and recover more quickly. The poorest frequently live where land is cheapest, often in flood-prone areas lacking adequate drainage, waste management, and resilient infrastructure.

This means flooding is also a justice issue. Climate hazards do not affect everyone equally. They punish vulnerability. That is why reducing flood risk requires more than sandbags. It requires reducing poverty, improving housing, expanding access to insurance and strengthening public infrastructure. Planning cities around people rather than political convenience. This is where governments must move beyond promises and camera lights.

Disaster response should not end with distributing relief materials for the evening news. Families need temporary shelter. Children need to return safely to school. Small business owners need support to rebuild. Farmers need assistance restoring livelihoods. Communities need functioning roads, drainage, healthcare, and clean water. Recovery is measured months after the cameras leave. Not while they are still recording.

There is also a lesson for faith communities. Churches and mosques often become places of refuge during disasters. They should also become places of preparedness. Faith leaders can educate congregations about disaster readiness, encourage environmental stewardship, organise volunteer response teams, and support affected families long after public attention has faded. The media

also has a responsibility. Too often, flood coverage ends when the water disappears. Yet recovery takes months and sometimes years. Journalists should return after the headlines fade to ask whether displaced families have been rehoused, whether promised relief has arrived, whether damaged schools have reopened, and whether governments have fulfilled their commitments. Accountability should not end when the cameras leave.

Perhaps the greatest lesson is this. Floods do not discriminate. They do not ask whether you voted for the ruling party or the opposition. They do not ask your ethnicity. They do not ask about your religion. They do not recognise national borders. The floodwaters that overwhelm communities in Ghana carry the same message as those that devastate communities in Nigeria. Nature is impartial.

Our preparation has not been. If there is hope in this tragedy, it is that every flood teaches us something. It teaches governments where infrastructure failed. It teaches engineers where cities need to be redesigned. It teaches communities where solidarity matters. It teaches families where preparation was missing. It teaches citizens that every plastic bottle thrown into a drainage channel has consequences far beyond a single household. The measure of a society is not whether floods come. No nation possesses that power. The measure is whether fewer people die the next time. Whether fewer homes are destroyed. Whether children return safely to school. Whether families recover more quickly. Whether governments learn. Whether communities organise. Whether citizens accept that caring for public spaces is also caring for one another.

The floodwaters will recede. The grief will not disappear so easily. The question is whether our memory will last longer than the water. Because if we forget these lessons once again, the next flood will not simply be another natural disaster. It will be another reminder that we failed to build the society we already knew we needed. Floods are often described as acts of nature. In truth, the scale of their destruction is often an act of policy, planning, preparation, and collective responsibility. Rain will continue to fall. The question is whether we will continue building societies that turn rainfall into mourning. The floodwaters will recede. What must not recede with them is our resolve to build differently.

Mr Ukoh, a PhD student and coauthor of Built By The Ancestors, writes from his base in New York, the United States.

Perspective

Viewpoint

With
Afo



AFOLABI ABIODUN

Entrepreneur | EdTech Professional | CISA-Certified Information Security Expert | PhD Candidate and Researcher

Nigeria doesn't have a cybersecurity problem. It has a Cyber-Talent problem — and we're training for the wrong jobs

The NCC is right that Nigeria needs “specialised skills.” But we keep mass-producing the cheap, general version of digital skills — and starving the expensive, specific ones the economy is actually hiring for.

THE MISMATCH what Nigeria trains vs. what the digital economy is hiring for	
WHAT WE MASS-PRODUCE General “digital skills” graduates Abundant. The easy, cheap thing to teach — and the number we keep celebrating.	WHAT THE MARKET NEEDS Cybersecurity · cloud · data · AI specialists Scarce. The expensive, hard capability employers actually hire for — and keep importing.



This week, the Executive Vice Chairman of the Nigerian Communications Commission, Aminu Maida, said something the whole sector already knows but rarely acts on: as Nigeria enters its next phase of digital transformation, it needs far greater investment in specialised technology skills. He is right. I want to take his point one step further, into territory that is less comfortable.

We have spent a decade celebrating the wrong number. Every few months a new figure is announced — so many thousands of young Nigerians “trained in digital skills.” The photographs are good. The certificates are real. And the cybersecurity vacancies stay open, the banks keep importing expertise, and the defence my research says actually works keeps going unstaffed. The problem is not that Nigeria trains too few people. It is that we are training the wrong depth of person for the jobs that exist.

Nigeria does not have a cybersecurity problem. It has a cyber-talent problem. And the way we are trying to solve it is quietly making it worse.

This is the first article in this series after concluding my three-part study of Nigeria's cybercrime equation. That work ended on a specific note: the factor that most determines whether an attack succeeds is not how digital we become, but how capable our defence is. Which raises the obvious next question — who, exactly, is going to run that defence? This article is about the people. Because a strategy is only as real as the workforce that can execute it, and right now, that workforce does not exist at the scale the country needs.

Exhibit A: The Number We Brag About

There is a comfortable version of digital-skills policy and an uncomfortable one. The comfortable version counts heads: how many people attended a training, learnt to use a spreadsheet, built a basic website, opened a freelancing account. It is cheap to deliver, easy to photograph, and politically reward-

ing. The uncomfortable version counts capability: how many people can actually secure a bank's cloud environment, run a security operations centre at 2am during a live incident, engineer a fraud-detection data pipeline, or govern identity across a national payment system. That version is expensive, slow, and unglamorous — and it is the only version the digital economy is actually hiring for.

The market is shouting what it needs, and we keep answering a different question. Employers do not have a shortage of people who have “done a digital skills programme.” They have a desperate shortage of mid-level specialists: security engineers, cloud architects, data engineers, applied-AI practitioners. These are the roles that sit unfilled for months, that get filled from abroad, that command salaries local institutions struggle to match. We are flooding the shallow end of the pool and wondering why nobody can swim in the deep end.

Consider what that looks like inside a single mid-sized Nigerian bank. It needs a security operations team that can watch its systems around the clock, a cloud engineer who can lock down the environment it is migrating to, and a data specialist who can make its fraud-detection models actually work. Those are three distinct, senior, expensive skill sets. What the national training pipeline mostly offers is a large supply of juniors who have completed an introductory programme and a certificate — capable, motivated, but not yet able to do any of those three jobs unsupervised. The bank's choice is then stark: spend a year and a fortune finishing the training itself, or hire the finished specialist from abroad. Most choose abroad. Multiply that decision across every bank, fintech, and telco in the country and you have the shape of the crisis — not too few people, but too few people at the depth the work demands.

We count the people we trained. The market counts the jobs we still can't fill. Until those two numbers are measuring the same thing, every “digital skills” announcement is a headline, not a solution.

Exhibit B: The Number the Market Actually Keeps

If the mismatch is this visible, why does it survive year after year? Three structural reasons, and none of them is a lack of talent.

First, general skills are cheap to teach and specialists are expensive to make. A one-week digital-literacy workshop scales to thousands. A cybersecurity specialist takes years, real infrastructure to practise on, and senior mentors whose time is scarce and costly. Programmes optimise for the metric that is easy to hit — headcount — not the outcome that is hard to build — capability.

Second, we train for exams, not for incidents. Much of what passes for specialist training in Nigeria ends at a certificate. But a certificate certifies knowledge, not competence. The gap between someone who has passed a security exam and someone who can be trusted alone on a live console at 2am is enormous — and it is exactly the gap employers are unwilling to pay to close on their own.

Third, the ones we do manage to train, we lose. Nigeria's best-trained specialists are a global export. Remote-first hiring means a talented Lagos security engineer can earn in hard currency for a firm abroad without leaving home. Local institutions — the ones whose systems most need defending — cannot compete on salary. So, the country pays to train defenders and then watches them defend someone else's systems.

The Verdict — Three Ways to Close the Gap

01 Build a specialist pipeline, employer-defined — not another mass digital-literacy count

Nigeria does not need more coding bootcamps that end at “hello world.” It needs a national specialist-skills pipeline aimed at the roles the market is actually short on: security operations, cloud security, identity and access, data engineering, and applied AI. That means employer-defined curricula (banks, fintechs, and telcos say what they will hire, and training is built backwards from it), industry certification pathways, and paid apprenticeships that place trainees inside real security operations centres — not lecture halls. Train for the job that exists, with the employer in the room from day one.

OWNER NITDA + NCC, with banks, fintechs & telcos. MODEL Estonia's cyber-workforce model, India's employer-linked ITIs. HORIZON Design in 6 months, first cohort within 12.

02 Give trainees real hours — national cyber-ranges and a SOC apprenticeship

A specialist is not made by a certificate; a specialist is made by supervised hours on real systems. Nigeria should stand up shared cyber-ranges and a national Security Operations Centre apprenticeship — rotating graduates through live monitoring, incident response, and threat hunting under senior supervision. This is the single fastest way to convert paper-qualified juniors into the mid-level defenders the sector cannot currently find, and it directly addresses the capability gap my research identified: the shortage is not of awareness, it is of hands that can actually run the defence.

OWNER NITDA + a consortium of banks / MSSPs. MODEL UK NCSC CyberFirst, Israel's supervised-hours model. HORIZON Stand up first shared range within 12 months.

03 Turn brain drain into a brain-gain loop — train-and-retain compacts

Talent that Nigeria trains at great cost is being hired — remotely, in hard currency — by firms abroad, while local institutions that most need defenders cannot compete on salary. Rather than fight this, harness it: a structured “train-and-retain” compact where employers who benefit from the national pipeline commit to local hiring quotas or co-fund the training, and where remote global work is taxed and channelled to partly fund the next cohort. Turn the brain drain into a brain-gain loop — the diaspora and the remote workforce become the funders and mentors of the pipeline, not just its export.

OWNER Federal Ministry of Commerce & Digital Economy. MODEL India's diaspora-linked tech funding, Unilever's retention bonds. HORIZON Pilot compact with 3 major employers in 12 months.

The fix is not more of the same at greater scale. It is a shift in what we build, how we build it, and how we keep it. Three directives follow — aimed less at spending more, and more at spending differently.

Closing Argument

Aminu Maida is right that Nigeria needs specialised skills. The danger is that the call gets answered with the same instrument that has failed for a decade — another round of high-volume, low-depth “digital skills” training, announced with the same optimism and the same photographs. That would not close the gap. It would widen it, because it spends the budget and the political goodwill on the easy metric while the hard one goes untouched.

My research has argued, across three articles, that Nigeria can out-defend its attackers — that defence works, that the digital economy is not the enemy, that the outcome is within the country's control. But every one of those conclusions rests on a silent assumption: that there are people capable of running the defence. Right now, at the scale required, there are not. The talent gap is the quiet variable underneath every cybersecurity headline in this country. Close it, and the rest becomes possible. Ignore it, and the best strategy in the world has no hands to execute it.

And this is not only a security story — it is an economic one. Every specialist role a Nigerian institution fills from abroad is capital leaving the country and a career that a young Nigerian did not get to build here. Every one we train and then lose to a foreign employer is a national investment earning its return somewhere else. Getting this right does more than secure the banks; it keeps the value of Nigeria's own talent inside Nigeria's own economy. That is the real prize hiding inside a problem we keep mislabelling as a skills shortage. It is not a shortage of willing people. It is a shortage of the specific, deep, expensive capability the digital economy runs on — and a decade of the easy version has not moved it.

We keep training people for the digital economy of the brochure. The real one is hiring for jobs we are barely teaching. Fix that, and Nigeria stops importing its own defence.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Cyber Frontline draws on the author's doctoral research into cybercrime and cybersecurity in Nigerian financial institutions (University of the Cumberland; committee-approved, defence forthcoming). This article opens a new arc following the three-part series Nigeria's Cybercrime Equation. The author is a Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) and an EdTech entrepreneur.

News Feature

From Kano to Abeokuta: PIN brokers international partnership against urban violence

ADEOLA AJAKAIYE

For residents of Abeokuta South Local Government Area, the fear of street violence, youth crime and other urban security threats could soon give way to new opportunities for safer neighbourhoods as the city prepares to host an international delegation focused on violence prevention.

Beyond the exchange of ideas, the planned visit is expected to provide practical benefits for residents through improved community policing strategies, stronger collaboration between government and civil society, and access to tested global approaches that have helped reduce violence in other cities.

The exchange programme, scheduled for July 25 to 29, 2026, will bring together experts from the United States and the United Kingdom under the Peace in Our Cities initiative, linking Abeokuta with Bristol in a city-to-city partnership aimed at tackling urban violence and strengthening community safety.

Driving the initiative in Nigeria is the Pin Initiative Network (PIN), a non-governmental organisation headquartered in the ancient city of Kano in northern Nigeria. Founded by Femi Michael Sodipo, the organisation has become increasingly recognised for promoting peacebuilding, conflict prevention, community resilience and innovative security partnerships across the country.

Through the forthcoming exchange, PIN is serving as the bridge between international partners and local stakeholders, creating an opportunity for Abeokuta to benefit from proven global strategies for reducing urban violence.

For Abeokuta South Local Government Council, the programme presents an opportunity to strengthen institutional capacity in crime prevention, while Ogun State is expected to benefit from international partnerships, knowledge sharing and improved security policies capable of attracting greater investment and economic activities.

Urban safety experts say safer cities encourage business growth, tourism, education and community development, making violence prevention not only a security issue but also an economic and social priority.

Preparations for the visit have already begun. On June 17, 2026, officials met in Abeokuta to fine-tune arrangements for the international exchange.

The meeting involved Adebayo Shittu, chairman of Abeokuta South Local Government Council, and Olu-sola Subair, special adviser on security to the Ogun State governor, alongside representatives of Peace in Our Cities and Pin Initiative Network.

According to organisers, the exchange will connect Abeokuta with Bristol to encourage practical learning between both cities, allowing officials, security stakeholders and community organisations to study successful violence prevention models and adapt them to local realities.

Femi Michael Sodipo, founder of



Pin Initiative Network, said the exchange is designed to move beyond theoretical discussions by fostering practical cooperation among cities facing similar urban security challenges. According to him, city-to-city partnerships allow communities to learn directly from one another while adapting tested interventions to local realities.

The initiative is coordinated globally by Peace in Our Cities, an international coalition of mayors, civil society organisations and global institutions working to reduce urban violence and build peaceful, inclusive communities across the world, while Pin Initiative Network is facilitating its implementation and local coordination in Nigeria.

Organisers say the collaboration is expected to deepen local capacity for preventing crime before it occurs rather than relying solely on enforcement after violence has happened.

The exchange comes against the backdrop of growing global concern over violence in urban centres.

Available data from the coalition indicate that about 82 per cent of deadly violence worldwide occurs outside recognised conflict zones, with a significant proportion concentrated in cities.

The organisation notes that more people now lose their lives on city streets than in active war zones, a trend experts say has received far less global attention than conventional armed conflicts.

By exposing local officials to evidence-based violence prevention strategies, organisers believe the Abeokuta exchange could help reshape security

planning in Ogun State.

Expected discussions will focus on strengthening partnerships between government institutions, law enforcement agencies, civil society organisations, youth groups and local communities to prevent violence through coordinated interventions.

Rather than concentrating exclusively on criminal prosecution, participants are expected to examine strategies that address the underlying causes of violence, including unemployment, social exclusion, weak community engagement and limited opportunities for vulnerable young people.

Experts say such preventive approaches have produced measurable results in several cities around the

world by reducing violent crime while improving trust between citizens and public institutions.

Peace in Our Cities was launched in September 2019 with the participation of 11 mayors and six international partners committed to accelerating action on urban peacebuilding.

Since then, the network has expanded significantly, becoming one of the few global platforms bringing together city leaders and civil society organisations around a common goal of reducing urban violence.

The coalition describes itself as the only international network dedicated specifically to supporting both municipal governments and community organisations in implementing practical solutions to violence affecting urban populations.

Its work aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 16.1, which seeks to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths worldwide.

Over the past six years, member cities have participated in several exchange visits that enabled them to study successful violence prevention initiatives, assess their relevance to local conditions and establish long-term partnerships.

Organisers say many of those exchanges have resulted in policy reforms and the adaptation of innovative methods that have strengthened violence prevention programmes in participating cities.

Among the resources developed by the coalition are the Guiding Principles and Inspiring Actions report, which outlines proven interventions for reducing violence and improving

collaboration between governments and civil society.

The network has also produced Insight Briefs documenting successful community responses to violence, Resource Briefs providing guidance on addressing specific forms of violence, and a publication titled Lessons from Effective Offices of Violence Prevention, which examines how specialised violence prevention agencies can operate more effectively.

For Abeokuta South, access to these global resources could help strengthen existing security initiatives while encouraging data-driven decision-making in addressing local crime challenges.

The involvement of Pin Initiative Network also reflects the growing role of Nigerian civil society organisations in shaping global conversations on peacebuilding. From its base in Kano, the organisation has continued to build partnerships that connect local communities with international best practices, demonstrating that solutions to insecurity can emerge through collaboration rather than isolation.

Security analysts believe city-to-city partnerships have become increasingly important because urban violence often shares common drivers across different countries despite cultural and economic differences.

Lessons learned in cities such as Bristol could therefore offer valuable insights for communities in Abeokuta seeking sustainable ways to reduce crime, improve public safety and build stronger relationships between residents and public authorities.

For Ogun State, the programme also has broader implications.

Improved public safety has long been recognised as a key factor influencing investment decisions, tourism, property development and overall quality of life.

A safer urban environment could encourage greater economic activities, create jobs and improve residents' confidence in public institutions.

The exchange is also expected to strengthen Ogun State's profile as a participant in international governance and security partnerships, opening opportunities for future collaboration with other cities and development organisations.

As delegates from the United States and the United Kingdom prepare to arrive later this month, expectations are growing that the discussions will extend beyond conference rooms into practical actions capable of making neighbourhoods safer.

For many residents, the success of the exchange will ultimately be measured not by speeches or agreements but by whether children can walk to school without fear, businesses can operate in secure environments and communities can enjoy peaceful streets.

If the lessons from other participating cities are successfully adapted, Abeokuta's partnership with Bristol—facilitated by Pin Initiative Network from its Kano headquarters—could become a model for how Nigerian-led collaboration with international partners helps local communities tackle urban violence while creating safer, more resilient cities for future generations.



A safer urban environment could encourage greater economic activities, create jobs and improve residents' confidence in public institutions

City File

Kogi announces successful rescue of kidnapped victims in Dekina

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE, Lokoja

The Kogi State Government has announced the successful rescue of the four persons kidnapped during the recent attack on an unauthorised examination center in Olowa, Dekina local government area of the state.

Kingsley Femi Fanwo, commissioner for Information and Communications, disclosed this in a statement on Thursday, describing the rescue as the outcome of a coordinated security operation ordered by Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo immediately after the incident.

He said: “Governor Ododo directed the State Security Adviser, Jerry Omodara to coordinate a joint rescue mission involving the Nigerian Army, the Department of State Services (DSS), the Nigeria Police Force, local vigilante groups and other security operatives. “Shortly after the kidnapping incident, the governor directed the State Security Adviser, Jerry Omodara to coordinate the rescue operation. The State Security Adviser and the leadership of the 12 Brigade and the 21 Battalion of the Nigerian Army, the DSS, the Po-



lice and local security operatives stormed the forest to ensure the victims were rescued. “Just this evening, while inspecting the Armoured Personnel Carriers procured by the Kogi State Government to strengthen the fight against criminality, the Governor assured newsmen that every effort was being made to secure the release of the victims. “A few hours later, the victims regained their freedom. The sustained pressure on the kidnappers and the saturation of the forest by heavily armed security personnel

forced the criminals to abandon the victims and flee. “Security operatives remain in the forest and the operation is still ongoing. We are determined to ensure that none of the criminals escapes justice. Our resolve is clear: anyone who chooses the path of crime in Kogi State will face the full weight of the law. “We can confirm that the School Principal, the NECO official and the two students have all been rescued safely. They are hale and hearty and are currently with security agencies for de-

briefing and necessary medical checks.”

Fanwo commended the gallantry and professionalism of the officers and men of the Nigerian Army, the DSS, the Police, local security operatives and all other agencies involved in the rescue mission, describing their swift response as another testament to the effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration in the fight against insecurity.

The Commissioner also expressed the appreciation of the Kogi State Government to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, for his steadfast support for the state's security efforts.

“The President directed the heads of the security agencies to give Kogi every necessary support to rescue the victims. Today, that support has yielded the desired result. We are deeply grateful to Mr. President for standing firmly with Kogi State in our determination to protect lives and property.”

He reiterated that Governor Ododo's administration would not relent in its efforts to rid every part of the state of criminal elements, assuring residents that the government would continue to invest in intelligence, security logistics and inter-agency collaboration to keep Kogi safe for all.

Newly inaugurated SUG ESUT advised to shun cultism, social vices

REGIS ANUKWUOJI, Enugu

Daniel Ndukwe, the Police Public Relations Officer of the Enugu State Police Command, has called on the newly inaugurated executive members of the Students' Union Government (SUG) of the Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) to shun cultism and other social vices.

Ndukwe, who made the call while delivering a keynote lecture titled, ‘Choices, Character and Consequences: Confronting Cultism and Other Social Vices on Campus,’ advised them to embrace responsible leadership, and serve as worthy ambassadors of the institution and society.

Congratulating the new student leaders on their election, the police spokesperson described their emergence as a call to selfless service, stressing that true leadership is rooted in influence, responsibility, and leading by example.

He urged the SUG executives to promote peace, unity, discipline, and academic excellence while working closely with the university management and security agencies to combat cultism, drug abuse, examination malpractice, cybercrime, and other criminal activities on campus.

Ndukwe observed that every undergraduate begins university with dreams

of success, but noted that the realization of those aspirations depends largely on the choices they make.

He warned that cultism, drug abuse, examination malpractice, cybercrime, and other social vices, often presented as shortcuts to success, ultimately result in academic failure, damaged reputations, criminal prosecution, and, in some cases, the loss of lives and promising futures.

The police spokesman advised students to choose their friends carefully, resist negative peer influence, uphold integrity, and always remember that “today's choices become tomorrow's consequences.”

He reaffirmed the commitment of the Enugu State Police Command, under the leadership of Mamman Bitrus Giwa, commissioner of Police, will be sustaining its partnership with ESUT in maintaining a safe and secure learning environment.

Ndukwe also encouraged students to remain vigilant, obey the law, and promptly report criminal activities or suspicious persons within and around the university community.

The inauguration ceremony was declared open by Aloysius-Michaels Okolie, vice-chancellor of ESUT. It was attended by Ernest Chike Nwoha, deputy vice chancellor; the Provost, the Registrar, the University Librarian, the Dean of Students' Affairs, other principal officers of the university, former SUG leaders, and students.

Niger CP vows continued support in tackling cattle rustling, livestock-related crimes

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Minna

Adamu Abdullahi Elleman, the Niger State commissioner of Police, Friday reaffirmed the command's commitment to supporting efforts aimed at combating cattle rustling and other livestock-related crimes across the state.

Elleman gave the assurance while receiving Abdullahi Adamu Mammagi and Umar Ahmad Rebe, Commissioners for Livestock and Nomadic Affairs alongside their entourage, during a courtesy visit to the Niger State Police Command Headquarters, Dutsen-Kura, Minna.

Speaking during the visit, Mammagi appreciated the Commissioner of Police for the warm reception and lauded the Command's continued support for the ministry. He noted that the establishment of the Ministry of Livestock and Nomadic Affairs has recorded significant achievements, particularly in reducing farmers-herders conflicts and managing the influx of nomadic groups through sustained stakeholder engagement.

According to him, the visit was aimed at strengthening collaboration with the Police Command towards the effective implementation



of new cattle market regulations in the state.

He explained that the regulations include mandatory veterinary inspection and proper documentation for the transportation of livestock to ensure animal health, security, and improved revenue generation for the government.

In a statement issued by Wasiu Abiodun, the Police Public Relations Officer, Mammagi explained that every animal transported after purchase would be accompanied by a waybill issued following a veterinary inspection. He noted that the process would guarantee the authenticity, health, and security of livestock while enhancing confidence in livestock transactions and boosting government revenue.

He stressed that the successful implementation of the regulations would require strong collaboration with the Nigeria Police Force and other relevant stakeholders.

Also speaking, Rebe commended the Commissioner of Police for his



consistent support and intervention in the activities of the Ministry of Livestock and Nomadic Affairs. He also praised the Command's efforts in addressing security challenges across the state.

In his response, CP Elleman expressed appreciation to the commissioners for the visit and reaffirmed the Command's commitment to enforcing all lawful regulations aimed at promoting peace, security, and orderly conduct. The Commissioner emphasized

the importance of verifying the origin of livestock, profiling buyers and sellers, and ensuring that all cattle transactions are conducted through legitimate and traceable processes.

He also commended the initiative for promoting veterinary certification, noting that it would enhance public health by ensuring the safety of beef for human consumption while simultaneously serving as a viable source of revenue for the state government.

Abstain from activities that could tarnish throne of Olubadan- Oba Ladoja

...Promotes 10 chiefs to higher status

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

Oba Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja (Arusa1) has promoted ten Ibadan traditional chiefs to higher ranks in the Otun Chieftaincy Line in Ibadanland with a charge that that they should abstain from land grabbing and other criminal activity that can tarnish the throne of Olubadan of Ibadanland.

The promotion exercise took place at the Banquet Hall of the Olubadan Palace, Oke Aremo, Ibadan on Friday.

In his message to the newly elevated Chiefs, Oba Ladoja admonished them to see their elevation as a call for more responsibilities to Ibadanland, for whom more is given, more is expected.

Furthermore, the paramount ruler charged the newly promoted rulers to always think of what they can do to move Ibadanland forward in the areas of peace maintenance, love, unity, economic emancipation, security, religious harmony, food sufficiency, abstinence from land grabbing and other criminal activity that can tarnish the throne of Olubadan of Ibadanland.



The Olubadan messages were contained in the press release issued and signed by Ayoadé Solomon Olugbemiga, the Chief Press Secretary to Olubadan of Ibadanland shortly after the elevation exercise.

In his interview shortly after the elevation program, the newly promoted Ikolaba Olubadan of Ibadanland, Dauda Kolawole Gbadamosi assured Oba Ladoja and the Olubadan - In - Council that the promotion of the new Chiefs will not be taken for

granted but instead will join hands with Oba Ladoja and the members of Olubadan-In-Council to take Ibadanland to a greater height.

Other elevated Chiefs are Williams Oyeleke Oyekola as new Asaaju Olubadan of Ibadanland, Oluyinka Akande the new Ayingung Olubadan of Ibadanland, Olufemi Olukorede Ogunwale as Aare-Ago Olubadan of Ibadanland and Wasiu Adejoro Aladorin as the new Laguna Olubadan of Ibadanland.

Southern Kaduna lawyers demand transparent probe into Marry Habila's death

BENJAMIN AGESAN, Kaduna

The Southern Kaduna Lawyers' Forum (SKLF) has called for an immediate, independent and transparent investigation into the death of Mary Habila, saying only a credible probe will restore public confidence and ensure justice in the controversial death.

In a statement jointly signed by Solomon Musa, chairman of SKLF, and Solomon G. Yohanna, the Forum's secretary, expressed shock over the “tragic and mysterious” death of Mary Habila, who reportedly died on June 27, 2026, at the residence of the Minister of Works, David Umahi, in Uburu, Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

The lawyers said the conflicting reports surrounding the circumstances of her death have raised serious concerns that require thorough investigation in line with the Constitution and internationally accepted legal and medical standards.

SKLF demanded that law enforcement agencies conduct a comprehensive investigation, including a valid autopsy and, where necessary, a cor-



oner's inquest, before the deceased is buried.

According to the Forum, “Any attempt to quickly carry out the funeral of the deceased should be aborted and refrained from, as that may further precipitate suspicion and mistrust by the populace on the circumstances of the deceased's demise.”

The Forum listed several questions it said investigators must answer, including the circumstances that led to Mary Habila's presence in the minister's residence, the exact time of her death, when the incident was reported, the condition of her body, who was present in the house on the day of her death, and the whereabouts of Engr. David Umahi

at the time.

It also called for clarification on reports that Mary allegedly died on June 27 but her death became public only on July 10, whether she worked as a nurse or physiotherapist, when she travelled to Ebonyi State, and the circumstances of her employment and alleged secondment to the minister's residence.

The lawyers stressed that no individual is above the law and insisted that due process must be followed regardless of the status or position of those involved.

“The answers to these questions will assure Mary's family, the Southern Kaduna Lawyers' Forum, the general public, as well as those

who had contact with Mary, of the transparency of the investigation,” the statement said.

The Forum urged all persons with relevant information to cooperate with investigators and called on the authorities to make the findings of the investigation public upon completion.

SKLF also appealed to the media and the public to avoid speculation, respect the dignity of the deceased, and allow investigators to carry out their work without interference.

The Forum pledged to provide legal support to the family and monitor the investigation to ensure justice is served.

“As lawyers and ministers in the temple of justice, we reiterate that the sanctity of human life is non-negotiable as encapsulated under Section 33 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). The law must take its course without fear or favour,” the group stated.

They added that the Forum was considering legal action, if necessary, to ensure justice and accountability in the matter while expressing confidence that the relevant authorities would act diligently to establish the true circumstances surrounding Mary Habila's death.

Ododo reaffirms no-ransom policy as security forces rescue abducted NECO candidates in Kogi

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE, Lokoja

Ahmed Usman Ododo, Kogi State governor, has reiterated his administration's policy of not negotiating with kidnappers or paying ransom, following the successful rescue of four persons abducted from a NECO examination centre in Dekina Local Government Area of the state.

Ododo made this known on Friday at the Government House, Lokoja, while receiving the rescued victims who were kidnapped last Tuesday during an attack on a purported examination centre at the abandoned Government Secondary School, Olowa Agbajo, Dekina Local Government Area, just as he commended security agencies for

their coordinated operations, describing the rescue as a testament to the effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration in tackling insecurity in the state.

He said, “I have said it before, and I want to reiterate that this administration will never negotiate with criminals or pay ransom. They may come into our state, but they will not return to where they came from.”

He equally commended President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for providing the necessary support to security agencies, assuring the President that Kogi State would continue to justify the confidence reposed in it.

“I want to commend Mr. President and Commander-in-Chief, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, for

giving us all the support needed to defeat insecurity. We will not disappoint him in Kogi State,” he added.

However, he ordered a full investigation into the circumstances that led to the conduct of the NECO examination at the abandoned school.

He pointed out that preliminary findings indicated that the school had earlier been shut down because of its remote location and security concerns.

“I await the outcome of the investigation to determine why the principal decided to take only 10 students to an isolated location for the examination,” he said.

Ododo urged residents to remain calm, assuring them that security operatives were on the trail of the kidnappers and would ensure they were arrested and prosecuted.

Focus

Human capital over protectionism: Why restricting educational access undermines national development



Image Credit: Proshare Graphics

Proshare

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 in-

vite 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 tra-

ditional 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.

NNPCL's N210 trn: When facts finally cut through the noise

IKE ONWUACHU

For weeks, the extraordinary figure of N210 trillion dominated public discussion around the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), creating an impression in some quarters that an almost unimaginable sum of public money had simply disappeared.

Then Bala Wunti appeared before the Nigerian Senate last week and brought something essential to the conversation: clarity.

With the confidence of a man deeply familiar with the workings of Nigeria's petroleum industry, Wunti methodically addressed the issues before lawmakers, breaking down complex accounting entries and drawing an important distinction between funds described as "missing" and figures requiring explanation, reconciliation or proper accounting treatment.

His presentation was compelling not because it was theatrical, but because it was grounded in knowledge.



Having spent decades across critical areas of Nigeria's oil and gas industry, Wunti demonstrated an uncommon command of the intersection between petroleum operations, investment structures, government obligations and financial

accounting. He spoke with precision, answered questions confidently and translated what had become a sensational national controversy into an issue that could be examined on its facts.

That distinction is critical. An accounting entry requir-

ing explanation is not automatically evidence of missing money. Terms such as "unaccounted for," "receivables," "payables," "outstanding obligations" and "missing funds" carry fundamentally different meanings. In a matter involving N210 trillion, those distinctions cannot be sacrificed for sensational headlines.

Wunti's intervention therefore did more than defend a position. It helped establish a clearer framework within which the Senate can now proceed with its constitutional responsibility.

With the issues better defined, lawmakers should be able to continue their work objectively, thoroughly and without ulterior motive, following the records wherever they lead, demanding reconciliation where necessary and ensuring that every material figure is properly explained.

That is what effective legislative oversight should represent: scrutiny without presumption, investigation without sensationalism and accountability anchored in evidence.

Wunti's appearance also demonstrated the value of institutional memory. Nigeria's petroleum industry is extraordinarily complex, and interrogating its finances requires more than reading numbers from a balance sheet. It requires understanding the transactions, operational structures and historical obligations behind those numbers.

That depth of knowledge was evident in his testimony.

Ultimately, the N210 trillion question should not be settled by competing narratives. It should be settled by facts, records and transparent reconciliation.

Bala Wunti helped bring much-needed clarity to the debate. The responsibility now rests with the Senate to build on that clarity, complete its work independently and establish the facts for the Nigerian people.

In matters of public accountability, scrutiny is necessary. But scrutiny is most credible when it begins with facts and follows them without fear, favour or predetermined conclusions.

First Securities launches FirstInvest to enable Nigerians trade directly in stock market

First Securities Brokers, a subsidiary of FirstHoldCo Plc, has announced the launch of the FirstInvest App, an innovative mobile investment platform designed to make stock market investing simpler, faster, and more accessible for Nigerians.

The FirstInvest App offers investors a seamless digital experience, enabling them to open and manage their investment accounts, monitor their portfolios, and trade equities listed on the Nigerian Exchange (NGX) directly from their mobile devices.

Fiona Ahmed Ahimie, managing director, First Securities Brokers, stated that FirstInvest has been developed to provide investors with convenience, speed, and accessibility.

She added that the app is a secure and intuitive platform that empowers individuals to participate confidently in the capital market from their comfort.

"The launch of the FirstInvest App represents another significant milestone in our digital transformation journey and our commitment to delivering innovative investment solutions to our clients," Ahimie stated.

She added that the app was designed with both new and experienced investors in mind, the platform combines convenience, security, and ease of use to help us-

ers make informed investment decisions anytime and anywhere.

As Nigeria continues to embrace digital financial services, the FirstInvest App reinforces First Securities Brokers' commitment to driving financial inclusion and expanding access to wealth creation opportunities through technology.

According to her, the launch of FirstInvest aligns with First Securities Brokers' broader strategy of leveraging technology to improve customer experience while supporting the growth of retail participation in Nigeria's capital market.

"Our goal is to remove the traditional barriers associated with investing by placing the power of timely investment and decision making in the hands of Nigerians," Ahimie stated.

She disclosed that First Securities Brokers remains committed to providing trusted investment advisory services, innovative financial solutions, and exceptional customer service, helping clients build and preserve wealth across generations.

"Whether you are taking your first investment step, actively managing your portfolio or just evaluating your investment, FirstInvest provides the tools and flexibility needed to support your financial aspirations," she stated.

The Duke's Masterclass has announced that Chief Emeka Anyaoku, former Commonwealth Secretary-General and one of Africa's most distinguished diplomats and elder statesmen, will serve as the chief speaker at its 2026 International Masterclass on Crisis and Reputational Management, scheduled to hold on October 29, 2026, at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja.

The executive programme will subsequently hold in London in March 2027, reinforcing The Duke's Masterclass as a unique dual-location executive platform that brings together globally respected leaders, policymakers, corporate executives, and governance experts to share practical strategies for navigating today's increasingly complex business and public sector environment.

With the theme "Definitive Strategies in Robust Crisis & Reputational Management," the Masterclass is designed for C-suite executives, board members, senior government officials, policymakers, corporate leaders, entrepreneurs, and communications professionals seeking world-class insights into leadership, governance, crisis management, strategic communications, and institutional reputation.

As the chief speaker, Chief Anyaoku will draw from decades of distinguished international service

Emeka Anyaoku to lead The Duke's Masterclass 2026 as corporates organisations confirm participation

to deliver keynote insights on diplomacy, negotiation, conflict resolution, leadership, and reputation management at the highest levels of global governance.

Joining him is an exceptional international faculty comprising Lord Gavin Barwell, former Chief of Staff to former UK Prime Minister Theresa May and Member of the UK House of Lords; Lady Yvonne Thompson, CBE, DL, Deputy Lieutenant of Greater London and founder of the United Kingdom's first Black-owned public relations company; and Dr. Nero Ughwujabo, former Special Adviser to former UK Prime Minister Theresa May and internationally respected governance and policy strategist. Together with accomplished Nigerian business and public sector leaders, the faculty will deliver practical insights into crisis leadership, stakeholder engagement, strategic communications, governance, and institutional resilience.

The Abuja edition of the Masterclass will be hosted by Bimbo Ashiru, chairman, Odu'a Investment Company Limited, whose distinguished career in banking, investment, corporate governance, and

public service further underscores the stature of the programme.

Momentum continues to build ahead of the masterclass, with Providus Bank fully onboard as a participating institution. The bank joins a growing list of leading organisations that have confirmed attendance, including United Bank for Africa (UBA), Rainoil Limited, Lagos Building Investment Company (LBIC), Heirs Energies, and the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). Their participation reflects the increasing recognition that effective crisis management, reputational leadership, and stakeholder engagement have become strategic priorities for institutions operating in today's dynamic environment.

Speaking on the forthcoming programme, Joseph Edgar, convener of The Duke's Masterclass, said: "Today's leaders are judged not only by their performance but by how effectively they respond to crises, inspire confidence, protect institutional reputation, and build enduring stakeholder trust. The Duke's Masterclass has been carefully curated to provide practical, globally benchmarked strategies

Issue

How the Landlords' economy is pricing Nigerians out of home

BLAISE UDUNZE

It is considered that in every organized society, the home is supposed to be a place of security. It should be where families find peace after a hard day's work, where children grow, where dreams are nurtured, and where the pressures of life temporarily fade away. This narrative comes with keen interest, having witnessed that for millions of Nigerians, home has become the country's newest economic battlefield. This is fast becoming the experience for the vast majority of Nigerians.

Across the length and breadth of Nigeria, citizens are deeply lamenting the skyrocketing rent. Regrettably, this has become one of the fastest-rising costs of living. An unexpected trend which has become a huge concern is that currently apartments that were rented for N700,000 or N1 million just a few years ago are now advertised for N3 million, N5 million or even higher. Amidst this bizarre development, do you know that they are often without significant improvements to the property itself? One key troubling development is that recent estimates suggest that house rents in many Nigerian cities have surged by between 100 and 300 percent over the last two years, a pace that far exceeds the country's official inflation rate and has placed unprecedented pressure on households already struggling with rising food, transportation and energy costs.

Landlords, through estate agents, increasingly demand one or two years' rent upfront. Tenants are expected to pay 10 percent of the principal rent toward agency fees, legal fees, agreement charges, caution deposits, and, in most cases, the service charge (which appears to be higher), security levies, and utility-related costs before receiving the keys. In many cases, these additional charges add hundreds of thousands or even millions of naira to the advertised rent, making the total cost of securing accommodation far beyond the reach of average-income earners. Equally disturbing is the unchecked exploitation by agent marauders, who prey on desperate house seekers by imposing outrageous and often illegal fees that further deepen Nigeria's housing crisis. What should ordinarily be a routine life event has become a financial ordeal.

Nigeria's housing crisis is no longer simply a property story. It has evolved into an economic emergency with profound implications for families, businesses, public health and national development.

The Federal Government's National Housing Data Technical Committee estimates that Nigeria faces a housing deficit of approximately 15 million homes. At the same time, millions of existing houses are considered structurally inadequate and lack access to essential infrastructure. If this figure is something to consider, anyone would know that these figures reveal two overlapping crises. First, this shows that millions of Nigerians cannot find decent accommodation, whilst millions more live in overcrowded, unsafe or poorly serviced housing.

At the same time, Nigeria's population continues to expand rapidly, with cities absorbing hundreds of thousands of new residents every year.

One of the challenges is that urbanisation has consistently outpaced housing development, widening the gap between supply and demand while



predictably, rents continue to rise and affordability continues to decline.

Remarkably, housing experts generally recommend that households should spend no more than 30 percent of their income on accommodation. For many Nigerian families, that recommendation has become almost impossible to achieve.

Teachers, nurses, journalists, police officers, civil servants, young bankers, entrepreneurs, artisans and other middle-income earners increasingly devote more than half of their annual income to rent alone. For many, housing has become the single largest financial obligation, leaving very little for every other necessity of life.

After paying landlords, food budgets shrink. Healthcare is postponed. Children are transferred to less expensive schools. Retirement savings disappear. Business investments are suspended. Vacations become unimaginable luxuries. The rent bill has become the first expense families think about and the last financial burden they can escape.

The effects extend far beyond individual households. This is totally outrageous, as financial analysts have long observed that when accommodation consumes a disproportionate share of disposable income, consumer spending across the economy inevitably weakens.

Families postpone replacing household appliances. Vehicle purchases are delayed. Furniture sales decline. Restaurants receive fewer customers. Clothing retailers experience lower patronage. Small businesses lose purchasing power from consumers whose earnings are now tied up in rent. The result is a vicious economic cycle in which rising housing costs suppress consumption, reduce business activity and ultimately slow economic growth.

Behind every rent increase lies a deeply personal story. Consider a fictional but representative family whose experience mirrors that of countless Nigerians. The aspect of receiving notice that the annual rent for their modest two-bedroom apartment would rise from N1.2 million to N3 million comes with uneasiness. At this point, the Blessings' family had spent months desperately searching for an alternative.

Unable to afford the increase and harassment from the landlord, they eventually relocated nearly 30 kilometres away from their former neighbourhood. The consequences were immediate. Their children had to change schools. The

family's daily commuting time doubled. Transportation costs rose sharply. Family time disappeared.

The father now leaves home before sunrise and returns late at night. The mother spends more each month commuting than she once spent on groceries. Their financial burden has not disappeared. It has merely shifted from rent to transportation and also deals with other issues like epileptic power supply and flooding, especially during this rainy season.

Unfortunately, such stories are no longer exceptional. They have become increasingly common across Nigeria's major cities. Perhaps no demographic feels this pressure more acutely than young professionals.

Come to think of graduates entering the workforce quickly discover that entry-level salaries cannot support decent accommodation close to their workplaces. You would also see many remaining with their parents far longer than anticipated. Other effects include seeing them share apartments with several unrelated adults to reduce costs whilst some endure daily commutes lasting three or four hours because affordable housing exists only in distant suburbs.

The fact is that the consequences extend beyond inconvenience because long commuting hours reduce productivity, increase fatigue, heighten stress levels and significantly diminish quality of life. Another aspect of this and which is discouraging is that for many talented young Nigerians, financial independence, home ownership and family formation are becoming increasingly distant aspirations. Several interconnected forces explain why rents continue to climb so aggressively.

Inflation has significantly increased the cost of cement, steel, roofing sheets and virtually every construction material required to build houses. The depreciation of the naira has made imported building materials substantially more expensive. No doubt, from recent findings, there are clear indications that there is a significant increase in the prices of building materials. Let us see the period between 2024 to 2026, Cement: N6,500 - N13,000; blocks: N600 - N1100; 30T of sand: N165,000 - N250,000; 30T of granite: N530,000 - N780,000; rebars (iron) ton: N850,000 - N1,150,000 amongst others. To be fair, it is a known fact that high interest rates have increased borrowing costs for developers, while land acquisition remains prohibitively expensive in many urban centres. The very question

at heart is, how has this recent development significantly impacted the apartments built five years ago and beyond?

The government has made it difficult to the point that obtaining development approvals can be slow and costly. Developers also contend with multiple taxes, infrastructure levies and rising labour costs before construction even begins. No doubt, these expenses inevitably find their way into rental prices. But one question keeps running through the minds of many, which is, how do these directly impact apartments built many years back? The truth is that market realities alone do not explain every increase.

In many locations, speculative pricing has taken hold. Some landlords have raised rents far beyond what can reasonably be attributed to maintenance or inflation, taking advantage of overwhelming demand and the severe shortage of available accommodation.

The inability of many Nigerians to purchase homes has further intensified the pressure on the rental market. Inflation, high mortgage rates and limited access to long-term housing finance have pushed home ownership beyond the reach of millions, forcing them to remain tenants for much longer than planned. This should be blamed on the government of the day, as more people compete for a limited supply of rental properties, landlords possess even greater leverage to increase prices.

Housing insecurity is also producing a less visible but equally damaging consequence for deteriorating mental health.

The constant fear of eviction, the uncertainty surrounding annual rent reviews and the enormous pressure of raising large lump sums every one or two years create persistent psychological stress.

Think of the impact of parents' worry about disrupting their children's education. Young couples postpone marriage because they cannot afford accommodation. Family disagreements increasingly revolve around financial pressures. Consider the part of many Nigerians who quietly or secretly or unknowingly battle anxiety, emotional exhaustion and depression arising from the struggle to secure decent housing.

None of these psychological costs clearly appear in official economic statistics, but the truth is that they profoundly affect productivity, family stability and overall well-being. It is equally obvious that the crisis is also affecting employers and businesses.

Workers forced to travel long distances arrive at work exhausted. Traffic congestion consumes valuable productive hours each day. It turns out that companies increasingly struggle to retain staff who relocate in search of affordable accommodation. Also, know that many employers face mounting pressure to increase housing allowances simply to remain competitive.

All these call for a balancing as employees demand higher wages to offset escalating living costs, further increasing operating expenses for businesses already contending with inflation, unstable exchange rates and rising energy prices.

Housing affordability is therefore no longer merely a social concern. It has become a business and national competitiveness issue.

Though Nigeria is not alone in confronting housing affordability challenges, its recent trend calls for attention. Across Africa, rapid urbanisation continues to outpace housing supply.

For this reason, Kenya has introduced ambitious affordable housing programmes

aimed at expanding supply, although implementation challenges remain; this can't be compared to Nigeria's current situation. Ghana is not left out of the equation as it continues to battle a significant housing deficit. Ghana is also grappling with the irony of completed homes that remain unaffordable for many citizens. South Africa, despite possessing a relatively more developed mortgage market, continues to experience severe affordability pressures in cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Nigeria's situation, however, is intensified by its enormous population, rapid urban expansion, limited mortgage penetration and one of Africa's largest housing deficits.

Nigeria has witnessed successive governments introducing affordable housing initiatives, mortgage schemes and public-private partnerships which fails before implementation. While these programmes represent positive intentions, delivery has consistently fallen far behind growing demand.

Housing experts argue that meaningful reform requires far more than constructing a limited number of housing estates.

Nigeria must simplify land acquisition processes, reduce infrastructure costs, expand mortgage accessibility, improve planning approvals, encourage private-sector investment in affordable housing and strengthen incentives for developers willing to build homes for middle- and low-income earners.

Improving housing data is important, but accurate statistics alone cannot reduce rents. Effective implementation remains the country's greatest policy challenge.

Let's consider some of these salient points proffered by urban planners who insist that Nigeria's housing crisis cannot be solved exclusively through market forces. According to them, governments at all levels must invest strategically in infrastructure and create financing mechanisms that reduce development costs. To further help reduce the housing gap, they encourage the construction of affordable rental housing rather than focusing disproportionately on luxury developments.

The truth is that if housing continues to consume an ever-growing share of household income, consumer spending, investment and long-term economic growth will ever remain constrained. Another key barrier that must be addressed quickly, as highlighted by researchers, are inflation, limited housing finance, weak regulatory enforcement and inconsistent policy implementation, which happen to be major bottlenecks to affordable housing delivery.



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Insight

Oil price rebound: Tantita's Pipeline Protection guarantees production flow, revenue surge for Nigeria

BERNARD APA

With Brent crude trading around \$80 per barrel—above Nigeria's 2026 federal budget benchmark of \$64.85—the price rebound would largely bolster the country's fiscal revenues. As an oil exporter, Nigeria's balance of payment and revenue surge are expected because of higher prices. This will strengthen domestic macroeconomic indicators. For Nigeria to harness the benefit of the oil prices rally, Tantita Security Services Nigeria Ltd (TSSNL's) oil assets protection and sustainability of the current stability in the Niger Delta should remain top priorities.

Oil prices rose slightly on Friday due to increased military action between the US and Iran in the Gulf region. There are also concerns over potential disruptions to key oil transit routes.

The surge comes as a truce between the two countries broke down earlier in the week, restricting oil flows from the Strait of Hormuz, a critical passage for about 20 per cent of global energy shipments.

For Nigeria, the current oil rally means improved revenue and forex inflows to the domestic economy.

With Brent crude trading above \$93 per barrel—well above Nigeria's 2026 federal budget benchmark of \$64.85—the current rally in global oil prices is expected to strengthen the country's fiscal revenues, foreign exchange reserves, and exchange rate stability.

Analysts say that if tensions escalate into a full-scale conflict capable of disrupting the Strait of Hormuz—a vital route that carries roughly 20 per cent of global oil supply—Brent prices could rise beyond \$100 per barrel.

"Higher oil prices typically strengthen Nigeria's current account balance and improve foreign exchange liquidity," the Chief Executive Officer, Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise, Dr Muda Yusuf, stated in a recent policy brief titled 'Implications of the Iran-US-Israel Conflict on the Nigerian Economy'.

"This could reduce short-term pressure on the naira and reinforce investor confidence," Yusuf, a renowned economist, further explained.

For Nigeria, such a surge in crude prices would translate into stronger export earnings and improved external balances.

Sustaining these gains would require taking strategic steps against oil theft by sustaining the oil assets protection project by Tantita Security Services Nigeria Ltd (TSSNL).

Already, the battle against oil theft requires not only robust security measures. It extends to assigning critical surveillance roles to institutions with tested expertise and commitment to taming the scourge.

That was what the Federal Government of Nigeria did when it appointed TSSNL to protect oil assets and ensure peace and stability in the Niger Delta.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu had appointed TSSNL led by High Chief, Dr. Government Owezide Ekpemupolo, alias Tompolo, to protect Nigeria's oil assets in the Niger Delta region.



Government Owezide Ekpemupolo, alias Tompolo

The appointment 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 achieve 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.

What high oil prices mean for domestic economy

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted significant recovery in Nigeria's Balance of Payment (BoP) following ongoing surge in crude oil prices.

In an interview transcript with Director of the Communications Department at the IMF, Ms. Julie Kozack said oil exporters may witness improvement in balance of payments because of higher oil prices.

She said: "For countries that are energy importers, they may face pressures on their balance of payments. For countries that are oil exporters, their balance of payments may improve because of higher prices. So, we may see a differential effect there.

Changes to global financial conditions are likely to affect all countries."

Nigeria earns over 90 per cent of its forex from crude oil exports, and with Brent Crude trading above \$80, Nigeria's earnings through crude oil export is bound to rise.

Murban crude, also hit \$85 and sped past it, reflecting the continued freeze of most tanker traffic in the Strait of Hormuz over Middle East crisis.

Kozack said the oil prices rally has impacted equity markets, and led to surge in bond spreads.

"We have engaged with finance ministers and Central Bank governors in many countries and regions. We've also engaged with regional institutions to discuss and share perspectives on the implications of the conflict and again, how the Fund can best provide support," she said.

Continuing, Kozack said that countries are most interested in what IMF assessment on the global economy, regional economies, and their individual countries.

"Our Managing Director has said recently that in an uncertain world, we do see more countries often turning to the Fund for support. We stand ready to provide that support as needed. Right now, we have not received any formal requests for emergency financing. But of course, as I said, as the situation evolves, as countries reassess their financing needs and their policy options, we stand ready to support them using all of the tools that are available to us," she said.

TSSNL's tech-based surveillance

Tantita, recently contracted a hi-tech security company, Textron Systems, to deliver three uncrewed aircraft that would enhance the company's capacity to carry out its surveillance operations on Nigeria's oil.

Under the contract agreement, which was signed and sealed late last year, mandates Textron Systems, USA, to deliver three Aerosonde Mk. 4.7 vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS) to the surveillance company.

The systems will be delivered in a fully ITAR-Free configuration designed for ease of export to international customers. These aircraft will significantly enhance security oper-

ations for the protection of Nigeria's vital oil and gas infrastructure.

The sale also includes options for training and additional aircraft to support planned capability expansion, building on a previous Foreign Military Sale (FMS) contract to the country.

The Aerosonde Mk. 4.7 VTOL UAS offers a runway-independent configuration powered by Hybrid Quadrotor technology, enabling vertical takeoff and landing.

Its proven performance and benchmark-setting reliability make it an adaptable solution for security operations across Nigeria's high-risk sectors.

"The Aerosonde Mk. 4.7 VTOL UAS is a mature, highly reliable, and industry-proven autonomous solution that will provide Tantita Security Services with transformational capability to execute their security operations," said David Phillips, Senior Vice President, Air, Land and Sea Systems.

"The Aerosonde system's demonstrated performance and benchmark-setting reliability will enable the Tantita team to expand its capabilities to protect the oil and gas infrastructure essential to Nigerian security and prosperity."

The system has conducted operations across the globe and currently operates on over 10 U.S. Navy ships. The system is equipped for multiple payload configurations with both VTOL and fixed-wing options.

Oil/gas output, revenue position

The Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd) reported a significant surge in revenue, hitting N5.08 trillion in October 2025, up from N4.27 trillion recorded in September. The figures are contained in the company's Monthly Report Summary for October 2025.

According to the report, NNPC Ltd's profit after tax (PAT) rose sharply to N447 billion in October, compared to N216 billion in September, stronger operational efficiency, improved market conditions, and enhanced cost optimisation strategies deployed by the national oil company.

The report shows that production hit 6,997 million standard cubic feet per day (mmscf/d) in October, up from 6,284 mmscf/d in September.

Gas sales, reported on an M-2 basis, climbed to 4,713 mmscf/d, marking a significant increase from 3,443 mmscf/d recorded in the previous month.

Views from stakeholders

Forensic experts and key stakeholders have applauded the Federal Government and Tantita Security Services Nigeria Limited for their collaborative efforts in strengthening pipeline security, which has driven higher crude oil production and boosted national revenue.

The commendation came at the end of a two-day National Dialogue on Pipeline Security in Abuja, where participants linked recent gains in oil output to coordinated surveillance.

The Forum of Forensic Civil Society Groups in Nigeria, in collaboration with the Centre for Social Justice, Equity and Transparency, convened the dialogue.

Participants noted that Nigeria's oil pipelines remain the backbone of

the economy, with improved security directly enhancing revenue generation and the government's ability to deliver on public obligations.

They attributed recent rises in production levels and the decline in pipeline vandalism to structured surveillance, warning against any disruptive changes that could reverse these gains.

"The dialogue observed that recent improvements in crude oil production levels and the relative decline in pipeline vandalism are closely tied to more coordinated and structured surveillance frameworks. These gains, participants agreed, must be preserved and strengthened rather than subjected to disruptive experimentation," the communiqué by Dr. Opialu Fabian said.

"The Forum expressed concern over increasing calls to fragment pipeline surveillance arrangements under the guise of inclusion, warning that such approaches risk undermining operational coherence, weakening accountability mechanisms, and creating vulnerabilities that could be exploited by criminal networks.

"Participants emphasised that pipeline protection is not a routine contractual engagement but a sensitive national security function requiring discipline, trust, intelligence coordination, and a clear chain of command. As such, it cannot be treated as an avenue for political accommodation or patronage distribution."

Stakeholders at the dialogue stressed that introducing unvetted actors into surveillance operations could compromise intelligence and embolden oil theft syndicates, which have previously caused billions in lost revenue. While acknowledging the need for host community involvement, they insisted that inclusivity must come through structured engagement and capacity-building without sacrificing efficiency or security.

The forum highlighted that breaches in pipeline security affect the entire nation through reduced public spending, economic instability, and stalled development, urging that protection of national assets rise above sectional interests.

They also cautioned against politicising the debate, saying inflammatory narratives could heighten tensions in the Niger Delta and divert attention from core security goals.

"While recognising the legitimate concerns of host communities and the need for inclusivity, the Forum stressed that inclusion must be pursued through structured engagement, capacity-building, and clearly defined roles that do not compromise efficiency or security outcomes.

"Participants agreed that the protection of national assets must transcend sectional interests, as the consequences of pipeline breaches are borne collectively through reduced public spending, economic instability, and weakened national development.

"The Forum also cautioned against the politicisation of pipeline security debates, noting that inflammatory narratives around entitlement risk aggravating tensions in the Niger Delta and distracting from the primary objective of safeguarding national infrastructure."

• Apa writes from Yenagoa, Bayelsa State

Tribute

Mbah hails Barth Nnaji at 70, commends him for coming home to impact nation

... As President Tinubu congratulates celebrant

REGIS ANUKWUOJI, Enugu
AND GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Peter Mbah, governor of Enugu State, on Friday joined other well-meaning Nigerians in celebrating former Minister of Power, Bart Nnaji, on his 70th birthday, commending the Professor of Robotics and Computer-Integrated Manufacturing for coming home to impact the nation.

Mbah said Nnaji's decision to return home was the real defining chapter of his life.

He, however, said his administration was committed to building an Enugu State where young people could imagine their future and actualise their potential without necessarily having to leave the country physically.

The governor spoke at the International Conference Centre, Enugu, during a colloquium to mark the former Minister's milestone birthday.

Speaking at the event, themed 'Powering Tomorrow: 70 Years of Engineering the Common Good,' Mbah said, "Professor Nnaji's life reminds us that the journey is only complete when knowledge returns to serve the community that first nurtured it."

"Prof. came home. And he returned not because he had to, but because he believed that what he had learned belonged here as well."

"He founded Geometric Power, becoming a pioneer of indigenous power development in Nigeria. He answered the call to public service in science and technology. He invested not only in infrastructure, but in people."

"For me, the defining chapter of his journey is not simply that he left. Not simply that he succeeded. But



that he returned.

"His life also reminds us that engineering is ultimately an act of service. Its value is measured by the difference it makes to people's lives: a community with reliable electricity, a hospital that never loses power during surgery, a young entrepreneur with the confidence to build a business because the foundations are dependable. That is why the theme of this colloquium is so fitting."

"Throughout his career, Professor Nnaji has shown us that knowledge reaches its highest purpose when it is placed in the service of others," he stated.

"We want to build an Enugu where every young person can imagine a future worthy of their gifts; a place where world-class education, reliable infrastructure, security, innovation, and enterprise come together to create genuine opportunity."

He said that whereas Nnaji had to travel to America, where he made it, his administration had envisioned

an Enugu State where youths and children could excel, actualising their potential.

"Our ambition is simple: that the next generation can acquire world-class skills, pursue world-class careers, and help build a world-class society - without feeling that they must leave home in order to fulfill their potential."

"That is why we are investing so heavily in education, equipping every Smart Green School with robotics and AI laboratories, strengthening our engineering and digital capabilities, expanding power infrastructure, and preparing our children for the demands of the 21st century," he stated.

He added that his government was equally committed to building Enugu State into "a place that continues to welcome home those who have travelled the world, while increasingly becoming a place where the world itself comes to Enugu."

Stressing the need for inclusive, quality education for all, Mbah

commended President Bola Tinubu's National Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) initiative for promoting access to tertiary education.

"Our goal in education perfectly aligns with the Federal Government's Renewed Hope Initiative, which has, through NELFUND, strengthened inclusiveness in education - ensuring that no student is denied access to tertiary education on account of lack of access to funds," the governor concluded.

Meanwhile, the event was attended by many personalities, including Kashim Shettima, vice president, represented by Sadiq Wanka Special Adviser the President on Power Infrastructure, Office of the Vice President, Olusegun Obasanjo former President, Alex Otti Governor of Abia State, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi former Central Bank Governor, Uche Azikiwe wife of Nigeria's First Republic President, ABC Orjiakor co-founder, Seplat Energy, John Azuta Mbata, president-general of Ohanaeze Ndigbo; senators, cap-

tain of industry and a host of others.

Meanwhile, President Bola Tinubu has also congratulated Nnaji on his birthday anniversary.

Nnaji, an engineer and chairman of Geometric Power, served as Nigeria's minister of Power from 2011 to 2012.

He also chairs the Advisory Board of the Nigeria Prize for Science and is the Pro-Chancellor of Bells University of Technology, Ogun State.

In recognition of his expertise and patriotism, he was invited to participate in the Presidential Retreat for Ministers and other top government officials immediately after the President assumed office in 2023.

President Tinubu in a birthday message, signed by Bayo Onanuga, his Special Adviser, Information and Strategy, celebrated the innovator and administrator, who brought integrity, brilliance, and discipline to his service to the nation as Minister.

Describing Nnaji, as one of the nation's critical players in the power sector, the President stated that the former Minister demonstrated foresight and keenness of mind, through the Aba Integrated Power Project—Nigeria's first fully vertically integrated electricity utility—a landmark project, which he pioneered and led.

The project had experienced 20 years of delays, but was commissioned, by Vice-President Kashim Shettima on behalf of the President in February 2024.

The President commended Professor Nnaji for his contributions to reforms in the power sector and thanked him for leading the charge despite the challenges.

President Tinubu joined family, friends, and associates to wish Nnaji many more years in good health and even greater success in his future endeavours.

UNAN inducts over 20 Nigerian youths into association's youth wing

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

The United Nations Association of Nigeria (UNAN), has inducted over 20 Nigerian youth into the Youth Wing of the association.

The event which held in Lagos, aimed to equip young people with leadership skills, promote the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and deepen youth participation in peace building and governance.

Speaking at the induction ceremony, president UNAN, Oluremi Olutimo described it as the beginning of an exciting journey of service, leadership, learning, and meaningful contribution by the

inductees to the association's shared values.

According to Olutimo who is a professor: "By choosing to become part of this movement, you have demonstrated a commitment to values that transcend personal interests."

"You are joining a community of young people dedicated to promoting peace, sustainable development, human rights, global cooperation, and active citizenship."

"Your energy, creativity, and passion are vital assets that will strengthen our organisation and expand its impact across Nigeria."

"As you take this important step, I encourage you not to see your induction as the

destination but, as the starting point of greater responsibility."

"Be active participants in every programme and initiative. Volunteer your time, contribute your ideas, and

work collaboratively with fellow members. The success of this Youth Wing will not depend on a few individuals but on the collective commitment and dedication of every member," he added.



He also urged the newly inducted youth members of UNAN to be supportive of one another and of the leadership of the association adding, "Let us build a culture of teamwork, integrity, respect, innovation, and excellence."

"Together, we can create a vibrant youth platform that inspires positive change within our communities and serves as a model for youth engagement across the nation."

While stating that the future of UNAN is closely linked to the strength of its young people, he challenged them to dream boldly, lead courageously, and serve selflessly.

On her part, Carolyn com-

mended the newly inducted youth adding, "young people had the ideas, energy, discipline, and the courage to lead. What they didn't have was the platform, the trust, or the seat in the table."

"So being part of the UN family, even at the youth wing level, means people will expect you to understand the Sustainable Development Goals, not as slogans, but as tools."

Also speaking at the event, a representative of the United Nations Association of Sierra Leone, Junisa Kal called on young people to commit more fully to service, noting that "dedication before service is what makes it rewarding."

Feature

How Mutfwang is rebuilding Plateau through sports, tourism, investment, landmark infrastructure projects

NATHANIE GBAORON, Jos

For decades, Plateau State was celebrated as one of Nigeria's foremost destinations for tourism, hospitality and sports. The Hill Station Hotel, Plateau Hotel and Rwang Pam Township Stadium were among the state's most recognisable landmarks, attracting tourists, hosting conferences and sporting competitions, while contributing significantly to the local economy.

However, years of neglect, deteriorating infrastructure and recurring security challenges eroded that reputation. The Hill Station Hotel remained under lock and key for nearly eight years, the Plateau Hotel lost much of its appeal, while the Rwang Pam Township Stadium gradually fell short of the standards required to host major national and international competitions. Stakeholders in the tourism and sports sectors believe the rehabilitation of the three facilities could serve as a major catalyst for economic recovery. Beyond preserving important public assets, the projects are expected to create jobs, stimulate businesses in the hospitality and transport sectors, attract private investments and boost internally generated revenue through conferences, sporting events and leisure tourism.

The remodelling of the Rwang Pam Township Stadium is also expected to revive Plateau's sporting culture by providing modern facilities for athletes, encouraging grassroots talent development and positioning the state to host local and international sporting competitions. Such events are expected to increase patronage for hotels, restaurants, transport operators and other businesses.

Similarly, the restoration of the Plateau Hotel and Hill Station Hotel forms part of the state's broader strategy to reclaim its status as the "Home of Peace and Tourism." With improved hospitality infrastructure, the government hopes to attract investors, conference organisers and tourists while diversifying the economy beyond federal allocations through stronger private-sector participation.

Against this backdrop, Governor Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang on Thursday inspected the ongoing remodelling of the Rwang Pam Township Stadium, Plateau Hotel and Hill Station Hotel in Jos, reaffirming his administration's commitment to using strategic infrastructure investments to reposition Plateau as a destination for sports, tourism and business.

At the Rwang Pam Township Stadium, the governor expressed satisfaction with the quality of work but directed contractors to speed up execution to ensure the project is completed ahead of the forthcoming football season.

"The completion of this sporting facility will position Plateau State to



host both national and international sporting events. That is why we insist that quality must never be compromised. So far, I am impressed with what I have seen, but we expect a faster pace of work.

"We need more hands-on site, particularly on the pitch. The contractor must take full advantage of the August break to ensure that the rains do not slow down the project. By the grace of God, before the football season begins in earnest, the pitch should be ready so that attention can shift to other components of the project," the governor stated.

He explained that the remodelling of the stadium forms part of his administration's broader vision to restore Plateau's sporting heritage, promote grassroots sports development and position the state as a hub for sports tourism and major competitions.

The governor also inspected the ongoing reconstruction of the Plateau Hotel and Hill Station Hotel, where he commended the investors and contractors for the progress made despite initial setbacks.

"I am pleased with the quality of work going on here. We experienced a few challenges at the beginning, which slowed the pace of execution,



but I must sincerely appreciate our partners. These projects are clear evidence that Public-Private Partnerships can successfully deliver critical public infrastructure.

"One of the commitments we made upon assuming office was to recover and restore Plateau State's legacy assets. Anyone familiar with Jos understands the historical significance of the Hill Station Hotel. It was once one of Nigeria's flagship hospitality destinations, but sadly remained under lock and key for

nearly eight years.

"Today, I can confidently say that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Serious reconstruction and redevelopment work is ongoing. Our partners at both the Hill Station Hotel and Plateau Hotel have assured us that the first phase of these projects will be delivered by October 1, 2026, and that is indeed exciting," the governor stated.

He further said: "Once completed, these projects will mark a major turning point in our tourism

development agenda. No state can successfully drive tourism without modern hospitality infrastructure. I am confident these facilities will significantly enhance Plateau's attractiveness as a destination for tourism, conferences, business, and leisure.

"I am delighted with the progress so far. Plateau people are eagerly anticipating the completion of these projects. Interestingly, many people have reached out to me simply because they have seen the new perimeter fencing, which has already rekindled fond memories of these historic landmarks."

Governor Mutfwang said the restoration of the Plateau Hotel and Hill Station Hotel would stimulate economic activities, attract local and international investments, create employment opportunities and restore Plateau's reputation as one of Nigeria's leading destinations for tourism, conferences and recreation.

He noted that the progress recorded on the projects sends a strong signal to investors that Plateau State is open for business, adding that his administration has deliberately created an enabling environment for businesses to thrive through strategic infrastructure investments anchored on public-private partnerships.

The governor also reaffirmed his administration's determination to tackle security challenges through collaboration with security agencies and community stakeholders, expressing confidence that Plateau would emerge stronger, safer and more prosperous.

He was received at the project sites by Danlami Jelka, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Plateau Investment and Property Development Company (PIPC) who led investors and contractors on the inspection tour and briefed the governor on the progress of work.

Contractors handling the hotel projects assured the governor that the first phase of both the Plateau Hotel and Hill Station Hotel would be delivered by October 1, 2026, marking what the administration hopes will be a significant milestone in Plateau's economic and tourism revival.

BusinessDay reports that if completed as scheduled, the remodelling of the Rwang Pam Township Stadium, Plateau Hotel and Hill Station Hotel is expected to mark a turning point in Plateau's economic revival. The projects are projected to create hundreds of direct and indirect jobs, stimulate growth in the hospitality, transport and entertainment sectors, attract national and international sporting events, and increase tourist arrivals.

They are also expected to boost internally generated revenue, strengthen investor confidence and reinforce Governor Mutfwang's strategy of diversifying Plateau's economy through sports, tourism and public-private partnerships rather than relying largely on federal allocations.



Sunday Magazine

Rice revolution faces turbulence as automobile, tractor manufacturers cry out over dumping

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

...Innoson, Bobtrack show pains over FG importation policy sommersault

The bubble of the rice revolution which Nigeria enjoyed in past few years seems set to burst due to steady importation of foreign rice at cheaper prices.

Consumers may be rejoicing but investors are wailing, saying jobs may perish as they could no longer compete with foreign rice.

Now, Local producers in key sectors from rice processors, automobile makers, and agric equipment manufacturers were said to have met in Abuja in the week with key government sectors including the House of Reps, the Senate, the presidency, etc. where they were said to have poured lamentations over their plights in the face of imported versions of what they produce with huge loans.

Apart from rice processors, others like Innocent Chukwuma of Innoson Ltd and Ibifiri Bobmanuel of Bobtrack Ltd were said to have spoken vehemently against importation that is killing the local effort.

The lamentations of Bobtrack and Innoson in Abuja were said to be same in other sectors, raising same questions from sensible Nigerians.

The manufacturers wondered where Nigeria was headed, saying it's like once the leaders take care of their own interests, anything can happen because they will just throw the next person under the bus.

Bobmanuel told BusinessDay in Port Harcourt after the Abuja how his group fought hard for deregulation to come and for fuel subsidy to be removed. He says he does not know if he was right after all.

He however, said: "Till today, I'm still in support of that action. In fact, that action made endeared me to the President when he came in. This is because we need a president that has the impetus to take the difficult decisions.

"This is because these difficult decisions come in difficult times; but at the end of the day, the country would be better for it. So, when the late president, Muhammadu Buhari, was in office, when Goodluck Jonathan was in office, I had always said we needed to deregulate. And I was the strongest voice on deregulation in Nigeria because I organised seminars at the Investors Forum supporting the government and urging the government to man up to deregulate. Eventually, this President came, and on first day, he just switched off that drain pipe called fuel subsidy when he said; "This is the last day we are going to have anything like subsidy. Subsidy is gone."

He said that Mr. President said it and meant it, and he followed it through. "Today, whether you like it or not, all those extra drain pipes are gone. We had been selling crude oil to import refined fuel. Today, we export crude oil and we also refine crude here. And because we have our products here that is being re-

finied by the private sector, we buy products even in Naira as against buying in foreign currency. We know that Dangote is being forced by economic measures to want to sell in Dollar. He cannot be selling fuel in naira when the is pressed by economic situations. We know he is trading on private funds. So, he must protect it because any glitch on that pipeline, that whole business collapses, and it collapses on his head. These are the issues facing every local manufacturer."

Dollar: Don't kill Dangote refinery:

Bobmanuel went on: "You have a Dangote that refines crude. In fact, today Dangote has one of the largest refineries in the world. He serves the largest market in the jet fuel sector. It means that a chunk of the global Jet A1 fuel is being purchased from Dangote Refinery in Nigeria."

From government perspective, he said, if you have such a big investment in your country, you must prioritize your policies to suit him; not just to suit him but to suit the sector so that the sector would continue to experience growth. That's what you need to do.

"In that case your policies should be protectionist, not to allow everybody from any part of the world to jump into it. It should be encouraging, it should be enhancing, and most importantly, it should have that environment that will be enabling enough for even further funds to come into that space.

"What it simply means is that we have comparative advantage in this sector, so for that reason, we must keep protecting

“Our experience has shown that Nigerian businesses can compete, innovate and create jobs when supported by the right policies. Making it easier to do business is not only about reducing regulations; it is also about creating markets for Nigerian businesses. In that spirit, permit me to respectfully suggest three practical legislative actions that can strengthen Nigerian manufacturing and accelerate economic growth



Innocent Chukwuma, CEO of Innoson Ltd

and guarding it for it to grow. But you find out that Dangote had been fighting with all manner of interests up to date as we speak.

"That is just Dangote and one sub sector called refinery. There are millions of Dangote in Nigeria. Dangote has gained economy of scale and people see his investment in all of Africa and the world. But there are millions of Dangote in Nigeria that the government is deliberately working to kill, to stifle.

"And I ask myself, why is it that a government that ordinarily should be working to protect such industry is rather the one working round the clock to stifle them? And it boils back to the fact that you begin to ask the questions like, where is our patriotism? In the corridors of power, my question to us to answer

today is, where is our patriotism? Where do we have our patriotism, especially from the people that are running the economy of Nigeria?"

The tears of rice processors

Just yesterday, we had a sit-out with Rice processors, the ones that are very key in the sector. These are people that are about moving Nigeria to another level by processing rice at home. The rice sector had been down because Nigeria did not process rice to get international quality. This made Nigerian rice to be either substandard or to be exported as raw material (paddy rice) very cheap.

"Now, these people came together and got huge loans and help from the FG to step up in processing. The lack of local processing made the farmers not to scale production. The paddy rice that was always exported never came back to

Nigeria but they would bring in warehoused rice (expired rice) to Nigeria and send our fresh and nutritious rice to top countries at very high price. Nigeria ended up farming huge rice but not eating its rice. Nigerian rice thus went to premium markets. But the policy of creating local processing facilities and machines.

"Now, what is the government doing in the rice industry? The local processors just woke up to find that the FG has opened its doors for foreign rice that has come at cheaper prices. They are rice that have stayed up to 10 years in warehouses, not fresh."

By this, he said, the FG has decided to throw all advances and gains in the sector under the bus by giving preferential licenses to people that are now importing rice into the country.

"Now, the reason for doing that is simply because the cost of rice at a point went up because the government put up a protectionist policy.

"They forget that before you make an omelet, you must crack an egg. Such policies come with high costs but later the benefits start coming in. See the case of mobile phones and lines. Some persons procured lines at N38,000 in the beginning, but now, some lines are free. Even President Olusegun Obasanjo never expected the boom in telecom to be as huge as this. Thank God he stuck to his guns then. The gains are here today. That's free market economy for you.

"Is it very difficult for us to understand this? Now, with the twist in rice policy, all those people that have invested in the rice mills system and so on are going to be extinguished. All their workforce is going to be extinguished because they can't compete in an economy where you have people bringing in grains that are 10 years in silos to come and compete with them that just got to the market from the farm.

What they import into Nigeria is called chaff. They do it to clear out the silos. They've made all the money they want to make."

He said the premium societies have ways of testing rice coming into their places to ensure quality but any quality can come into Nigeria. We have fundamental problems here.

More tears from automobile industry

Now, he went on, look at the automobile sector and see look at the amount of funds that have been pumped into the sector. Yesterday, I was with Innocent Chukwuma, the managing director/ chief executive officer of Innoson Vehicle Manufacturers (IVM) or Innoson Motors. He was at the chambers of the National Assembly to make a case for the protection of the automobile sector and to conserve the gains of the past years. It's only a layman or a dumb man that would not understand where this man (Innoson) is coming to and what is his pain.

He has invested so much in the auto industry today, he sells vehicles all over Nigeria and outside. What the government needs to do is to protect that market; that Nigerian market advantage. Yes, his vehicles may be slightly more expensive but it is the teething stage of it.

Innoson

In a three-minute presentation to federal lawmakers and policy makers by Innoson at a legislative business breakfast which BusinessDay accessed, Chukwuma said bringing sector leaders to discuss their challenges with leaders of the NASS was a very good idea that would accelerate Nigeria's economic growth.

The Innoson CEO began with a question: "Permit me to ask one simple question: If we all agree that Nigeria must industrialise, shouldn't government procurement become one of the strongest instruments for achieving that goal?"

He said: "I come from Nnewi, a town where manufacturing is more than a business—it is a way of life. Through Innoson, and together with thousands of dedicated Nigerian workers, we have invested in manufacturing for more than four decades because we believe Nigeria's greatest resource is not what we import, but what we are capable of producing ourselves.

"Our experience has shown that Nigerian businesses can compete, innovate and create jobs when supported by the right policies. Making it easier to do business is not only about reducing regulations;

it is also about creating markets for Nigerian businesses. In that spirit, permit me to respectfully suggest three practical legislative actions that can strengthen Nigerian manufacturing and accelerate economic growth."

He gave short suggestions: "First – make local procurement work"

He said: "Government procurement is one of the strongest drivers of industrial development. Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies procure thousands of vehicles every year. Where Nigerian manufacturers meet the required standards and specifications, they should be given first consideration. I respectfully urge the House to strengthen legislative oversight to ensure the effective implementation of the Nigeria First Policy."

Next, he said, measure compliance. "Require Ministries, Departments and Agencies to publish annual reports on the procurement of locally manufactured goods. What gets measured gets implemented. This will promote transparency, accountability and compliance with government policy."

Finally, he said FG should create predictable demand. "Establish a National Government Fleet Procurement Framework that provides predictable demand for Nigerian manufacturers. This will encourage investment, expand production capacity, deepen local supply chains and create more jobs for Nigerians."

He said: "These recommendations are not about Innoson alone. They are about creating an environment where every Nigerian manufacturer can thrive, compete globally and contribute more to our national development.

"The private sector is ready to invest more, employ more Nigerians and partner with government to build a stronger economy. We respectfully ask the House to continue using its legislative and oversight responsibilities to ensure that government procurement becomes a strategic instrument for national development.

"Every government procurement decision that supports Nigerian industry is an investment in Nigerian jobs, Nigerian enterprise and Nigeria's economic future. If we build Nigerian industries today, Nigerian industries will build Nigeria tomorrow."

Tractors and Bobtrack

The pains of Innoson and Rice Leaders are said to be same with agric equipment and tractor manufacturers. Bobmanuel said: "This is the same with Bobtrack Ltd where we are investing heavily in billions of Naira in manufacturing of electric cars (EVs). As we speak, we have an electric car in the showroom downstairs that is made by Bobtrack. That's the first prototype we have.

"We've spent this much, we've exposed ourselves to huge amount of loans to invest this much in it. Now, all of a sudden, the government wakes up and they tell you, no, they want everybody

to import from anywhere and bring into Nigeria for little or no duty paid."

FG policies make Nigerian manufacturers look foolish

Then I would see myself as a very stupid man for his factory to still remain open when he can as well just travel abroad, buy those cars, get them to do the manufacturing there, and just import it for Nigeria at low cost and sell in the market.

The end losers are the FG of Nigeria, our job seekers, our young men and women that go out of their way to try to make ends meet by eking a legitimate job for themselves. Imagine the number of jobs that this particular policy is going to enhance in the economy. From Innoson alone, I know he runs his job direct and indirect job workforce should be running into thousands. From Bobtrack alone, our direct and indirect jobs will be running into about the same. So, where are we going to? That is just in the auto sector.

Let us go to the agro sector. Agriculture seems to be the key sector that drives growth and drives inflation in Nigeria. Bobtrack is the largest agricultural equipment manufacturers in Nigeria today, and indeed in West Africa, the fastest growing.

Now, I was in a seminar two days back

and I was near some topmost government officials and somebody was telling the crowd how his agency had bought 4,000 tractors. I don't want to name the agency. They have bought 4,000 tractors all from abroad. And I asked him, "Where is your patriotism?"

So, I ask these government officials, where are their patriotism as Nigerians? Where is their loyalty to the Federal Republic of Nigeria that even endeared the President to even appoint them as members of his cabinet in whichever form? Do you know what 4,000 agricultural tractors would have cost, the dent it would have caused in our economy? You take all of those jobs, you share send it out, you buy tractors, bring them into the country. Do you care about the local technology? We're not even talking about the Naira figure now. We should be paying more attention to the local technology that would produce 4000 tractors. We must protect the local technology we have. That's why countries like America are practicing the same protectionist policies that they say a big no-no to anybody bringing in anything into their American.

As we speak, you can't take a fully built vehicle from any part of the world into America, especially some parts of the world that you don't pay. If it's from China, you must pay 100percent duty.



Ibifiri Bobmanuel, CEO of Bobtrack Ltd

This is because if you want your labour to be in your country, no problem. Keep the labour in your country, but you must have to pay 100percent to the Nigerian government for the Nigerian government to use that as subsidy to grow the Nigerian investors that are investing in the same space with you.

That's the only way economies grow. But in our case, our government officials would rather hobnob with those foreign manufacturers and throw the economy open to them to flood it in with all sorts of jargons that will not stand the test of time. So, how can the economy grow? It can never grow. So, the government needs to go back home and ask itself, "Do we want to fix this economy or we want to just play lip service to it?" They have to tell us so we know whether to also help them destroy it by joining in importing instead of suffering as manufacturers. That's my question to them and my call.

If they want to fix the economy, then they need to begin to buy Nigeria, they need to promote Nigeria, they need to protect made in Nigerian product, and they need to extol made in Nigerian products.

Today, we're not just producing tractors, our tractors are all across Nigeria. They're all across every major entry point or exit point in Nigeria where you will see our tractors. Our electric cars are on display. You will see the first electric car that is made in our facility, and you see the quality of what we have. And you imagine all of this could just evaporate in one day if the government does not call itself back from this policy.

The hint we got is that oh, election is around the corner. I say, it has nothing to do with elections. Elections will always come. If you put an election ahead of an economic policy of yours, that policy had already failed right from ab initio. So, you imagine now the huge grounds you would have lost because of elections. You want rice to come into the country as against the efforts of the processors you have in the country.

If election and political decisions were very important, why not subsidise the processing for a period. After elections, you can remove the subsidy. This way, price of rice will crash and it's a win-win. You needed to exhaust local options.

But the most important thing is that you must believe in your setup, in your country, in your policies. You must not be doing inconsistent policies, half way in, half way out.

Nigeria is not short of good policies but short of proper implementation of those policies.

The moment Nigeria fixes its way of implementing policies, not just America, but China and every other serious country will wake up to realise that there is an emerging industrial power called Nigeria. We just have to wake up to this.

Consumer Watch

LASCOPA seeks collaboration with consumers to eliminate 'No return', 'No cancellation' policies

...Reaffirms commitment to consumer rights, fair trade practices

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

The Lagos State Government, through the Lagos State Consumer Protection Agency (LASCOPA), has reaffirmed its commitment to protecting consumers by discouraging the unlawful use of "No return, No refund, No replacement" and "No cancellation after payment" policies by businesses operating across the State.

The General Manager/Chief Executive Officer of LASCOPA, Afolabi Solebo, stated that while businesses have the right to establish reasonable terms and conditions, such policies cannot override the rights guaranteed to consumers under applicable consumer protection laws, particularly where goods are defective, unsafe, misrepresented, or unfit for the purpose made known to the seller before purchase.

According to him,



consumers deserve fair treatment and should not be compelled to accept defective goods or services simply because a business displays a disclaimer.

He stressed that any

policy designed to deprive consumers of their lawful rights is unfair, misleading, and unenforceable.

"The Lagos State government is partnering with consumers to eliminate

unfair trade practices, including the indiscriminate use of 'No return, No refund, No replacement' and 'No cancellation after part or full payment' policies.

"Consumer rights

are protected by law, and businesses must operate responsibly and fairly. 'We encourage consumers to know their rights and report any violations to LASCOPA for prompt intervention,' Solebo stated.

The General Manager further explained that consumers are entitled to appropriate remedies where goods or services are defective, unsafe, falsely described, or fail to meet the purpose for which they were purchased, provided they comply with the applicable terms of purchase and relevant legal provisions.

He also called on event centres, hotel operators, reservation service providers, and other businesses to adopt transparent, fair, and consumer-friendly return, refund, replacement, and cancellation policies that promote trust, accountability, and confidence in the marketplace.

The Agency urged Lagos residents to inspect goods before purchase where possible, retain receipts and

other proof of payment, and promptly report cases involving unfair trade practices, deceptive business conduct, defective products, or the denial of legitimate consumer rights.

LASCOPA reiterated its commitment to promoting a fair, safe, and competitive marketplace where both consumers and businesses can thrive, in line with the vision of the Lagos state government to foster sustainable economic growth and strengthen consumer confidence.

Solebo reaffirmed the Agency's dedication to enforcing all relevant laws and regulations that protect and promote consumer welfare across Lagos state.

He also urged consumers to join hands with the government in promoting safety, responsible business practices, and regulatory compliance for a safer and more consumer-friendly Lagos.

He urged residents to forward their complaints and enquiries to the Office of the General Manager LASCOPA.

Firm fosters culture of consumers' loyalty with nationwide rewards activation

PIUS DUKOR

TOTAL BEVERAGE alcohol company, Guinness Nigeria has said that it was committed to creating meaningful and impactful experiences for Nigeria consumers by rewarding consumers' loyalty through product activation.

According to the company, the launch of its nationwide national consumer promotion (NCP) tagged 'Open For More' is a consumer rewards initiative that will see more than N400 million in cash and prizes won by consumers across the country.

The promotion, which runs nationwide, offers consumers the opportunity

to win N1 million every day, N100,000 cash rewards for 1,000 winners, and a brand-new Toyota Land Cruiser Prado as the grand prize. The campaign is designed to reward loyal consumers while creating more opportunities for everyday Nigerians to celebrate life's meaningful moments.

Ramanathan Solayappan, marketing and Innovations director, Guinness Nigeria, said the promotion reflects the brand's longstanding relationship with consumers and its commitment to creating memorable experiences beyond the product itself.

"Nigerians have made Guinness part of their celebrations, milestones, and everyday moments for

over seven decades. The 'Open For More' promotion is our way of rewarding that loyalty by giving consumers genuine opportunities to win prizes that can make a meaningful difference in their lives."

Solayappan, said



We believe, at Guinness, that there is always room for more possibilities, more progress, and more reasons to celebrate

that the promotion was deliberately designed to make participation simple and accessible to consumers across the country.

"We believe, at Guinness, that there is always room for more possibilities, more progress, and more reasons to celebrate. Through this campaign, we are inviting consumers and beloved Nigerians over the age of 18 years to take part in an experience that goes beyond enjoying a Guinness. Every eligible purchase could open the door to something more."

Beyond rewarding consumers, the promotion comes at a time when many Nigerians are placing greater value on opportunities that offer

tangible returns. By putting more than 400 million in cash and prizes directly into the hands of consumers, Guinness Nigeria is creating a campaign that celebrates loyalty and delivers meaningful rewards that can support personal aspirations, family needs, and everyday goals.

As part of the campaign, winners will emerge weekly throughout the promotion period, with regular winner announcements and prize presentations aimed at ensuring transparency and public confidence in the process.

The Open For More National Consumer Promotion strengthens Guinness Nigeria's commitment to rewarding

consumers while creating excitement around the brand through meaningful and impactful experiences. Consumers are encouraged to look out for specially marked promotional packs and follow Guinness Nigeria's official communication channels for updates, winner announcements, and further information on participation mechanics.

Consumers Stand a Chance to Win N1 Million Daily, N100,000 for 1,000 To participate, consumers are required to purchase specially marked bottles of Guinness Foreign Extra Stout or Guinness Smooth, check for the unique code beneath the crown cork, and enter the code at www.guinnessng.com/1759 for a chance to win.

Interview

How Makoko, Lagos slum, shaped my understanding of art, by Opedun

Lagos-based contemporary artist Damilola Moses Opedun says years spent mentoring children in Makoko have transformed not only his artistic practice but also his understanding of art as a vehicle for hope, empowerment and social change. Opedun, a Lagos-based contemporary artist, has built his practice around themes of spirituality, identity, memory, displacement and resilience. Born in Akure, Ondo State, in 1983, Opedun's artistic journey has been shaped by more than a decade of engagement with Makoko, one of Lagos' most vulnerable communities. Through his NGO, The Seed of The True Vine Foundation, he works with children in underserved communities, using art as a tool for education, empowerment and social transformation. His paintings often combine contemporary Black figures with historical and spiritual imagery, reflecting the intersection of struggle and hope. In this interview with KENNETH ATHEKAME, Opedun discusses how Makoko became the defining influence on his work, why he believes "imagination is something nobody can evict," and what Nigeria must do to unlock the economic potential of its creative industry while expanding opportunities for talented children from underserved communities. Excerpts:

For more than a decade, you have worked with children in Makoko through your NGO. What first drew you to the community, and how has that experience transformed your worldview and artistic practice?

I was drawn to Makoko because it reflected parts of my own background. I grew up in a difficult environment, raised by my late single mother, and I understood what it meant to experience hardship. Initially, I visited Makoko to take photographs as references for my paintings. But what I encountered was far beyond what I expected: poor living conditions, underage motherhood, children growing up surrounded by neglect and limited opportunities. The experience deeply affected me. My love for children and my desire to contribute led to the creation of The Seed of The True Vine Foundation, which focuses on the welfare and education of children in the community.

Every Saturday, I visit Makoko with art students and interns from my studio to teach and encourage the children. Over the years, we have witnessed remarkable transformations. That experience changed my understanding of art. I realised that art is not just about creating beautiful objects; it is also about service, healing and empowerment. Spirituality, for me, became a language of liberation, resistance and progress.

Many of your recent works, including Joseph, The Witness and The Meeting Point series, are inspired by Makoko. Why has the community become such a powerful recurring subject in your work?

Makoko represents a larger human experience. It symbolises struggle, resilience and the challenges people face while pursuing their dreams. The community reflects the tension between present realities and future possibilities. It is a place where hardship exists alongside hope, where people continue to build lives despite difficult circumstances. For me, Makoko is not just a location; it represents humanity's ability to survive, imagine and create despite adversity.



You have said that "imagination is something nobody can evict." In communities facing poverty, displacement and insecurity, how can art become a tool for empowerment rather than simply expression? Art is spiritual at its core because it allows people to imagine possibilities beyond their current circumstances.

It connects the visible and invisible what exists today and what people hope to create tomorrow. In difficult environments, art gives people a sense of control, identity and hope.

Through my work in Makoko, I have also used art to teach young people practical skills that can become sources of income. I encourage them to explore different creative fields, including fashion, design and other forms of expression.

The goal is to help them understand that they are capable of creating something valuable that the world appreciates.

Your paintings often juxtapose Makoko's stilt houses with Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, a symbol of divine intervention and hope. What message are you

communicating through this contrast?

The message is simple: your environment does not determine your destiny.

When I place Makoko beside Santa Maria della Salute, I am showing that two realities can exist together. A person can come from a community considered disadvantaged and still achieve greatness.

Santa Maria della Salute was



Liberation happens when people realise they are not just waiting to be helped they are also capable of helping others

built during a period of suffering and uncertainty as a symbol of hope. Makoko, in its own way, also represents faith, survival and community.

I want young people to understand that hope is not something that comes from outside. It already exists within them.

Having witnessed demolitions and displacement in Makoko, how do you balance documenting painful realities with offering hope through your art?

I believe it would be incomplete to only show the pain. My responsibility as an artist is to tell the full story the displacement, the struggles, but also the resilience, faith and imagination that cannot be destroyed.

Hope is not about ignoring suffering. It is about recognising the dignity that exists within difficult circumstances.

That is why my work places Makoko and Venice together. They represent struggle and beauty, reality and vision.

When we only focus on hardship, we reduce people to their problems. But when we show their humanity, creativity and resilience, we change the narrative.

You describe spirituality as a language of liberation rather than escape. How do you communicate that message to children through your mentorship?

I teach children to understand faith as resilience, not simply as religion.

Spirituality should encourage action. It should inspire people to improve themselves and contribute to their communities.

Through our NGO, older children mentor younger ones, share resources and learn the importance of service.

Liberation happens when people realise they are not just waiting to be helped they are also capable of helping others.

Faith, hope and spirituality should remind people of who they are: creators, witnesses and people with a future.

Nigeria's creative economy is gaining global recognition, yet many talented children from low-income communities remain

excluded. What practical steps should government, private sector and cultural institutions take to close this gap?

Talent exists everywhere in Nigeria. The biggest challenge is access. The government needs to support individuals and organisations working in creative education through funding and partnerships.

The private sector can do more by investing in creative talents, purchasing artworks and creating opportunities for young creatives.

Cultural institutions also need to open their doors and collaborate with grassroots organisations.

The next globally recognised Nigerian artist may come from Makoko, but we must create the environment where that talent can develop.

Your work has been exhibited internationally in cities such as Vienna and London. Why is it important for communities like Makoko to be represented on global art platforms?

Representation changes narratives. For many years, Makoko has mainly been presented through images of poverty, demolition and hardship. But through art, the world can see the creativity, dignity and humanity of the people who live there.

When my work is displayed internationally, people do not only see the challenges; they see the beauty, faith and resilience of the community.

It moves the conversation from pity to partnership.

For the children, representation is also powerful because they begin to see that their stories matter and that they are not invisible.

As you continue creating internationally recognised works while mentoring children in underserved communities, what legacy do you hope to leave behind?

I hope to prove that great art does not only come from major cities, elite institutions or traditional centres of power. It can emerge from places people have overlooked.

I want Makoko to be remembered not only for what it has endured but for what it has created as a place of imagination, resilience and creativity. Through our NGO and future art centres, I want children in Makoko to grow up knowing that becoming an artist is possible.

For the next generation of Nigerian artists, I hope to inspire them to tell their stories honestly, embrace their identity and remember the importance of giving back.

My legacy will not only be the artworks I create, but the people I inspire to create, teach and build for others. If one child I mentor goes on to mentor ten more, then the seed has grown.

Because imagination, as I always say, is something nobody can evict.

Interview

Business leaders must communicate with clarity, consistency, and credibility - Ajayi

Every July 16 of each year, integrated marketing communications (IMC) – especially public relations (PR) practitioners celebrates the World PR Day. Omotoyosi Ajayi, a strategic communications & growth marketing consultant /founder, Stage Africa Media & Advisory, who is also the vice president & programs director, Nigerian Women in Public Relations (NWiPR) spoke with JOHN SALAU, on why World PR Day matters to Nigeria and why strategic communications now belongs at the centre of business strategy. Excerpts:

What is World PR Day, and why should business leaders care?

World PR Day, marked globally on July 16, is an opportunity to recognise the contribution of public relations professionals and reflect on the role communication plays in organisations, industries, and society. For practitioners, it is a celebration of the profession. For founders and CEOs, it should be much more than an industry observance. It is an invitation to consider how communication affects trust, reputation, stakeholder confidence, customer adoption, and business growth. The 2026 theme, 'The Golden Age of Strategic PR,' captures an important transition. Public relations is moving beyond publicity, press releases, media coverage, and corporate announcements. It is becoming a strategic business function that helps organisations understand their environment, influence perception, manage risk, earn trust, and support commercial outcomes.

Why is this theme particularly relevant to Nigeria?

Nigeria is one of Africa's most dynamic business markets. It is home to ambitious founders, innovative consumer brands, financial institutions, technology companies, creative businesses, and large corporate organisations. It is also a market shaped by intense competition, economic uncertainty, regulatory pressure, social-media scrutiny, and increasingly vocal customers. A service failure can become a viral conversation within hours. A poorly handled statement can damage years of brand-building. An innovative product can struggle because customers do not understand or trust it.

A company can also invest heavily in advertising and still lose credibility because its actions contradict its message. In this environment, communications cannot remain an afterthought. Nigerian organisations need professionals who can connect business objectives with public expectations, cultural realities, and stakeholder interests. They need strategic communication that is proactive, commercially aware, and close enough to leadership to influence decisions before problems emerge. The golden age of strategic PR is therefore not merely a celebration - it is a call for Nigerian businesses to rethink the place of communication within their organisations.

How is Nigerian Women in Public Relations marking 2026 World PR Day?

At Nigerian Women in Public Relations, we are using this year's celebration to create conversations, learning opportunities, and platforms that reflect the changing role of the profession. Our activities are built around the movement from execution to counsel. Ahead of World PR Day (NWiPR) hosted a panel discussion titled 'From Execution to Counsel.'



The conversation brought communications professionals together to examine what it takes to move beyond implementation and become trusted strategic advisers to leadership. We are also running The Human OS, a digital campaign that highlights the judgment, empathy, cultural intelligence, relationships, and ethical responsibility communications professionals bring to organisations, particularly in an age of artificial intelligence and automation.

Following World PR Day, The Counsel Room will provide an opportunity for senior women in communications to give back through focused conversations and practical guidance for younger and mid-career professionals. These activities matter because the future of strategic PR depends not only on celebrating the profession but also on equipping practitioners to operate at a higher level. We need professionals who understand business, interpret data, anticipate risk, advise leadership, and connect communications outcomes to organisational priorities.

Has public relations really changed that much?

Yes. For decades, communications occupied a familiar place in many organisations. It handled media relations, speeches, corporate announcements, events, and crisis response. In many cases, the communications team entered the process after strategic decisions had already been made. Its job was to package, explain, or publicise those decisions. That model no longer reflects today's business environment. Markets are noisier. Customer expectations are higher. Trust is more fragile. Competition is no longer based only on product quality, pricing, or distribution. Businesses now compete on perception, credibility, relevance, experience, and their ability to maintain trust across multiple audiences. Strategic PR has therefore moved from simply managing messages to helping shape business outcomes.

What do strategic communications contribute to a business?

Strategic communications helps organisations answer questions that are central to growth and survival. How should we position our organisation in a changing market? What do customers currently believe about us? What could prevent people from adopting our product? How do we build credibility before we need public support? How do we communicate innovation in a way people understand? How do we protect our reputation while expanding? How should our leaders communicate during uncertainty? These are not simply communications

questions. They influence revenue, customer loyalty, investor confidence, employee morale, partnerships, and market relevance.

When communications professionals are involved early, they help leadership understand not only what the organisation wants to say, but how its decisions may be interpreted and what response they may generate.

Why is attention no longer enough?

Every organisation is competing for attention, but attention alone does not create business value. A company can trend without earning trust, and it can generate media coverage without increasing sales. It can stage an impressive launch and still fail to achieve sustained product adoption. The stronger pathway is: Visibility creates awareness. Credibility strengthens trust.

Trust encourages consideration. Consideration supports adoption. Adoption can lead to advocacy and growth

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Strategic communications helps organisations manage this progression. It ensures that visibility is connected to a clear narrative, credible evidence, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and a defined business objective. Without strategy, communications may create noise; but with strategy, it can create understanding, confidence, and action.

Why should CEOs pay closer attention to reputation?

Reputation is one of the most valuable assets an organisation owns. It affects whether customers buy, investors commit capital, talented people join the company, partners collaborate, and stakeholders support the organisation during difficult periods. Yet reputation is not built during a crisis. It is built every day through customer experience, leadership conduct, employee behaviour, public statements, responsiveness, and the alignment between what a company says and what it does.

In Nigeria's highly connected environment, negative reviews, unresolved complaints, weak executive communication, and inconsistent messaging can quickly become commercial problems. Businesses that fail to manage their reputation deliberately leave customers, competitors, critics, and the wider market to define their story for them.

What role should the CEO play in communications strategies?

Today, the CEO is also a communication channel. Employees, customers, investors, and partners want to understand what leaders believe, where the company is going, and how it responds when the stakes are high. This does not mean every CEO must become a social-media personality; it means leaders must communicate with clarity, consistency, and credibility. A well-positioned CEO can strengthen confidence in the organisation, attract partnerships, influence industry conversations, and provide direction

during uncertainty. Executive communication should therefore be treated as part of corporate strategy, not as an occasional visibility exercise.

From your points of view, how should PR be measured?

Strategic PR should not be measured only by the number of press releases distributed, interviews secured, or events organised. Those are outputs. The stronger questions are: Did communication improve stakeholder understanding? Did it strengthen trust? Did it support product adoption? Did it protect the organisation's reputation? Did it increase leadership credibility? Did it help the business enter a market, attract partners, or grow? The value of communications lies in the outcomes it supports. This requires stronger measurement, better use of data, and closer alignment between communications goals and business priorities.

What does this mean for founders and CEOs?

It means communication should be brought into the room earlier. Not after the strategy has been finalised. Not only when there is a crisis; not only when the organisation needs publicity. Communications professionals should be involved when products are being developed, markets are being selected, customer issues are being reviewed, major partnerships are being considered, and decisions with reputational consequences are being made. Their role is not simply to make every decision look attractive. It is to help leadership make decisions that can be clearly explained, credibly defended, and sustainably supported.

How does Stage Africa support organisations in this new era?

At Stage Africa Media & Advisory, we help consumer-facing brands and ambitious organisations connect strategic communications, reputation management, and growth marketing to defined business outcomes. We support organisations seeking to launch or reposition products, strengthen customer trust, improve reputation, increase product adoption, enter African markets, manage negative narratives, and build executive visibility. Our approach begins with the business problem, not with a list of communications tactics.

We examine what the organisation is trying to achieve, what the market currently believes, what may be preventing trust or adoption, and what communication and growth system is required to close the gap, because serious organisations do not only need to be seen - they need to be understood, trusted, chosen, and remembered.

What is your final message on the back of this year's World PR Day?

As we celebrate World PR Day, we should recognise how far the profession has come, but also the responsibility that comes with this moment. Communications now connects leadership with stakeholders, purpose with perception, innovation with adoption, and vision with execution.

My message to CEOs is simple: Do not wait until the decision has been made before inviting communications into the room. Bring communications into the room where strategy is being shaped. Because in the golden age of strategic PR, communications is no longer just the voice of the business - it is one of the architects of its future.

Interview

Success comes through consistency and perseverance – UNILAG Professor, Otinwa

Prof, you have excelled as an academic, administrator and Christian leader. Looking back, how did your journey with Christ begin?

My journey with Christ began in February 1977 while I was in Form Two at the Women's Teachers College, Zaria. During an altar call organised through the Hope for the Blind Ministry led by Bro. Bitrus Gabi, I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ. Although I did not grow spiritually immediately, God used my elder brother, Prof. Stephen Akinyemi Akintunde, Christian literature and the Fellowship of Christian Students to nurture my faith. That encounter laid the foundation for everything I have become today.

How has your faith influenced your academic and professional career spanning over three decades?

My faith has been my greatest compass. It has taught me integrity, diligence, humility and excellence. Every leadership position I have occupied, whether as Head of Department, Director of Quality Assurance and SERVICOM at the University of Lagos or in international organisations, all have been approached as opportunity to serve God by serving people faithfully.

You have held more than 80 leadership positions. What leadership philosophy has sustained you?

Leadership is stewardship. It is about serving others with integrity, building systems that outlive you and mentoring younger people to become even better leaders.

Can you merge this with excellence?

Excellence should never be compromised, but it must always be balanced with compassion.

You are a five-time Best Researcher award recipient. What has driven your passion for scholarship?

Scholarship is about solving problems and improving lives. Research allows us to generate knowledge that benefits society. I have always believed that every lecture delivered, every student supervised and every research publication should make a positive contribution to humanity.

Your ministry has consistently focused on children. Why is children's evangelism so close to your heart as a female voice?

Grace Otinwa is a distinguished professor of Exercise Physiology in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Lagos, with over 35 years of teaching, research and academic leadership experience. A former director of Quality Assurance and SERVICOM at UNILAG, she has served in numerous national and international leadership roles and is recognised for her contributions to education, sports science and institutional development. Beyond the academia, she is a committed Christian leader, mentor and advocate for children's ministry, combining professional excellence with a lifelong dedication to faith, service and nation-building. She spoke with LYDIA ENYIDIYA EKE. Excerpts:



“Believe in yourself, work diligently, remain teachable and never stop learning Build your competence, maintain your integrity and trust God throughout the journey

Children are tomorrow's leaders. If they are grounded in Christ early, the society will reap the benefits in the future. From my days as a Children's Sunday School teacher to my Child Evangelism Ministry training, I have remained passionate about nurturing children in God's Word.

Beyond the classroom, you have served in church, missions and

humanitarian outreach. Why is service so important?

Serving God is one of most important aspect of our Christian faith and Christianity is practical. We cannot preach Christ without demonstrating His love through service. Supporting missionaries, participating in missions to places like Burkina Faso, serving in church ministries and mentoring others are all expressions of our

faith in action.

You have attended leadership and professional development programmes across China, Spain, Kenya, the United Kingdom and the United States. How have these international experiences shaped your outlook?

They have broadened my perspective. I learned that while cultures differ, excellence, accountability and servant leadership are universal values. They also have also strengthened my commitment to improving education and quality assurance in Nigeria.

Many women aspire to become professors and university administrators. What advice would you give them?

Believe in yourself, work diligently, remain teachable and never stop learning. Build your competence, maintain your integrity and trust God throughout the journey. Success comes through consistency and perseverance.

You have successfully balanced family life, ministry and a demanding academic career. How did you achieve that balance?

It takes God's grace, supportive family members, proper planning and knowing your priorities. I have always recognised that every role is important, and I strive to give my best in each season.

What legacy would you like to leave behind?

I want to be remembered as someone who loved God wholeheartedly, served people faithfully, mentored others intentionally and contributed meaningfully to education, leadership and nation-building.

What message would you like to leave for young Nigerians?

Put God first. Pursue excellence with integrity. Develop yourself continuously. Be disciplined, diligent and committed to making the society better. Never underestimate what God can accomplish through a life that is fully surrendered to Him. Whatever you do, do all for the glory of the Lord.

Women's World

Women group builds global community for female leadership, professional growth

LEILAH ZAHARADEEN

In an increasingly interconnected world where digital platforms have become powerful tools for collaboration, professional networking and leadership development, organisations dedicated to advancing women's voices continue to play a growing role in shaping global conversations. Among such initiatives is the Exclusive Women of Influence Circle (EWIC), an international organisation committed to empowering women through leadership, mentorship, community engagement and professional development while creating long-term social impact for women, families and communities.

EWIC has established an expanding international presence designed to encourage leadership, mentorship and knowledge sharing among women in business, academia, entrepreneurship, public service and community development. Through educational videos, leadership discussions, interviews and member engagement, the organisation seeks to provide opportunities for women to develop professionally while building relationships that transcend geographical boundaries.

The rapid expansion of digital communication has transformed how professional organisations engage with their audiences. Rather than relying solely on physical conferences and networking events, organisations such as EWIC have embraced technology to establish communities where women can exchange ideas, celebrate achievements and collaborate irrespective of location. Its YouTube channel serves as a platform for leadership conversations and educational content, while its social platforms further broaden the organisation's reach through visual storytelling and short-form educational content designed to engage younger professionals and aspiring entrepreneurs.

Beyond its digital footprint, EWIC's core objectives centre on empowerment, community support, dignity and long-



term social impact. The organisation's work reflects a holistic approach that combines leadership development with practical assistance, recognising that sustainable empowerment extends beyond professional success to improving the wellbeing of families and communities.

At the heart of EWIC's mission is women's empowerment. The organisation seeks to empower women through connection, confidence-building, leadership development and practical support while creating safe spaces where women can grow personally and professionally. Through mentoring opportunities, leadership programmes and supportive networks, participants are encouraged to develop the confidence and skills necessary to become influential leaders within their respective fields.

Community support forms another pillar of the organisation's work. EWIC provides food assistance, wellbeing resources, hygiene packs and crisis support to vulnerable families across the United Kingdom, reflecting its commitment to ensuring that no individual or family experiences hardship in isolation. By preserving dignity while responding to immediate needs, the organisation aims to strengthen communities through compassion and

practical action.

Recognising that education remains fundamental to long-term development, EWIC also invests significantly in skill-building and training. Workshops, mentoring programmes and skills acquisition initiatives are designed to strengthen leadership, entrepreneurship,

emotional resilience and employability, equipping women with practical knowledge and professional competencies that contribute to sustainable career development.

Collaboration remains central to EWIC's philosophy. The organisation has cultivated a growing network of influential women who work collectively to create positive social change, exchange ideas and establish meaningful professional relationships. By fostering collaboration rather than competition, EWIC seeks to build a community where knowledge sharing and mutual support become catalysts for innovation and leadership.

Its commitment to social responsibility extends further through programmes supporting vulnerable families with essential items, emergency assistance and signposting to trusted support services. Such initiatives recognise that empowering women often requires addressing wider social and economic challenges affecting households and communities.

Another defining feature of EWIC's work is its emphasis on intergenerational impact. Rather than focusing solely on immediate outcomes, the organisation seeks to build a lasting legacy by ensuring that empowerment reaches not only today's women

but also their children and future generations. Through education, mentorship and community engagement, EWIC aims to create opportunities whose benefits extend well beyond the present.

To improve accessibility, the organisation operates community hubs across several cities in the United Kingdom, including London, Borehamwood, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol, Liverpool and Newcastle. These hubs expand the organisation's reach while creating local environments where women can access programmes, participate in training and engage with others pursuing similar aspirations.

Throughout all its activities, EWIC remains committed to providing safe, respectful and inclusive environments for members, partners and participants. Upholding safeguarding principles, mutual respect and inclusive practice remains central to the organisation's efforts to create spaces where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued, supported and empowered.

Industry observers note that despite significant progress in advancing gender equality, women continue to face barriers to leadership opportunities, mentorship, investment and executive representation across numerous sectors. Organisations dedicated

to leadership development therefore continue to play an increasingly important role in creating pathways for professional advancement while strengthening communities through education and collaboration.

The organisation's objectives are reflected in its broader mission: to empower women by building confidence, leadership, resilience and influence; nourish communities through food banks, hygiene packs, wellbeing resources and crisis support; develop practical skills through workshops, mentoring, entrepreneurship and career development; strengthen collaborative professional networks; support vulnerable families with dignity-focused assistance; create intergenerational impact through lasting empowerment; operate accessible community hubs across the United Kingdom; and ensure safe, inclusive environments founded on safeguarding, respect and equality.

As digital communities continue to reshape professional engagement, organisations operating within this space face the challenge of maintaining meaningful interaction while delivering credible, relevant and impactful programmes. EWIC's approach combines leadership development with community service, recognising that professional success and social responsibility are mutually reinforcing.

With the continued expansion of digital learning and international collaboration, the Exclusive Women of Influence Circle illustrates how technology can be harnessed to connect individuals beyond national borders while empowering women through confidence-building, leadership development, practical support and community engagement. By combining professional networking with tangible social initiatives, the organisation continues to contribute to a growing global movement dedicated to strengthening women, supporting families and building more resilient communities for generations to come.

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As digital communities continue to reshape professional engagement, organisations operating within this space face the challenge of maintaining meaningful interaction while delivering credible, relevant and impactful programme

Women's World



UNICEF applauds First Lady's investments in women, children's education

TONY AILEMEN

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has commended the First Lady for investing in women and children. It also applauded the Federal Government under the leadership of President Bola Tinubu, over the recent rescue of abducted 39 pupils and 5 teachers in the Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Busola Kukoyi, Senior Special Assistant SSA Media to the First Lady, in a statement, said the UNICEF gave the commendation during a visit to the First Lady, by UNICEF delegation, led by Catherine Russell, the executive director, Mission to Nigeria.

Russell said that the commendation was in recognition of the First Lady's commitments that has put issues of

women and children on the front burner of her various interventions particularly through the Renewed Hope Initiative.

The UNICEF noted that investing in women and children is an investment into the future of the nation, adding that "UNICEF is glad to stay part of the time, helping as much as possible, we thank the leadership for rescuing children in conflict".

"What I see in my travels around the world is that conflict is one of the most difficult situations for children, whether it is displacement, conflict, violence, abductions, whatever it is, children need to be protected in these situations," he further said.

The UNICEF also commended the First Lady for championing the birth registration

drive which resulted in an upsurge to 14 million children across the country within two years.

The Organisation



The First Lady, however, expressed concern over the increasing number of out-of-school children mostly amongst the Almajirai

pointed out that it was achieved through several key factors including the direct contribution of Senator Oluremi Tinubu advocating through the Renewed Hope Initiative.

"I think as Nigeria continues to advance, this will be an important moment to invest in children and I like to commend the leadership and RHI for birth registration.

"Birth registration is one of the most important because children are part of our priority to guarantee a great future".

The First Lady has been at the forefront, playing pivotal roles in the campaigns against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) among others.

The First Lady, in her response, expressed her gladness for the return of the abducted children

and for UNICEF to identify with the government at during the dark periods.

"We are used to UNICEF coming to partner with our office in the way of advocacy because we know we have ministries and the work of the First Lady is for complementary and support.

"I agree with you that children are very important in any country for the development of that country.

"When you have children and they are not well invested in, no matter how wealthy that country is, they will not be able to make substantial growth".

"That is why, for me, with education background in teaching, I have known that we have to invest in our children.

"Like you mentioned, the children in conflict

areas, you also understand that Nigeria is a developing economy and the population size is quite daunting," she said.

The First Lady, however, expressed concern over the increasing number of out-of-school children mostly amongst the Almajirai.

She said that the government was also looking into ensuring that they are well-placed and gain formal education in special schools in addition to skills acquisition.

Other members of the delegation include UNICEF, Country Representative, Wafaa Saeed Abdelatef; Chief of Staff, Ted Mary; Senior Adviser, Communication, Marlene Jensen, head of project Marlene Serrano and Executive Specialist, Nabila Jamshed.

Women World

JOHN SALAU

Happy Woman Solutions Limited, recently partnered with Mayden Microfinance Bank, to launch the Happy Woman Match Fund, a financing initiative designed to help women entrepreneurs acquire business equipment needed to expand their enterprises and increase earning potential.

The initiative is aimed at addressing limited access to productive equipment due to financial constraints, considered as one of the biggest challenges confronting women-owned businesses.

"Economic empowerment begins with creating access to opportunities that enable women to build sustainable businesses," Kunle Erinle, CEO, Happy Woman Solutions, stated at the official launch of the Fund.

Erinle described the launch of the Happy Woman Match Fund as a significant milestone in

Happy Woman, Mayden MfB partner to bridge equipment gap, empower women entrepreneurs

the organisation's mission to eliminate barriers that hinder the growth of women-owned businesses.

"Through the Happy Woman Match Fund, we are providing a practical pathway for women entrepreneurs to acquire the productive assets they need today while cultivating healthy financial habits that will strengthen their businesses for the future," Erinle stated.

He added that the programme is being introduced first to members of the Happy Woman community in Lagos and Abuja, where the first cohort of beneficiaries will be selected.

According to him, the programme reflects its commitment to supporting



women in building sustainable businesses and achieving long-term financial independence.

Foluke Alakija, founder and managing director, Mayden Microfinance Bank, stated that the bank is committed to advancing financial inclusion by supporting innovative financing solutions that expand access to capital for underserved entrepreneurs.

She added that the programme will promote entrepreneurship and financial inclusion, particularly among women-led businesses.

She disclosed that eligible women entrepreneurs are encouraged to apply and take advantage of the opportunity to access

equipment that will strengthen their businesses and accelerate growth.

Through the partnership, Happy Woman Solutions Limited and Mayden Microfinance Bank hope to empower more women to build thriving enterprises, generate employment, and contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's economic development.

Applications for the Happy Woman Match Fund are now open for eligible members of the Happy Woman community in Lagos and Abuja.

Accordingly, interested applicants are encouraged to submit their applications through the programme's designated application platform.

The chase for quick wealth and wide doors of destruction of Nigerian youths

MERCY ENOCH, Asaba

Quick Money Syndrome is seen to be pushing some Nigeria youths into destruction. This is evident in the trending case of two young persons, one a 40-year-old married man and the other, a 20-year-old young girl. Both connected online on issue of monetization, but ended up in physical destruction.

Several videos recorded and posted online by 40-year-old Ifeanyi Ogbonna, a content creator popularly known as "Odogwu Asaba" have continued to surface since the news of the death of 20-year-old Favour Agbro, a nursing student, who hailed from Ughelili North LGA of the state, went virile.

Ogbonna, a father of two children, was arrested following allegations that he raped Favour who later died by suicide.

Favour had reportedly contacted the content creator after seeing his online advert promising to train aspiring creators on



how to monetise TikTok and Facebook pages. Believing it was an opportunity to build a career in content creation, she travelled to Asaba for the training.

According to the petition before the police, Favour had reportedly told the suspect that she was a virgin and made it clear she was not interested in any romantic or sexual relationship. Despite this, it is alleged that the suspect lured her to a hotel in Asaba, where he allegedly raped and physically assaulted her, leaving her with injuries.



After returning home to Warri, Favour reportedly confided in her family and her twin sister, recounting the ordeal she had allegedly experienced. Activists claimed she struggled emotionally after the incident and was unable to get the help she desperately needed.

Bright Edafe, Delta Police spokesperson, said that Favour later recorded a video in which she detailed the alleged assault and the emotional trauma she suffered. According to the police, she subsequently

ingested a toxic substance in an apparent suicide attempt and later died despite efforts to save her.

Following a petition, Yemi Oyeniyi the Commissioner of Police (CP), ordered an immediate investigation. Operatives of the Area Command in Effurun arrested Ogbonna, who is currently in police custody. Police said that Ogbonna has made useful statements, while investigations continue to determine the full circumstances surrounding the case.

As at Friday evening, reports had it that Ogbonna had admitted to the crime and was begging to settle the parents of Favour but some Nigerians including right activists who are interested in justice for Favour have begun raising funds for the legal matter and to ensure Ogbonna does not buy justice with his money.

Favour's parents were said to be ready to collect N7 million they claimed they borrowed and spent at the hospital to save her life but concerned Nigerians and netizens viewing that

poverty and lack of money were reason for such choice, are out to fight and ensure Ogbonna faces the full weight of the law.

Many concerned citizens have continued to dig out Ogbonna's past videos to reveal his reckless lifestyle. One of such videos include the one in which he stated that since he stopped going to church 10 years ago, his life had begun to "sweet him". That since he stopped associating with his pastor who was always reminding him to come to church, he had been enjoying his life. That then, any time he didn't want to go to church, the pastor would be telling him things that would make him think he would go to hell-fire.

"Since I rescued my mindset, my life, my body, my soul from going to church, that was the time my life began to change." According to him, he cancelled going to church because "Church is a very big scam!"

Many Christians have viewed the post as the main reason he doesn't fear God. They said that he left the

body of Christ and the Assembly of Brethren and the devil/kechukwu Enwere, an indigene of Delta State resident in Asaba, said that "the man's life changed for the worse because he stopped worshipping God. The 10 years of not worshipping God were 10 years of living a sinful life," he said.

"Well, I'm still saying that his rough life started after living church because he no longer fears going to hell fire. Devil came and took over his life, making him to live deeper in evil," he said.

According to him, "People tell you that church is a scam because the devil wants to destroy them; he stops them from going close to their Maker. Watch out! You will now see that this man with time, he will go back to God. Before, he regretted going to church and stopped, now following the crisis he is facing, he will regret leaving God and will desire to go back to him."

Bishop Enrich Iritevwobor of Resigners' Assembly while regretting that Ogbonna fell into such temptation of raping a girl leading to her death, he said that nobody was above temptation of the eyes, hands and sex organs until the person disciplines him or herself.

For him, Church is not a scam and can never be a scam.

Bliss with Nonye Ben-Nwankwo

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Losing Alexx forced me to ask many questions – IK Ogbonna

Actor IK Ogbonna has said the death of his closest friend, Alexx Ekubo, has left him with many questions about life.

In a recent post, his first since Alexx's passing, IK said nothing had prepared him for such a painful loss.

He wrote: "On May 11, I lost my best friend and brother. Nothing prepares you for a loss like that.

"There is something I have come to realise these past few months. Every day, we see an ambulance drive past us. Sometimes it is moving fast, sometimes slowly. We look up for a second and whisper, 'God have mercy' or 'Rest in peace.' Then we continue with our day because, somehow, we always believe the person inside belongs to somebody else.

"Every day, the news tells us another person has died. We shake our heads. We type 'RIP'. We send our condolences. Then we move on. But the truth is, you never truly understand the weight of death until it is your own person inside that vehicle, until the phone stops ringing forever, until the chair beside you remains empty, until the conversation you thought you had time to finish suddenly becomes memories."

IK said that had been his reality since Alexx's death.

"For the past two months, I have been trying to understand life, trying to understand loss, trying to



understand God, trying to understand why someone so full of life can suddenly become a memory. I still don't have all the answers. In fact, I don't think anyone does.

"Losing Alexx forced me to ask myself questions I'd never really asked before. Why do we live the way we do? Why do we chase tomorrow as though tomorrow signed a contract with us? Why do we postpone love? Why do we postpone forgiveness? Why do we postpone phone calls? Why do we convince ourselves there will always be another birthday, another Christmas, another conversation, another 'I'll see you next week'?

"The truth is, tomorrow is a privilege, not a promise. All we own is this moment."

Reliving their friendship, IK said they shared a close bond. "Alexx and I spoke about everything. We laughed about growing old. We dreamed about businesses, movies we wanted to create, places we wanted to travel, the lives we imagined for our children, success, legacy and family. We truly believed we had time. Neither of us imagined one of us would leave first. Life had another plan. Or perhaps God simply had a different plan."

Despite the pain, IK said he has found peace.

"As painful as it is, I have found peace in believing that God's wisdom is greater than mine. There are questions my heart still asks that my mind cannot answer. But faith reminds me that not every answer is meant to be understood on this side of eternity.

"One day, every single one of us will become somebody's memory. The only question is: What kind of memory will we become? Will people remember what we owned or how we loved? Will they remember our possessions or our presence? Will they remember our success or our significance?"

He also expressed gratitude for the friendship they shared.

"Alexx, my brother, thank you. For every conversation, every correction, every laugh, every disagreement that made us stronger. Thank you for believing in me. Thank you for trusting me enough to call me your brother. It remains one of the greatest honours of my life.

"You may no longer be beside me, but you will always walk within me. I promise to keep living, to keep building, to keep giving and to keep showing up, to leave the world better than I met it. Because if your life taught me anything, it is that our time here is not measured by how long we live but by how deeply we love."



No one knows full story of my marriage – Uche Ogbodo

Nollywood actress Uche Ogbodo has warned the public to stop commenting on her marriage.

Uche recently announced the breakdown of her marriage through a series of posts on her social media pages.

However, in a recent post on Instagram, she appealed to the public to stop discussing her marriage and offering unsolicited opinions about her personal life.

She wrote: "I understand that many people have opinions about my personal life.

The truth is, no one knows the full story except the people who actually lived it. Yet social media has a way of making everyone believe they know more about someone else's life than the people living it."

She added that her priority is caring for her children and focusing on her healing.

"My priority right now is raising my children, focusing on my healing, however that journey unfolds, and moving forward with dignity and peace of mind."

Stop negative comments about my wife – Nkiru Sylvanus' husband

Riches Sammy, Nigerian businessman, filmmaker and husband of actress Nkiru Sylvanus, has responded to online speculation about his wife's health, warning against what he described as misleading comments about their marriage.

Some social media users reacted to a viral photo and video of Nkiru, claiming she looked unhealthy, unhappy or that her marriage had deteriorated.

Responding, the Japan-based businessman said the circulating image did not accurately represent his wife's appearance and warned that he would no longer tolerate

such comments.

He said: "A picture and a video which do not represent what my wife looks like are currently circulating online. I might choose to overlook that and all the comments that have been made.

"But what I will not tolerate is anyone making a derogatory post or a misleading caption about my marriage. I will not tolerate that. I will take legal action. Be warned."

The filmmaker, who keeps a relatively low profile, shared the warning on his Instagram account, urging online trolls to stop making negative comments about his family.



Heineken launches Bar De Change

Heineken has unveiled Bar De Change, Nigeria's first social currency exchange, introducing a new way for travellers to enjoy familiar social experiences beyond the country's borders.

Available to Nigerians travelling to the United States and Mexico, the platform allows consumers who purchase a Heineken in Nigeria to receive a gift card redeemable for a Heineken abroad at the same price paid at home.

Travellers can participate by visiting the Heineken bar at the Sapphire Lounge of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMIA) before departure, purchasing a Heineken to receive a Bar De Change gift card, and redeeming it at participating Heineken bars in the United States or Mexico.

Speaking on the initiative, Maria Shadeko, Portfolio

Manager, Premium Beer, Nigerian Breweries Plc, said:

"Heineken has always believed that the best experiences are shared. Bar De Change brings that belief to life in a way that feels particularly relevant to Nigerian travellers today. It transforms a familiar travel ritual into a social experience, allowing consumers to enjoy a Heineken abroad at the same value they pay at home."

She added:

"For many Nigerians, international travel begins with a stop at the Bureau De Change, a familiar ritual where local currency is exchanged for foreign currency before a journey begins. Bar De Change reimagines that simple purchase as an opportunity for connection, allowing travellers to carry a familiar social experience with them as they explore new destinations."

The Sunday Stew

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The Sundiata Post Model (3): The Dual Engine Architecture

In the 7 June 2026 article which marked the formal unveiling of the Decoupling Sovereignty Index (DSI), I articulated a defining institutional proposition. The launch of the DSI was presented not merely as the introduction of a new analytical instrument, but as another milestone in the evolution of Sundiata Post into what I described as a dual engine architectural powerhouse. That statement marked an important transition. It signalled that Sundiata Post was no longer to be understood solely as a digital news platform, but as an institution consciously integrating journalism, strategic intelligence and scholarly research within a single operational framework.

The proposition advanced on that occasion was straightforward. On the front end, Sundiata Post would continue to function as a digital-first, high-velocity news organisation, reporting events, investigating public issues, analysing developments and informing citizens through timely, credible journalism. On the back end, the Sundiata Post Intelligence Unit (SPIU) would operate as a proprietary knowledge engine, generating original research, developing analytical frameworks, curating datasets, publishing working papers and preserving institutional knowledge through globally recognised scholarly repositories.

This article develops that proposition into a formal institutional architecture.

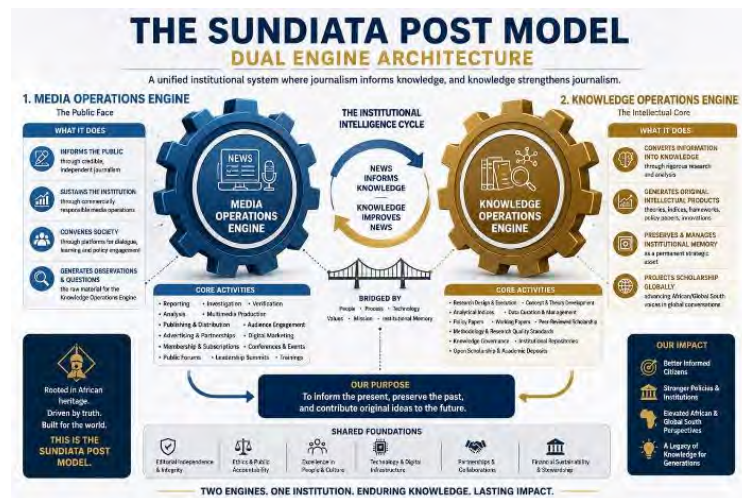
The first part in this series argued that the newsroom of the twenty-first century must evolve beyond the production of daily news to become a knowledge institution. The second situated that proposition within a broader intellectual tradition, demonstrating through the works of Walter Lippmann, Hannah Arendt, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo that historically served not merely as a conveyor of information but as a builder of public reason, democratic culture and national development.

Having established the philosophical foundations, we now turn to the question of institutional design. Every enduring institution requires more than a compelling vision; it requires an architecture capable of translating principles into sustained practice. Ideas alone do not create institutions. Institutions endure because they are deliberately designed to produce consistent outcomes, preserve organisational memory, adapt to changing environments and outlive their founders.

The Sundiata Post Model is therefore built upon what I call the Dual Engine Architecture. Simply stated, the Dual Engine Architecture is an institutional design in which a Media Operations Engine generates public value through journalism while a Knowledge Operations Engine transforms that journalistic enterprise into a permanent system of knowledge production.

The first engine is the Media Operations Engine—the visible newsroom that performs the essential functions of journalism through reporting, verification, investigation, editing, publication and audience engagement. The second is the Knowledge Operations Engine—the institutional infrastructure through which research is conducted, theories are formulated, datasets are curated, policy knowledge is generated and intellectual assets are systematically preserved.

These engines are neither parallel organisations nor competing departments. They are interdependent components of a single institutional system. Journalism



supplies the observations, evidence and questions that shape the research agenda. Research, in turn, enriches journalism with deeper context, analytical rigour and conceptual innovation. The output of one continuously strengthens the other, creating an institutional intelligence cycle in which news informs knowledge and knowledge improves news.

The significance of this architecture extends beyond Sundiata Post itself. It offers a framework for reimaging the modern newsroom in an era defined by rapid technological change, information overload and declining public trust. Rather than treating journalism as a transient response to the daily news cycle, the Dual Engine Architecture positions the newsroom as the public-facing component of a broader knowledge enterprise—one that simultaneously informs the present, preserves the past and contributes original ideas to the future.

The Media Operations Engine

The first pillar of the Sundiata Post Model is the Media Operations Engine. This is the institution's public-facing operational system—the visible enterprise through which Sundiata Post fulfils its journalistic, commercial and public engagement responsibilities. It represents the front end of the organisation, integrating editorial excellence with audience development, revenue generation and public-facing institutional activities.

At its core, the Media Operations Engine performs the traditional functions of a professional news organisation. It identifies stories of public importance, deploys reporters to the field, verifies facts through rigorous editorial procedures, produces multimedia content, provides analysis and commentary, and disseminates information across digital platforms. These activities remain the foundation of the institution's commitment to informing society accurately, independently and responsibly.

Beyond the newsroom, however, the Media Operations Engine encompasses the broader business of media. It includes advertising and brand partnerships, digital marketing, audience growth strategies, subscription and membership initiatives where applicable, commercial publishing, multimedia production, and other revenue-generating activities necessary to sustain editorial independence. Within the Sundiata Post Model, commercial operations are not peripheral to journalism; they are carefully managed institutional functions that provide

the financial capacity required for long-term public-interest reporting and knowledge production.

The engine also extends the institution's public engagement beyond daily news publishing. Conferences, annual lectures, policy dialogues, public forums, media masterclasses, leadership summits and other convening platforms become integral components of the media enterprise. These engagements transform the organisation from a publisher of information into a convener of ideas, creating spaces where journalists, scholars, policymakers, business leaders and citizens can deliberate on issues of national and continental importance. In doing so, the Media Operations Engine strengthens the institution's civic presence while simultaneously generating new networks, partnerships and editorial opportunities.

Within the Sundiata Post Model, the Media Operations Engine performs an additional function that distinguishes it from conventional news organisations. It serves as the institution's principal observational system. Every news report, investigative assignment, interview, audience interaction, conference discussion and field observation constitutes more than a discrete media product. Collectively, they generate the empirical evidence, public conversations and emerging questions that feed the institution's knowledge infrastructure.

In many conventional media organisations, these valuable intellectual assets dissipate with the passing of the news cycle. The Sundiata Post Model rejects this linear conception of journalism. Instead, every verified report, public engagement and editorial initiative is regarded as a potential contribution to a cumulative institutional intelligence system.

Accordingly, the Media Operations Engine performs four interconnected functions. First, it informs the public through credible journalism. Second, it sustains the institution through commercially responsible media operations. Third, it convenes society by creating platforms for dialogue, learning and policy engagement. Fourth, it continuously generates the empirical observations and strategic questions that become the raw material for the Knowledge Operations Engine.

The Media Operations Engine is therefore far more than a newsroom. It is the institution's interface with society—observing events, engaging audiences, building relationships, generating revenue and producing the empirical foundation upon which the Sundiata

Post Model's broader knowledge enterprise is constructed.

The Knowledge Operations Engine

If the Media Operations Engine is the public face of the Sundiata Post Model, the Knowledge Operations Engine is its intellectual core. It is the institutional infrastructure through which information is transformed into knowledge, knowledge into analytical frameworks, and analytical frameworks into enduring intellectual assets. While the front end responds to the immediacy of events, the back end seeks to understand their underlying structures, causes and long-term implications.

The Knowledge Operations Engine is anchored by the Sundiata Post Intelligence Unit (SPIU), which serves as the institution's research and strategic intelligence hub. It is responsible for designing and executing research programmes, developing original concepts and theories, constructing analytical indices, curating datasets, producing policy papers, publishing working papers and peer-reviewed scholarship, maintaining institutional standards for methodology, research quality and knowledge governance, and preserving institutional knowledge through globally recognised academic repositories.

In this architecture, research is not an adjunct to journalism but an integral institutional function.

Unlike conventional newsroom research desks, whose work is often confined to supporting daily editorial production, the Knowledge Operations Engine pursues an independent programme of knowledge creation. It identifies recurring patterns across time, interrogates complex governance and security challenges, develops explanatory models, and subjects those models to empirical testing. The objective is not merely to explain individual events but to contribute original intellectual frameworks capable of advancing scholarly and policy debates.

The engine is also responsible for the stewardship of institutional memory. Research datasets, methodological notes, interview archives, conceptual papers, technical documentation and analytical outputs are systematically organised, preserved and made retrievable. Rather than allowing institutional knowledge to disappear with personnel changes or the passing of the news cycle, the Sundiata Post Model treats these materials as strategic assets that accumulate value over time. This commitment to preservation transforms the institution from a producer of content into a custodian of knowledge.

A defining characteristic of the Knowledge Operations Engine is its commitment to openness and scholarly engagement. Where appropriate, research outputs are deposited in recognised academic repositories, enabling scrutiny, replication, citation and further development by the global research community. By exposing its analytical frameworks and datasets to independent examination, the institution embraces the principle that durable knowledge grows stronger through critical evaluation rather than institutional isolation.

The Knowledge Operations Engine therefore performs four interconnected functions. First, it converts empirical observations into structured knowledge through rigorous research and analysis. Second, it generates original intellectual products—including theories, indices, policy frameworks and methodological innovations—that extend beyond the immediate demands of journalism. Third, it preserves and manages the institution's

intellectual capital as a permanent strategic resource. Fourth, it projects African or Global South scholarship into global academic and policy ecosystems, ensuring that ideas developed within the newsroom contribute to international conversations on governance, security, development and media innovation.

The Knowledge Operations Engine is therefore not simply a research department. It is the institutional mechanism through which journalism acquires permanence, evidence is transformed into understanding, and a media organisation evolves into a knowledge-producing institution. Together with the Media Operations Engine, it completes the Dual Engine Architecture that lies at the heart of the Sundiata Post Model.

If the preceding sections explain how the Sundiata Post Model works, an equally important question remains: Is this architecture unique to Sundiata Post, or can it become a framework for journalism more broadly?

Beyond Sundiata Post

The Sundiata Post Model is proposed as a universal institutional framework for twenty-first-century journalism. Although it originated within Sundiata Post, it is not conceived as an organisation-specific model. Rather, it offers a general institutional architecture that can be adapted by news organisations operating in diverse economic, technological, political and cultural environments.

In this formulation, Sundiata Post is not the model; it is the founding implementation and proof of concept—a living institutional demonstration that such an architecture is both practicable and sustainable. The relationship is similar to the Toyota Production System, which began inside a single company but evolved into a global management framework adopted by organisations far beyond the automotive industry. Likewise, the Sundiata Post Model is intended to transcend the organisation in which it was first developed.

Its long-term significance will therefore be determined not solely by its success at Sundiata Post, but by its capacity to be tested, adapted, replicated and refined by media organisations across different societies. The true measure of any institutional model is not that it works for its originator, but that it enables others to build stronger institutions of their own. If the Sundiata Post Model ultimately proves capable of helping news organisations across Africa, the Global South and beyond become enduring knowledge institutions, then its greatest contribution will not be what it achieved for Sundiata Post, but what it made possible for journalism itself.

Trust is sacred. Stay seasoned

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WordMatters

with **CHRIS AGBEDO**



Triple Canopy of Grace: Celebrating Peter Uche Family

Human life occasionally reaches a point where its deepest virtues converge with remarkable harmony. Longevity acquires the quiet authority of wisdom. Love transcends romance to become an enduring covenant. Family grows beyond kinship into legacy, while faith and discipline mature into a way of life. Such rare convergence forms what may aptly be described as a “triple canopy of grace,” a sacred meeting point where years, values, and relationships illuminate one another and reveal the profound beauty of a life well lived.

The Uche family stands beneath this gracious canopy with quiet dignity. Their story is one in which scholarship is tempered by humility, faith expressed through service, discipline softened by compassion, and love refined by more than five decades of faithful companionship. It is a narrative that reminds us that the finest legacies are seldom fashioned by dramatic moments but by countless ordinary acts of consistency, sacrifice, and steadfast devotion.

It is in celebration of this extraordinary confluence of blessings that family members, friends, colleagues, brethren of the Order of Knights of St. Mulumba, Nigeria and countless admirers gather on 25 July 2026 to honour a remarkable triad of milestones. They are the 83rd birthday of Emeritus Professor Peter Ikechukwu Uche (KSM), 74th birthday of Lady Philomena Adaeze Uche (LSM), and 53rd anniversary of a marital union that has quietly but powerfully defied the erosion of time, circumstance, and modern fragility of commitment; one marriage, whose enduring strength has become a quiet testimony to faith, fidelity, and grace. This celebration is therefore not an ordinary social occasion. It is a triadic festival of life, an interweaving of biography, marriage, scholarship, family, and faith. It is the celebration of age that has ripened into wisdom, of love that has matured into covenant, and of family that has grown into legacy.

At the heart of this luminous narrative stands Emeritus Professor Peter Ikechukwu Uche, a distinguished scholar of Statistics, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. His academic life is marked by intellectual discipline, methodological rigour, and a sustained commitment to advancing the frontiers of statistical science. Over the decades, he has built a reputation not merely as a teacher of statistics but as a shaper of analytical thought and a mentor to generations of



students who now occupy various spaces in academia and industry.

His scholarly contributions have enriched the field in significant ways. Among his widely cited works is the seminal publication titled “Non-homogeneity and transition probabilities of a Markov chain,” a study that engages deeply with stochastic processes and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of probabilistic transitions in non-uniform systems. This work remains a reference point in discussions of Markovian dynamics and continues to influence subsequent research in the field.

Further extending his intellectual reach, Emeritus Professor Uche’s work on “Equilibrium models for interdependent Markov systems” explores complex systems characterized by interrelated probabilistic behaviours, offering a refined analytical framework for understanding equilibrium states within interconnected stochastic environments. Equally significant is his study on “Statistical models of length of stay in the educational system,” which applies rigorous statistical methodologies to educational progression, shedding light on patterns of student retention, duration of study, and systemic efficiency within educational institutions. These works collectively reflect a sustained engagement with complex analytical problems and underscore a career marked by intellectual consistency, analytical depth, originality, scholarly impact, and applied relevance.

However, beyond the archive of academic excellence lies a life grounded in faith, humility, and service. As a Knight of St. Mulumba (KSM), Professor Uche embodies the integration of intellect and moral responsibility. His life illustrates that scholarship, when properly rooted in ethical conviction, becomes not merely an intellectual pursuit but a form of service to humanity. Beside him stands Lady Philomena Adaeze Uche (LSM), aged 74, a woman whose life is a quiet but profound testimony to grace, resilience, and relational wisdom. In her, one encounters the architecture of stability that sustains not only a household but a generational value system. She represents the emotional and moral equilibrium of the Uche family, providing strength that is neither loud nor performative, but deeply consistent and enduring. As a Lady of St. Mulumba, she mirrors the same spiritual and moral commitments that define her husband, translating faith into daily acts of care, hospitality, and nurturing presence.

Together, they form not merely a couple but a covenantal union, one that has endured 53 years of shared life, responsibilities, joys, trials, and transformations. Their marriage is not an accidental coincidence of compatibility; it is a disciplined journey of mutual understanding, forgiveness, patience, and shared purpose. In a world where relationships are often fragile and transient, their union stands as a counter-narrative, an

affirmation that permanence is still possible when anchored in faith and intentional commitment.

From this enduring union came five children - Chukwudi, Tochukwu, Okwudili, Kenechi, and Ikemefuna - each representing the living extension of a carefully nurtured legacy. They are not merely biological descendants but intellectual and moral inheritors of a household deeply rooted in discipline, education, and ethical formation. Through them, the values of the Uche family continue to find expression in contemporary contexts, ensuring that the legacy of their parents is neither static nor confined but dynamically evolving.

The Uche family home itself has long functioned as more than a domestic space. It is an institution of formation, a quiet academy of values where character is shaped, discipline is cultivated, and aspiration is guided by principle. Many who have encountered the family, including colleagues, friends, and members of the academic community, attest to its stabilising influence and its quiet but enduring moral authority. It is a home that teaches not through proclamation but through consistent example.

The triple celebration of 83 years, 74 years, and 53 years of marriage thus invites deeper reflection. The 83 years of Professor Peter Uche symbolise intellectual endurance, historical consciousness, and accumulated wisdom. The 74 years of Lady Philomena represent emotional intelligence, relational depth, and nurturing strength. The 53 years of marriage embody the disciplined cultivation of love as practice, covenant, and shared destiny. Together, these dimensions form a coherent narrative of human flourishing, i.e., mind, heart, and commitment in harmonious balance.

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where Professor Uche has served as an eminent academic, remains an important intellectual context in this story. His contributions to the institution’s academic life have helped strengthen statistical education and research culture, influencing both curriculum development and student formation. Generations of students have passed through his mentorship, carrying forward not only technical knowledge but also a disciplined approach to inquiry and intellectual integrity.

The celebration of the Uche family will commence with a Thanksgiving Mass at St. Peter’s Chapel, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, a sacred moment of gratitude that

acknowledges divine providence as the foundation of their journey. From there, the event will proceed to the St. Teresa’s College Hall, Nsukka, where family members, colleagues, students, friends, and well-wishers will gather in joyful recognition of a life and marriage that have become symbolic of endurance and grace. These venues are deeply symbolic: the chapel signifies thanksgiving and spiritual grounding, while the College Hall represents communal recognition of an extraordinary legacy.

The programme will also feature a book presentation, introducing an additional dimension of intellectual and cultural significance to the occasion. While the content of the book scheduled for unveiling is, at present, not publicly detailed, its presentation forms an integral part of the celebratory activities and reflects the esteem in which Emeritus Professor Peter Ikechukwu Uche is held within academic and social circles. In celebrating the Uche family, therefore, we are not merely marking birthdays and anniversaries. We are affirming a philosophy of life, that is, one that integrates scholarship with family, faith with reason, and achievement with humility. We are witnessing the quiet triumph of endurance over fragmentation, and of commitment over convenience.

Their story is a reminder that true greatness is not always loud. It does not always announce itself in public spectacle. Often, it is found in the patient accumulation of years, in the silent sacrifices of love, in the disciplined pursuit of knowledge, and in the faithful stewardship of family. As the day unfolds in thanksgiving and celebration, may it also serve as a moment of reflection for all who encounter this remarkable family. May the years ahead bring continued peace, good health, and renewed joy. May their children continue to flourish as carriers of a noble legacy. And may the Uche family remain a shining example of what it means to live not only long, but well.

Happy 83rd, 74th, and 53rd celebrations to Emeritus Professor (Sir) Nnadiugwu Peter Ikechukwu Uche, Lady Philomena Adaeze Uche, and the entire Uche family - a household where time has become testimony, love has become covenant, and legacy has become light.

Agbedo, a professor of Linguistics, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Fellow of Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, is a public affairs analyst.

Cover

From Creditor to Debtor: Nigeria's long descent from oil wealth to a borrowing nation

■ Lent \$240m to World Bank in 1974; \$120m to IMF in 1975

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

In the mid-1970s, Nigeria occupied a position few developing countries could boast of. Flush with oil revenues and rising foreign reserves, the country was not seeking financial assistance from international institutions; it was helping to finance them.

In 1974, Nigeria invested \$240 million in World Bank bonds, effectively providing resources that the institution could deploy for development projects across the world. A year later, it contributed \$120 million to the International Monetary Fund's Oil Facility, a programme established to help countries struggling with soaring oil prices. At the time, Nigeria was emerging as a regional power, funding peacekeeping missions, supporting liberation movements in Africa and providing assistance to neighbouring countries.

The country was so wealthy that General Yakubu Gowon was famously quoted as saying that Nigeria's problem was not money, but how to spend it.

Five decades later, that statement reads like a relic from another era.

Nigeria is now heavily dependent on borrowing to finance its budgets and development plans. According to the Debt Management Office, the country's public debt rose to N159.28 trillion by the end of 2025. The 2026 federal budget earmarks about N15.8 trillion for debt servicing alone, an amount that exceeds the combined capital budgets of several key sectors.

The transformation from creditor to debtor raises a troubling question: what happened?

The answer lies not in a single event but in decades of missed opportunities.

The oil boom of the 1970s created enormous wealth, but it also encouraged a dangerous dependence on crude oil. Agriculture, which had been Nigeria's leading export sector before oil, gradually declined. Manufacturing struggled to compete, while successive governments relied increasingly on oil revenues to fund public spending.

When global oil prices collapsed in the early 1980s, the weakness of the economy became exposed. Government revenues fell sharply, foreign exchange earnings dwindled and borrowing began to replace oil income as a source of financing.

Rather than use the crisis to di-



versify the economy, successive administrations largely continued the pattern of dependence on oil. Periods of high oil prices brought temporary relief, but they were often accompanied by higher government spending rather than long-term investments that could generate sustainable growth.

The return to democracy in 1999 offered another opportunity for economic renewal. Rising oil prices during the 2000s generated billions

of dollars in additional revenues. In 2005, Nigeria secured debt relief from the Paris Club, eliminating about \$18 billion in external debt and providing what many economists described as a fresh start.

Yet the country soon returned to borrowing.

The problem was not necessarily the loans themselves. Every major economy borrows. The critical issue is how borrowed funds are used.

In countries where debt finances

productive infrastructure, industrial expansion or technological development, borrowing can stimulate growth and generate the resources needed for repayment. In Nigeria, however, the outcomes have often been less visible.

Despite decades of borrowing, many roads remain in poor condition, electricity supply is inadequate, public schools are underfunded and healthcare infrastructure remains weak. While

some debt-financed projects have improved transportation and connectivity, the overall impact has fallen short of public expectations.

Corruption has also played a significant role.

For years, anti-corruption agencies have uncovered cases involving billions of naira in stolen public funds. Yet convictions are often delayed, assets are not fully recovered and many high-profile cases end with plea bargains. The perception that public officials can loot state resources with limited consequences has undermined confidence in governance.

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index continues to rank Nigeria among countries facing significant governance challenges, reinforcing concerns about accountability in public finance.

The consequences are evident in today's fiscal reality.

A growing share of government revenue is spent servicing existing debts rather than building new infrastructure or expanding social services. At the same time, inflation, unemployment and poverty continue to affect millions of Nigerians. Citizens are increasingly asking why rising public debt has not translated into a comparable improvement in living standards.

Yet debt is only a symptom of a deeper problem.

The real issue is the inability of the economy to generate sufficient revenue outside oil, combined with persistent inefficiencies in public spending. Nigeria's population has grown from about 56 million in 1970 to more than 230 million today, placing enormous pressure on infrastructure, education, healthcare and employment.

The country still possesses significant advantages. It has vast oil and gas reserves, fertile agricultural land, a large domestic market and a youthful population. What has been lacking is the consistent policy framework needed to convert those assets into broad-based prosperity.

Nigeria's journey from lender to borrower offers a lesson in economic management. Natural resources alone do not guarantee development. Wealth must be invested productively, institutions must be strengthened and public resources must be managed transparently.

Half a century ago, Nigeria was helping to fund global financial institutions. Today, it relies on many of those same institutions for support.



Beyond the rescue: How weak local governance fuels insecurity in rural communities

Continued from Page 1

conversation: why are vast sections of rural Nigeria still left vulnerable to criminal groups, and what role can empowered local governments play in reversing the trend?

For many observers, the Oriire incident is not merely a story of kidnapping and rescue. It is a case study of how decades of neglect have created ungoverned spaces where state authority is weak, public services are absent and criminal networks thrive.

Where government presence ends

The communities affected by the Oriire abductions lie roughly 42 kilometres from Ogbomoso. Yet distance alone does not explain their vulnerability.

Leaving Ogbomoso, the landscape gradually changes. Asphalt gives way to narrower roads. Settlements become fewer. Mobile phone signals weaken. Electricity poles, where they exist, often carry no power. Communities appear intermittently between vast stretches of forest.

Old Oyo National Park, which spans about 2,512 square kilometres across northern Oyo and southern Kwara states, occupies a unique place in Nigeria's history. It combines rich biodiversity with the archaeological remains of Oyo-Ile, the ancient political capital of the Oyo Empire.

But the same vast forests that preserve the country's ecological and historical heritage have increasingly become sanctuaries for criminal groups.

Security experts, local leaders and residents have repeatedly raised concerns about the park's growing role as a hideout for terrorists, bandits, kidnappers and illegal miners operating across state boundaries.

The challenge is not unique to Oyo State. Across Nigeria, many of the communities most affected by terrorism, banditry and kidnapping share similar characteristics: they are remote, poorly connected and largely abandoned by formal institutions of government.

There are often no police stations, no functional healthcare centres, poor roads, weak telecommunications networks and limited state presence.

In Yawota, one of the communities bordering the forest reserve, residents say these deficiencies leave them exposed whenever attacks occur.

"No light, no internet. The government should help us. If we had a network, we would have been able to call for help," Damilare Amusa, a resident was quoted in a report by TheCable following the abduction.

His complaint reflects a reality familiar to millions of Nigerians living far from state capitals. When emergencies occur, help is often hours away.

The rise of parallel authorities

In many rural communities, insecurity has created an alternative governance structure.

Where government protection is absent, residents frequently negotiate informal arrangements with armed groups controlling nearby



forests. Farmers pay levies to access their farmlands. Communities contribute money to avoid attacks. Local leaders negotiate fragile peace agreements with criminal gangs.

The arrangement is not born out of loyalty to criminal groups but necessity. People seek survival where formal institutions have failed.

This pattern has become increasingly common across parts of Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Niger, Kaduna and now sections of the South-West.

In Sabon Birni Local Government Area of Sokoto State, residents reportedly paid bandits tens of millions in 2024 to avoid sustained attacks, according to a report by SBM Intelligence.

Such incidents illustrate how insecurity can evolve into a parallel system of taxation and authority when the state loses effective control of local territories.

The result is a dangerous cycle. As communities become dependent on informal arrangements for protection, criminal groups gain legitimacy, resources and intelligence. Meanwhile, confidence in government institutions continues to erode.

The limits of military operations

Security analysts argue that while military operations remain necessary, they are not sufficient to address the root causes of insecurity in remote communities.

The rescue operation in Oriire demonstrated the effectiveness of coordinated security interventions. However, replicating such operations simultaneously across dozens of vulnerable local government areas presents enormous challenges.

Military deployments are expensive. Personnel are limited. Troops cannot permanently occupy every forest community across Nigeria.

Even successful operations often provide only temporary relief. Once soldiers leave, the structural condi-

tions that enabled criminal activities frequently remain unchanged.

This reality raises a critical question: who provides sustained security presence after military operations end?

For many analysts, the answer lies not only in state policing but also in stronger local government institutions capable of supporting community-level security structures.

The missing link in the state police debate

Discussions about state police have intensified following the passage of the bill by the National Assembly as Nigeria struggles with worsening insecurity.

Supporters argue that decentralising policing would improve intelligence gathering, enhance local accountability and enable faster responses to threats.

Yet some analysts believe the debate often overlooks a crucial component.

Ayomide Akinwale, an analyst at SBM Intelligence, argues that state police alone will not solve Nigeria's security challenges.

According to him, policing must extend beyond state capitals and reach communities where insecurity is most concentrated.

"Something that is often overlooked in public debate is the aspect of community policing. It should not just be restricted to the state. It should be further devolved to the community level," he said.

Akinwale notes that most insecurity occurs in rural communities where local residents possess knowledge that formal security institutions often lack.

People know who recently arrived in the community. They know suspicious movements. They understand local terrain, family networks and social relationships.

A community-based policing structure, he argues, would make it easier to identify criminal elements

and gather intelligence before attacks occur.

"If you have a community police force where officers are mostly members of the community who have gone through proper training, they would understand where criminal elements are within the community," he said.

For him, the real debate is not merely state police versus federal police. It is whether security architecture can be designed to reach the grassroots where threats originate and where victims live.

Why local government autonomy matters

The conversation inevitably returns to local governments.

Historically, local councils played a more active role in community security. Many worked with vigilante groups, hunters and traditional institutions to monitor threats and protect residents.

Although informal, these arrangements often provided valuable intelligence and deterrence. Over time, however, the capacity of local governments weakened.

Critics argue that state governments increasingly absorbed powers and resources that should have remained at the grassroots level, leaving many councils unable to perform even basic functions.

As a result, local authorities became less capable of supporting security initiatives, maintaining infrastructure or responding to emergencies.

Akinwale believes any serious community policing model must be anchored on financially independent local governments.

"If you're going to have a community police force, it should be coordinated by local government executives. And for that to happen, they need fiscal autonomy," he said.

His argument reflects a broader governance debate that gained national attention in July 2024 when the Supreme Court ruled that local

governments should receive their allocations directly and that governors had no constitutional authority to dissolve democratically elected councils or withhold their funds.

The judgment was widely celebrated as a major step toward strengthening grassroots governance. Two years later, however, implementation remains elusive.

Trillions allocated, little autonomy achieved

Data from the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) reveal the scale of resources involved.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, local governments received a combined allocation of N4.496 trillion, representing nearly one-quarter of the N18.074 trillion shared among the three tiers of government during the period.

Yet despite the Supreme Court ruling, most allocations continue to pass through state-controlled joint accounts.

Governors maintain significant influence over local government finances, often citing constitutional provisions establishing the State Joint Local Government Account.

The result is that many councils remain financially dependent despite the judicial pronouncement granting autonomy.

Across several states, local governments continue to struggle with delayed salaries, stalled projects and limited administrative capacity.

For communities facing insecurity, these governance failures have direct consequences.

Without financial autonomy, councils cannot effectively support local security initiatives, maintain critical infrastructure, improve communications networks or strengthen public services.

Security begins with governance. The story of Oriire is ultimately about more than a kidnapping. It is about the consequences of governance vacuums.

When communities lack roads, telecommunications, schools, healthcare facilities and security institutions, criminal groups find opportunities to establish influence.

When local governments lack authority and resources, the state's presence weakens further.

And when rural populations feel abandoned, they increasingly seek protection through informal and sometimes dangerous alternatives.

The rescue of the abducted pupils and teachers demonstrates what coordinated security action can achieve.

But preventing future abductions may require something deeper than military operations. It may require rebuilding governance from the ground up.

For communities scattered along the forests of Old Oyo National Park and countless others across Nigeria's vast rural landscape, the challenge is not simply the absence of soldiers or police officers. It is the absence of government itself.

Until that gap is filled, experts warn, ungoverned spaces will continue to provide fertile ground for the insecurity that has become one of Nigeria's most persistent national challenges.

Cover

Tinubu's same-faith ticket reignites debate across Northern Nigeria ahead of 2027:

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running mate for the 2023 election.

The decision departed from Nigeria's long-standing tradition of balancing presidential tickets along religious lines and immediately sparked widespread criticism from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Middle Belt Forum and several Christian leaders, who argued that it sidelined Christians despite the country's religious diversity.

Among the strongest critics was Babachir Lawal, former Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) who addressed the APC Northern Christian Leaders Summit in July 2022. He declared that the same-faith ticket would be resisted politically and spiritually, saying: "Clearly, there is an agenda to politically, religiously and economically suppress and oppress Northern Christians. But we are up to the task. We will protect ourselves. The PVC and our prayers will be our weapons of choice and we will massively deploy them in 2023."

Lawal rejected the argument that competence alone informed the choice of Shettima, insisting the decision reflected a deliberate political agenda.

"The main purpose of this historical narrative is to let you know that for the APC, a Muslim-Muslim ticket has been a long-term political strategy and not a one-off decision. Thus, all this talk of competence as the reason for the choice of the Muslim vice-presidential candidate is balderdash and diversionary. This is a calculated anti-Christian exclusion agenda that is being implemented," he said.

He also questioned why the APC had not sought dialogue with aggrieved Christian groups, asking: "Why is the APC itself mute about our rejection of this Muslim-Muslim ticket? Why has none of the other perpetrators of this crisis reached out to Christians for dialogue?... Truly, things are not adding up."

Concluding his position, Lawal said Christians viewed the same-faith ticket as "a deliberate and premeditated attempt to introduce and firmly entrench religion into the politics of this country," warning that it could "lead to further disharmony in the hitherto fragile coexistence of Nigerian society, disrupt peace and hamper both social and economic development of the country."

Despite the widespread opposition, Tinubu and Shettima went on to win the 2023 presidential election, making the Muslim-Muslim ticket the first to produce a victorious presidential pair since the return to democratic rule in 1999.

Nearly four years later, the issue has resurfaced following President Tinubu's decision to retain Vice President Shettima as his running mate for the 2027 election.

Unlike the intense backlash that greeted the announcement in 2022, reactions have so far been relatively subdued, although dissenting voices remain, especially among some Christian leaders and groups in the Middle Belt and Northern Nigeria.

Political observers say the debate has softened because Nigerians have now experienced the Tinubu-Shettima administration for one term, shifting attention toward its record on the economy, security and governance, even as questions over religious balance and inclusivity continue to feature in discussions ahead of the 2027 poll.

Muted reaction to Shettima's renomination shows Nigerians have moved beyond

religious politics — Plateau APC spokesman

Wumanna Bako, publicity secretary of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Plateau State, has said the relatively muted reaction to President Bola Tinubu's decision to retain Vice President Kashim Shettima as his running mate for the 2027 presidential election indicates that Nigerians have moved beyond the religious concerns that dominated public discourse in 2022.

Bako, in a telephone interview with BusinessDay in Jos, said unlike the strong opposition from Christian groups and other stakeholders that greeted the APC's Muslim-Muslim ticket ahead of the 2023 election, there has been no significant backlash following Shettima's renomination, suggesting that Nigerians are now placing greater emphasis on leadership and performance than religious considerations.

"President Tinubu has shown that leadership supersedes religious differences. The Muslim-Muslim ticket was heavily criticised in the past, but he has demonstrated that leadership is about performance, and I believe he has performed. Nigerians are now comfortable with him. For those who think they can still use religion as a political tool, that era is over. Nigerians have accepted the nomination of Vice President Kashim Shettima because they are satisfied with what the President is doing," Bako said.

Speaking with BusinessDay, Victor Majekodunmi Akure, presiding bishop of Turning Point Faith Arena Ministry in Kano and Abuja, described Shettima's re-nomination as a strategic political move that could strengthen Tinubu's re-election bid.

Akure said the decision comes at a time when many Christians, particularly in Northern Nigeria, are demanding greater equity, justice and inclusion in governance.

According to him, the experience of the Tinubu administration since assuming office on a Muslim-Muslim ticket has eased the concerns initially expressed by many Christians ahead of the 2023 general election.

He argued that the administration's approach to appointments and the distribution of public offices has reflected a measure of ethno-religious balance, reducing fears that Christians would be marginalised under the arrangement.

"The government has been considerate in making appointments and allocating public offices. This has helped to reassure many Christians that a Muslim-Muslim presidency does not necessarily translate into unfair treatment," Akure said.

The cleric, who also serves as deputy chairman of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Kano State chapter, stressed that Nigerians are now more concerned with the quality of leadership than the religious composition of the presidency.

He urged political leaders to focus on building an inclusive government that accommodates all citizens regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds.

Akure also called on the federal government to intensify efforts to tackle the country's worsening security challenges, particularly in Northern Nigeria, saying effective leadership should prioritise the protection of lives and property while fostering national unity.

Katsina Varsity Don urges Tinubu to deepen inclusion after retaining Shettima

Musa Daniel, an Associate Professor of Plant Science and Biotechnology at the Fed-



eral University Dutsin-Ma, has described Tinubu's retention of Shettima as politically understandable, despite concerns among some northern Christians over the continuation of the Muslim-Muslim ticket.

Daniel, a Christian from northern Nigeria, said while he was "not completely happy" with the decision, it was in the interest of the ruling party and aimed at preserving political stability ahead of the elections. According to him, replacing the vice president at this stage could have heightened political tension in the North and created an opportunity for opposition parties to exploit the situation.

"As a Christian from the North, I am not completely happy, but in the interest of the party, it is a welcome idea. Tension is already high in the northern part, and if Mr. President had replaced his running mate now, it would undoubtedly have increased the tension. If I were in his shoes, I would end up doing the same thing because, for politicians, what is more important is winning elections," Daniel said. The university lecturer recalled that many northern Christians initially opposed the Muslim-Muslim ticket during the 2023 elections due to fears of religious domination and exclusion. However, he noted that President Tinubu's appointments since assuming office had helped to reduce those concerns by giving qualified northern Christians key positions in government.

"We were very skeptical in 2023 because of fears of domination and exclusion, but Mr. President was able to allay our fears through his appointments. We have seen northern Christians given very sensitive offices, showing that the intention was to win an election and not to promote religious domination," he stated.

Daniel urged the President to continue strengthening national unity through inclusive governance as preparations for the 2027 elections gather momentum.

"I have to be fair to Mr. President. If I were in his shoes, I would do the same thing he has done, but that does not mean there will not be anger in the North. I will urge Mr. President to do more by sustaining and expanding the inclusive approach he has demonstrated over the past three years of his administration," he said.

Nicholas Uwerunonye, a Christian and public affairs analyst in Ilorin, Kwara State, said the impact of a Muslim-Muslim ticket on President Bola Tinubu's re-election chances would depend on whether his administration is perceived as favouring Muslims.

He said: "Whether it will affect his chances depends on if Tinubu's administration has been overtly pro-Muslim. To a very large extent, the APC government under Tinubu has been religiously neutral,

at least when compared to the tenure of his predecessor, the late Muhammadu Buhari.

"In my opinion, Tinubu probably believes that the core North does not see him as their ideal Muslim. He works closely with a very influential First Lady, while Vice President Kashim Shettima has remained largely in the background.

Similarly, Taiwo Ogunwale, another Christian resident of Ilorin, said the President's decision to retain a Muslim-Muslim ticket was a personal political calculation.

"The President has made his choice in adopting a Muslim-Muslim ticket for reasons best known to him. The same strategy was used in the 2023 election, and it succeeded.

To me, what matters most is good governance. The government should focus on delivering on its promises and meeting the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians," he said.

Also speaking, Michael Felix, a public affairs commentator argued that religion was unlikely to determine the outcome of the next presidential election.

"The Muslim-Muslim ticket under the Tinubu administration is not a new development. It was adopted in 2023, and the incumbent won the election despite concerns over diversity and inclusiveness, particularly in terms of religious representation.

"I do not think the decision will substantially alter his electoral prospects. If he wins or loses, it is more likely to be based on his performance and track record in office rather than on issues of religious exclusion," Felix said.

The Northern Ethnic Nationality Forum (NENF) and other Christian-based northern organisations urged President Bola Tinubu and the APC to adopt a more religiously balanced ticket if the party hopes to retain broad national support. The groups argue that while the Muslim-Muslim ticket secured victory in 2023, repeating the strategy could prove politically costly in 2027.

The NENF, led by Dominic Alancha, said national unity, justice and electoral viability demand a ticket that reflects Nigeria's religious diversity. The forum warned that another same-faith ticket could weaken the APC in politically strategic states across the Middle Belt, including Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, Kogi and the Federal Capital Territory, where religious balance often plays a significant role in voting behaviour.

Similarly, the Christian Media Forum (CMF) recently expressed concern over reports suggesting the continuation of the Tinubu-Shettima ticket, arguing

that such a decision would reinforce perceptions of exclusion among Northern Christians and undermine confidence in inclusive governance.

Benue citizens condemn Tinubu's Muslim-Muslim ticket, allege suppression of Christians

Several persons in Benue State have condemned President Bola Tinubu's Muslim-Muslim ticket, describing it as an attempt to suppress Christianity in the country.

Some of the citizens who spoke to BusinessDay across party lines said since the return of democracy in 1999, the presidency has rotated between Christians and Muslims.

They added that since the emergence of Tinubu as president, he pushed out Christians out of the presidential ticket.

Those who spoke include Shamange Iorlami of the All Progressives Congress, APC; Chiahemba Salem of the Labour Party, LP; and Ngumimi Asen.

They said in the interest of fairness and national unity, the president ought to have chosen a Christian running mate.

"Even though he didn't do that in his first term, he would have done it in his second term. But doing it now has only exposed his hatred for Christians," they said.

The respondents also accused the president of showing bias in the fight against insecurity, which they said is mostly affecting Christian-dominated communities.

Citing Benue as an example, they referenced the killing of Ardo Risky Mohammed, state chairman of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, MACBAN, and said that the Federal Government immediately issued a statement condemning the killing and directed security agencies to go after the perpetrators.

They, however, noted that days later, a professor and his 19-year-old brother were allegedly killed by one Abdullahi, suspected to be a Fulani man from Nasarawa State, who was arrested with the professor's phones. According to them, there was no condemnation from the Federal Government and no directive to security agencies.

"So, our belief is that what is happening in Benue is political because the state is one of the Christian-dominated states in the country with a lot of mineral resources," they said.

"From what we are seeing in the country, there is no one that can stand firm to condemn any wrongdoing. What is happening now is everybody to himself. But posterity will always judge the oppressors and those who had the opportunity to right the wrong but refused to do so," they added.

As the 2027 election cycle gathers momentum, President Tinubu's decision to retain Vice President Shettima has once again thrust the same-faith ticket into national discourse. While the fierce opposition that characterised the debate in 2022 has noticeably eased, opinions remain divided between those who see the issue as settled by the administration's record and those who insist that religious inclusivity remains vital to Nigeria's unity.

Ultimately, whether the Muslim-Muslim ticket becomes a decisive electoral factor in 2027 is likely to depend less on its religious composition than on voters' assessment of the Tinubu administration's performance on the economy, security and governance.

FG's long embargo on employment raises concerns, queries

Continued from Page 1

home support programmes like the conditional cash transfer and others, and insisted that such money was meant for the poor in the society.

But several criticisms trailed Ngige's comments as many told him that the unemployed needs work to sustain livelihood and not one-off cash transfer from the government.

Since then, there have been repeated calls from policy experts and concerned citizens for the lifting of the ban entirely to stimulate employment, but the calls largely remain enforced even by the Bola Tinubu-led government.

Displeased with the situation, Francis Waive, member, House of Representative (APC, Delta State), recently moved a motion for the federal government to rescind its ban on employment in the federal civil service.

He argued that several years of unemployment have created shortage of manpower in the federal civil service, especially in the junior and middle-level cadres as officers are promoted and some retire and others die.

To resolve the shortage issue, Waive decried that, "Some agencies have resorted to engaging casual staff who are paid from their Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) and other sources."

Also calling for the need to rescind the embargo, Tuni Olaopa, chairman, Federal Civil Service Commission, recently appealed to the federal government to lift the blanket employment embargo, decriing that the long embargo has made the service to lose the value of using employment as a tool for recruiting the service.

He further argued that long-standing hiring freezes have turned employment from a strategic governance tool into a bottleneck that pushes talent away and weakens institutional capacity.

Fearing that the federal civil service is already losing trained hands to the private sector and the diaspora, he suggested that the government should lift the embargo in order to restore its status as an employer of choice through fresh thinking and innovation in employment policy.

Adding to the calls for the lifting of the embargo, Joyce Evoka, a consultant with UNICEF Enugu field office, cited the rising unemployment rate as a major reason for the government to rescind the ban.

"We all live here and are witnessing the rising criminality and desperation among young Nigerians. If that does not make sense, then the present hardship in the country does and should be a wake-up call for the government at all levels.

"If you can curb the rising unemployment, you can check insecurity," she insisted.

Following the embargo on recruitment into the civil service in 2020, Nigeria's unemployment rate rose to 33 percent in 2021, the sec-



ond highest on global list then.

Also, according to the first quarter of 2023 (Q1, 2023) data by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), rising unemployment rate was 4.1 percent, while youth unemployment was 6.9 percent. Though the government has been making efforts to ensure decline, the rates are still high as high institutions churn out graduates yearly with little or no jobs available for them, while the embargo on employment worsens the situation.

Rationale for the lifting

Out of Nigeria's estimated working-age population of over 116 million, only about 7.3 percent work in the formal sector, and the federal and state civil servants account for approximately 1.5 to 2 million public sector workers nationwide.

Based on the above, Yakubu Ankali, an economist, argued that it means civil servants make up less than 1 percent of Nigeria's total population, despite having more dependents.

"If we go by the six years ban on employment, I think the federal civil service lacks capacity at present and needs more hands," he said.

According to figures from the Bureau of Public Service Reforms and the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), Nigeria has an estimated 720,000 public servants at the federal.

Going by the above figure, Onyewuchi Akagbule, a senior university lecturer, insisted that the nation's federal civil service lacks manpower to meet today's work demand.

"If you divide over 116 million working-age population of Nigeria by the 720,000 public servants at the federal, you will be shocked by the shortfall. Again, spread the

720,000 public servants across the many ministries, MDAs and agencies, you will also see the need for more 'competent' hands," he said.

"We are not saying that the government should employ everyone, but it can restructure the federal civil service to enable the employment of more competent hands at the federal level."

Selective waivers

While the embargo largely restricts general hiring in Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), selective recruitments are frequently permitted in critical sectors like healthcare, security, and specific specialized vacancies.

The waiver, according to many, is the issue and reason to lift the entire embargo.

"There are certain critical agencies, which are regularly granted waivers by the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation," a senior civil servant, who pleaded for anonymity, explained.

"The waiver empowers them to hire replacement workers, and to expand workforce capacity in essential roles. Today's digitalized world makes such hirings necessary."

According to the source, the ban does not affect recruitments in defence, security systems, healthcare and some critical areas because of their highly sensitive, urgency and demanding attention.

But Samul Pam, a recently retired assistant director in the federal civil service, decried that the selective waiver has severally been abused as top government functionaries and politicians used it to offer jobs to their relatives and associates, even in non-critical areas.

"In my last three years in the service, I witnessed new faces,

both young and not too young, in our ministry, which is not a critical one. The faces are new employees authorized by the same system that placed ban on employment," Pam lamented.

He noted that children of many senior government workers are often used to replace their parents when they retire or die in office.

"I cannot really say there is an embargo when people are being employed, though through back door."

Omale Ochefu, a Lagos banker, confessed partaking in a sendoff party for a staff member who joined a federal ministry in 2024, despite the acclaimed embargo.

"He always complained of being far from his family in Suleja and luckily his cousin fixed him on federal job in Abuja. So, there are jobs, but your contact makes the difference, even in the private sector," Ochefu said.

Alleged over-bloated service

According to Akagbule, the federal civil service is not over bloated, just that the system allows fraud that has been draining public funds over the years with little checks and less precautions.

"If the government has adopted and implemented the Oronsaye Report, nobody will be talking about ghost workers, people earning double salaries or dead staff members still receiving salaries."

The financial pressure the unaccounted workers placed on the government, according to Akagbule, are among the reasons the government is not considering the rescind of the embargo on employment.

In 2022, Dasuki Arabi, director-general, Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR), revealed that through the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), and the introduction of the Treasury Single Account, about 70,000 ghost workers were eliminated from the payroll system, with N10 trillion saved through TSA administration of funds.

Arabi also disclosed that the bureau reduced more than N220 billion wastage through wrong management of IPPIS on payroll by ministries departments and agencies of government.

While commending the reduction, Akagbule said that the savings can pay salaries of many qualified hands in the job market to boost efficiencies in the federal civil service.

"If you consider the huge allocations being shared among the three tiers of government today, the government cannot say the embargo is still on due to paucity of funds. It should lift the embargo to help many out of their sufferings."

Job racketeering

Many are calling for the embargo to be lifted because of the perceived job racketeering in the federal civil service, as many still get job offers and appointment letters in non-critical areas.

"We cannot say there is no job racketeering because many who are looking for jobs are ready to pay

any amount to get it, especially if it is a federal government job," Abiodun Salami, a job recruiter said.

According to Salami, even parents source for money to ensure their children get federal jobs because of job security and even the pay, which has improved official and unofficially.

Salami insisted that, "If there is full employment, job racketeering will be curbed."

Citing the fake agency case that is trending as an example of the job racketeering in the federal civil service, Akagbule queried why individuals will get such access or emboldened if not for the money they expended.

"There is a presidential embargo on employment, but the Head of the Service of the Federation waved the embargo and allowed Adeyemi 300 staff, including 10 directors," Mahmud Jega, analyst at Arise TV, queried during a show.

Frowning at the trend, Pam noted that job racketeering is a criminal offence, which the EFCC, according to him, should feat on, but often look the other way.

"What am I even saying. Can you get job at the EFCC, CBN or NNPC if you don't know anybody. That is part of the racketeering that has made it very difficult for the poor to get jobs here and for merit to be a core consideration for employment," Pam said.

Today's job market

While many are calling for the lifting of the embargo, Orhe Terse, a dean of an Abuja-based private university, decried that many Nigerian graduates are not trained for today's job market and are often not employable even in the federal civil service.

He regretted that Nigeria's education system is still primarily structured to produce graduates designed to fit into the public service system.

"We are in a digital world where creativity is the currency. The government, like the private sector employers, is looking for graduates who are highly skilled individuals, who could innovate solutions and ideas that can impact their work and boost efficiencies in the system," he said.

With your chains of degrees, you can become creative and strike out on your own. That can get you attracted potential employers, even the government. I have some of our graduates in the Software Engineering who are working with some government agencies and earning good pay. That for me are special jobs, but they distinguished themselves. So, the government is also looking for such superstars to lead revolution in the federal civil service. It may sound funny, but it is real."

Salami also noted that employers, even the federal government, are increasingly going after those with additional skills, special needs and not just the degree certificate.

"I know that connection matters in getting job here in Nigeria, but having additional skills, being in tune with the digital tool will give one an advantage," he said.

However, many still consider the federal government as an employer of choice, hence the repeated call for the lift of the embargo on employment, which they insisted is long overdue.

They implore the government to lift the ban and put in place the necessary measures that will checkmate inefficiency, nepotism, leakages and fraud in the system, all in effort to take more out of the streets, empower people and curb insecurity.

Cover

Divergent reactions as NASS criminalises preaching on commercial buses

■ It will open room for enforcement officers' self enrichment - Archbishop Ojo

■ Lawmakers are very insensitive to the mood of the nation - Pastor Ilesanmi

Continued from Page 1

Amendment Bill 2026, which seeks to amend Nigeria's road traffic laws by criminalising preaching on commercial buses.

The amended legislation contains an updated schedule of 52 traffic offences and their corresponding penalties that bring Nigeria's road safety laws at par with current realities.

According to lawmakers, the review was designed to modernise the country's traffic regulations, provide a more effective deterrence against violations, and equip the FRSC with stronger legal tools to enforce road safety standards.

If signed into law by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the amended legislation will replace several outdated fines and penalties that lawmakers argued no longer reflect prevailing economic conditions or adequately discourage traffic offenders.

The Senate expressed the optimism that the amendment would improve road discipline, enhance commuter safety, strengthen public confidence in traffic law enforcement, and contribute significantly to reducing road crashes and fatalities across Nigeria.

However, one of the proposed amendments in the bill has generated much needed reaction from a section of the country's population - considering it a direct attack on their faith.

The Senate had proposed a ban on hawking, trading, and preaching in commercial vehicles.

Under the proposed amendment, any person found engaging in any of the prohibited activities inside a commercial vehicle commits an offence and, upon conviction, will be liable to a N50,000 fine.

According to the lawmakers, the measure was introduced to minimise distractions that could interfere with drivers' concentration and endanger passengers.

The lawmakers noted that commercial vehicles should remain free from activities capable of compromising safety.

However, some stakeholders have termed the proposed amendment as a targeted attack on the Christian community in Nigeria.

They also questioned the modality of the enforcement on the back of the recent judgment of the Federal High Court in Kano barring the FRSC from enforcing traffic laws on designated state roads.

Joseph Ojo, presiding bishop, Calvary Kingdom Church (CKC), said the amendment raised more questions than answers. He also questioned the modality of enforcing the said amendment if finally



signed into law by President Bola Tinubu.

"I think it's in the process of trying to silence the voice of the Christians. You know, they are trying in several ways, Sharia, and all the other laws," he said.

Ojo disclosed that those who pushed for the amendment thought it would silence the Church in Nigeria.

He added that implementation might pose a huge challenge for the FRSC and other law enforcement agencies who might be saddled with enforcing the new amendment.

"But the truth is, no law actually works in Nigeria because of the corrupt nature of police and law enforcement agencies," he said.

The cleric also highlighted the Lagos State traffic law that bans tricycles (Keke) from plying the Lagos-Badagry Expressway and how it is being abused by the riders with no level of enforcement on sight.

"I went down to Badagry today. They said that no tricycle should be

on Badagry Expressway - They are giving the law enforcement officers room to be corrupt and enrich themselves," he said.

According to him, law amendments alone cannot guarantee compliance from the people. "No law works in Nigeria until sanity enters in it and they have a right not to work in Nigeria. Even the election will not work."

Another Lagos-based cleric also aligned his thoughts with that of Ojo, suggesting that there might be more to the amendment, especially because of its timing.

"That decision further confirms this administration's evil intention against the Church. The government has been complicit in the alleged genocide of Christians in Nigeria," Tope Ilesanmi, senior pastor, Revival Summit, told BusinessDay.

According to him, the lawmakers appear less concerned about the level of insecurity and the growing numbers of Nigerians being kidnapped or killed across the country.

"The Law makers haven't lifted a

finger to legislate against insecurity but preaching in the bus or not is their priority.

"The lawmakers are very insensitive to the mood of the nation. While Christians are crying about loved ones in the hold of bandits, the lawmakers were only thinking of how to add insults upon our injuries?"

Ilesanmi, a former chairman of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Ikeja Province, added that the legislation against preaching in public buses is a backdoor attack on the Church.

"They chose this time because they knew the Church had a more debilitating evil at hand and wouldn't pay attention to such a lesser problem," he said.

Another pastor based in Ogun State,

Olusola Daniel Olatomi, pastor, Christ Firstfruits Assembly, said that there is a historical perspective to the matter. According to him, Nigerian society grew with the culture of public preaching.

He added that Nigerians are said to be religious because they love to pray and to be prayed for irrespective of religion; and that such disposition encourages Nigerians to accommodate public preaching.

"It is disheartening that Nigeria as a nation will get to the point that preachers will be penalised by the state for preaching in public buses," he said.

He however questioned the underlying purpose of the bill; asking: who initiated this bill? And what interest does this provision in the bill serve and who does the provision serve?

He added that if the bill is signed into law by President Bola Tinubu, it will further create and support an imperative that has been on the table for a long time about Christian persecution in Nigeria.

"It must however, be noted that this cannot be divorced from the prophecies of our Lord Christ Jesus (Matthew 5:11-12, John 15: 20).

"Persecution will arise against those who hold on to the gospel of our Lord Christ Jesus. If care is not taken, they will tell the Church of Christ Jesus where to preach, what time to preach and who to preach to," he said.

According to the cleric, every effort to shut down the spread of the Gospel of Jesus in Nigeria will fail. He reiterated that this is not the first time and it might not be the last time.

"At a point in history, the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ were told not to preach with the name of Jesus, they failed woefully.

"Saul of Tarsus tried to shut down everyone with the name of Jesus; he eventually became one of

the promoters of the Gospel of Jesus. This too will fail," he added.

He however urged Nigerian Christians to innovate their approach to evangelism and that the Church must wake up to pursue things that are of utmost importance to the faith and the Kingdom, rather than the pursuit of mundane and irrelevant things.

"Is the Church building the faith of its parishioners on sand or on the rock which is Christ Jesus?"

"This is calling on the Church to reinvent the communication methods that have been in use to reach the dying souls," Olatomi said.

The Kano judgment

While Nigerians await the presidential assent of the proposed amendment to the FRSC laws - a recent court judgment might throw spinners in the way of the Corps' enforcement modalities.

The federal high court in Kano recently barred the FRSC from operating on state and local government roads.

The court also declared the FRSC's operations on township roads within Kano metropolis unlawful, holding that they violated the fundamental rights of citizens.

The judgment was delivered in favour of Abba Hikima, a Kano-based lawyer who sued the FRSC over an incident that occurred in July 2025.

According to the suit, the FRSC operatives mounted roadblocks on township roads in Kano and stopped motorists, including Hikima, demanding driver's licences and questioning them despite the absence of any primary traffic offence.

Hikima subsequently approached the federal high court, noting that the corps had unlawfully violated his fundamental rights.

He stated that the FRSC's statutory mandate covers only federal highways and does not extend to state or local government roads.

M.S. Shuaibu, the presiding judge, ruled that the FRSC officers acted outside their statutory powers by stopping, questioning and delaying motorists on township roads.

It also stated that the actions breached the constitutional rights to personal liberty and freedom of movement guaranteed under sections 35 and 41 of the 1999 Constitution.

The judge granted all the reliefs sought by Hikima, including a perpetual injunction restraining FRSC personnel from stopping or harassing motorists on Kano state roads without lawful authority.

He also ordered the corps to publish a public apology in a national newspaper and awarded the applicant N800,000 in damages and costs.



Environment/Climate

OLATUNJI OMIRIN, MAIDUGURI

Why Governor Zulum is hero of climate change campaigner - Minister

The shrinking of Lake Chad is not just an environmental problem; it is a humanitarian catastrophe, while others see it as a lack of opportunities for young people, especially for communities that depend on the lake for fishing, farming, and herding. The lake has become a matter of survival rather than sustainability.

This dramatic reduction, driven by climate change, has caused devastating social, economic, and environmental consequences for Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Over the past decades, the lake has shrunk by more than 90 percent, transforming from a vast inland sea into scattered ponds and marshes.

The effects of the lake's decline have also contributed to regional insecurity. As a result, the environmental crisis has become linked with violent extremism, creating a vicious cycle that threatens regional peace and stability.

The Lake Chad basin, once a source of peace and stability among nations, is now a hotspot of insecurity and ecological disaster.

Speaking during the flag-off of the four million tree-planting campaign in Maiduguri, Balarabe Lawal, minister of Environment, described the receding inland Lake as a major catastrophe; however, while acknowledging the frantic efforts of Governor Zulum's administration to reduce climate change impact in the state, it is worthy of emulation by other state governments.

"I think Governor Babagana Zulum is the hero of climate change campaigner; he has done so much to protect nature. I heard him say that Borno State has enacted laws prescribing stiff penalties for deforestation, but enforcement remains a major challenge. I think, it is only Borno State has enacted these laws. This is commendable and I urge other states to emulate this noble cause to protect our environment.

"We need stronger collaboration among the international community to restore Lake Chad, because of its importance to humanity and the global ecosystem," he said.

Lawal, therefore, urged non-governmental organisations to complement government efforts in addressing environmental challenges, while calling for closer collaboration among state governments and agencies, including the National Agency for the Great Green Wall (NAGGW) and the Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes (ACReSAL) project, to tackle desertification and climate change.

The initiative aims to promote the adoption of clean cooking energy, reduce dependence on firewood, curb deforestation, and improve environmental sustainability across the state.

Borno State Government commenced the 2026 Tree Planting Campaign with the planting of four million seedlings as part of efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.



•Governor Zulum planting a tree



•Zulum and Balarabe Lawal, minister of Environment

Lawal, who launched the four million seedlings, said: "This ceremony goes beyond the planting of trees; it represents a renewed reaffirmation of our collective commitment to restoring degraded landscapes, combating desertification, conserving biodiversity, expanding Nigeria's forest cover, and strengthening our capacity to address the impacts of climate change."

According to him, Zulum also intensified its clean energy campaign by distributing 21,000 free cooking stoves and cylinders to primary school teachers and staff of the Borno State Environmental Protection Agency (BOSEPA).

"This is a laudable initiative; you can't ask people not to fell without

providing alternative means. Giving free cooking stoves and cylinders to teachers and environmental vanguards is commendable."

He disclosed that the headquarters of the National Agency for the Great Green Wall had been relocated to Kano to strengthen efforts to combat desert encroachment, adding that the agency's Director-General had commenced operations from the state.

Speaking at the event, Governor Babagana Zulum said the environmental degradation has continued to fuel poverty, displacement and conflict in the state, stressing that sustainable development cannot be achieved without a stable ecosystem.

According to him, Borno's location within the Sahel belt has made the state particularly vulnerable to desertification and the adverse effects of climate change.

"We will continue to work with national and international partners to protect our environment through tree planting, ecological restoration and climate resilience initiatives," he said.

He commended the Federal Ministry of Environment for donating cash and other intervention materials to mitigate environmental challenges in the state, while also acknowledging the support of the ACReSAL project.

Governor Zulum announced that 23,700 cooking gas cylin-

ders would be distributed free of charge to teachers and environmental vanguards across the State's 27 local government areas in phases.

The first phase of the programme will provide 5,000 cooking gas cylinders and clean cooking stoves to beneficiaries in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and Jere Local Government Area, with the remaining beneficiaries in the other 25 local government areas receiving theirs subsequently.

According to Zulum, "Our administration firmly believes that environmental restoration must remain an integral component of our rebuilding and recovery agenda. As we rebuild communities affected by conflict, we must also restore the ecosystems that sustain them. Sustainable peace and sustainable development cannot flourish in a degraded environment."

"For us in Borno State, this campaign carries even greater significance. As a frontline State within the Sahel region, we continue to experience the harsh realities of climate change, including desert encroachment, dwindling vegetation, rising temperatures and environmental degradation. These challenges threaten agriculture, food security, water resources and the livelihoods of millions of our people."

He urged beneficiaries of the free cooking stoves and gas cylinders to use them effectively and to refrain from using firewood, noting that the initiative aims to promote clean energy, improve public health, and protect the environment.

"The 5,000 cylinders we're distributing today are just a flag-off. All the 21,000 primary School teachers will benefit. They are making a lot of sacrifice, and we need to support not only to discourage the use of firewood and tree felling but to improve health," he said.

A similar gesture was also extended to 2,500 staff members of BOSEPA, with the governor urging them to remain dedicated to protecting the environment and ensuring a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable Borno State.

A dummy cheque for N112.5 million was presented to the beneficiaries, with the governor explaining that the funds would be used as vouchers to refill gas cylinders at designated locations, making it easier for beneficiaries to adopt clean cooking practices without the immediate burden of refill costs.

Some of the beneficiaries commended the Zulum administration for gifting her and other colleagues free cooking stoves and gas cylinders, saying, "I am deeply grateful to the governor for this wonderful gesture. The cooking stove and gas cylinder will go a long way in reducing the financial burden on my family, especially with the recent hike in filling a gas cylinder."

Health and Living

'Why bridging academic, clinical practice in prosthetics, orthotics is pivotal across Africa'

EMMANUEL SALAWU

Determined to develop globally competitive prosthetics and orthotics professionals across Africa, IfeanHealth recently hosted stakeholders and selected beneficiaries of its scholar programme ahead of their internship placements in Lagos and Enugu.

According to the company, the Scholars programme aims to bridge academic learning with real-world clinical practice and marks a key milestone in the company's growing commitment to human capital development for the company.

The event, designed to provide cross-regional clinical exposure and hands-on professional training, brought together directors, healthcare leaders, and stakeholders alongside the newly selected scholars in an atmosphere focused on mentorship, professional development, and continental collaboration.

Ejike Anih, managing director/CEO of IfeanHealth, said that the scholarship and scholar



L-R: Nora Opionachie, IfeanHealth Scholar; Precious Ogbu, IfeanHealth Scholar, Ejike Anih, MD/CEO, IfeanHealth; Fortune Odunze, IfeanHealth Scholar, Sobechi Ugwu, IfeanHealth Scholar, Samuel Mutua, IfeanHealth Scholar at the 2026 IfeanHealth Scholar Luncheon.

programme is modelled on his personal and professional experiences as an alumnus of the Management Development Programme (MDP) at Abbott – an American multinational medical

devices and global health care company based in the United States.

Anih said that the initiative was designed not only as a national development effort but as a strategic platform for

advancing prosthetics and orthotics capacity across Africa.

He said the programme continues to position itself as a talent pipeline for emerging rehabilitation professionals across

Africa while encouraging the scholars to remain committed to discipline, consistency, and purpose, stressing that impactful professional journeys are built through persistence and strong values.

The managing director further highlighted professionalism, integrity, and confidentiality as essential principles guiding their internship experience.

The five scholars selected for the internship phase emerged from the 11 outstanding winners of the IfeanHealth Scholarship Programme. The final cohort reflects a widening African reach, including a scholar from Kenya, underscoring the programme's growing cross-border impact and its vision of building a connected ecosystem of prosthetics and orthotics professionals across the continent.

Speaking at the event, Eva James, programme coordinator and director, Strategic Partnerships & Impact Initiatives, described the programme as "a transition from selection to responsibility" and "from

potential to performance."

James explained that the programme serves as a bridge between academic learning and real-world clinical exposure, equipping scholars with structured mentorship, discipline, and practical experience required to excel in prosthetics and orthotics practice across diverse healthcare systems.

Other IfeanHealth executives reinforced the organisation's culture of excellence, collaboration, and innovation, explaining how the work of each department contributes to the delivery of high-quality prosthetics and orthotics services. Through interactive mentorship sessions, they shared practical insights on professionalism, ethical practice, leadership, effective communication, interdisciplinary teamwork, patient-centred care, and continuous professional development, encouraging the scholars to view themselves not only as future clinicians but as future leaders who will help shape rehabilitation services across Africa.

Group alerts on alarming increase in HIV/AIDS cases with Delta recording over 51,000

MERCY ENOCH

Gregory Sifo, Delta State Chairman of the Civil Society Organization on Malaria Control, Immunization and Nutrition (ACOMIN), has alerted on the alarming increase in Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) cases across Nigeria which the recent statistics revealed that Delta State has over 51,000 people with the disease.

ACOMIN has therefore, urged government, corporate organizations and well-meaning individuals as well as community leaders in the society to assist in prevention of

...Solicits support for prevention of disease

HIV/AIDS by supporting the supply of test kits to healthcare facilities.

Sifo made the call in Okpanam, Oshimili

North Local Government Area of the state during an advocacy visit to a community leader and Felix Okafor, the Ikejani-

Enyi of Okpanam.

He reminded the community leader that the advocacy visit was a follow up to their earlier

meeting where the organization solicited the support of the community to be able to equip Ogbeobi Health Centre with HIV/AIDS test kits and other important healthcare needs.

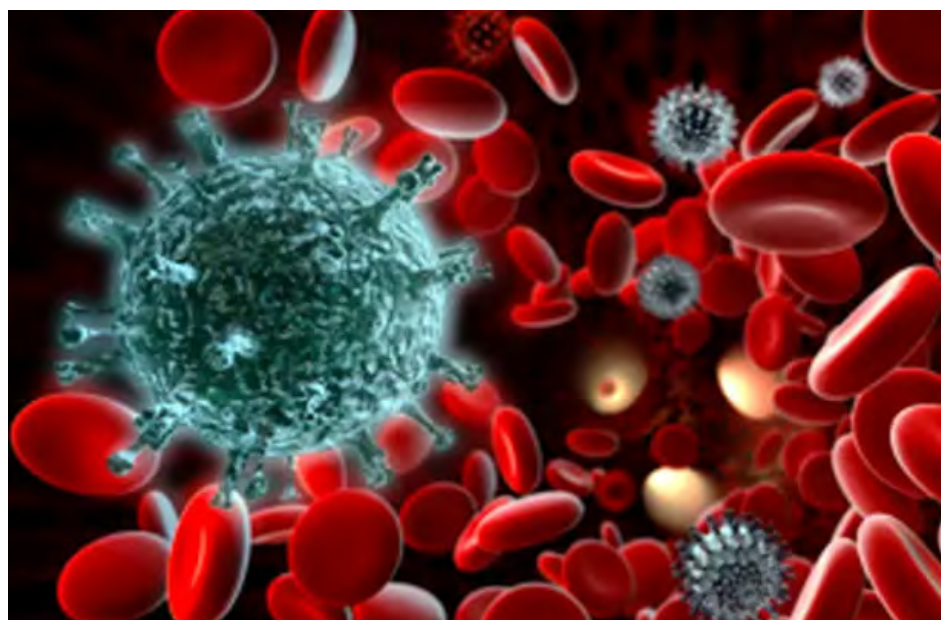
While informing the Ikejani-Enyi that they have been making efforts to interface with Innocent Esewzie, the LG Chairman, to appreciate him for transforming Obodogba Healthcare facility into Cottage Hospital, Sifo said that they intended to meet with him again in order to seek more collaborative measures aimed at ensuring that the healthcare institutions in the community were strengthened for more

effective service delivery.

Responding, Felix Okafor, the Ikejani-Enyi of Okpanam, promised to convey their request for test kits to some of their illustrious sons and daughters in diaspora, especially those with medical and health related background who are working in various health institutions and community association in America to see if they could support.

Okafor, however, assured the ACOMIN team that he would intimate Esewzie of their intentions to pay him advocacy visit concerning healthcare centres in the community.

He commended ACOMIN for its modest contributions towards the upliftment of healthcare facilities not only in the community but the State at large through their advocacies and intervention.



Health and Living

Enugu constitutes inter-ministerial task force to tackle medical quackery

REGIS ANUKWUOJI

The Enugu State Government has inaugurated an Inter-Ministerial Task Team on Medical Quackery, Illegal Medical Practice, Unlicensed Health Facilities and Related Offences as part of efforts to protect public health and strengthen the regulation of healthcare services across the state.

Speaking during the inauguration of the team in Enugu on Thursday, George Ugwu, commissioner for Health, described the initiative as a significant step towards improving healthcare regulation, safeguarding residents, and ensuring safe medical practices throughout the state. Ugwu said the task team, comprising representatives of key ministries, agencies and relevant stakeholders, was established to develop a



coordinated strategy for identifying, investigating and addressing irregularities in medical practice.

According to him, the administration of Peter Mbah remains committed to transforming the state's healthcare sector through

effective regulation, quality assurance and improved access to safe and reliable healthcare services.

"Our health-loving governor is committed to ensuring effective regulation, quality

healthcare delivery and improved access to safe and reliable healthcare services in every part of the state," he said.

He noted that medical quackery poses a serious threat to public health,

stressing that the menace must be tackled through collective action, sustained enforcement and strict compliance with established standards.

"Medical quackery poses serious risks to lives and must be tackled through collective action and sustained enforcement," the commissioner said.

Ugwu charged members of the task team to work collaboratively, uphold professionalism and ensure that all healthcare providers and facilities operating within the state comply with approved standards and regulatory requirements.

He also underscored the importance of intelligence gathering, regular monitoring and decisive enforcement against individuals and establishments engaged in illegal medical activities.

The commissioner expressed confidence that the task team would play a critical role in sanitising the health sector and protecting the lives of residents.

The inauguration of the task team, he added, reflects the Enugu State Government's renewed commitment to safeguarding the health and well-being of its citizens.

Among those who attended the inaugural meeting were Osinachi Nnajeze, commissioner for Justice and Attorney General; representative of the Commissioner for Information and Communication, Ugochukwu Adimora; and a representative of the Commissioner for Children and Gender Affairs, Clementina Ogbu, alongside other government officials and stakeholders.

Kwara strengthens multi-sectoral collaboration on climate change, health adaptation

SIKIRAT SHEHU

The Kwara State Government has said it would continue to strengthen health sector's resilience against the effects of climate change through a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach.

This was the focus of a one-day Non-Residential Multi-Sectoral Stakeholder Engagement Workshop on Climate Change and Health, the Health National Adaptation Plan (HNAP), and the implementation of the Kwara State Climate and Health Adaptation Plan (KwCHAP), held recently at the Ministry of Health headquarters in Ilorin.

Declaring the workshop open, Amina Ahmed El-Imam, commissioner for Health, described climate change as one of the greatest public health challenges of our time, noting that its impact extends beyond the environment to affect disease patterns, food security, water supply, sanitation, nutrition and emergency response

systems.

A statement signed by Saad Hamdlat, Press Sec MOH; El-Imam observed that Kwara State, like many parts of the country, has continued to experience climate-related events such as flooding, drought, rising temperatures and environmental degradation, all of which had direct consequences on the health and livelihoods of residents, particularly vulnerable populations.

The Commissioner explained that changing

weather conditions had contributed to the increasing prevalence and wider spread of climate-sensitive diseases, including malaria, cholera and diarrhoeal diseases.

According to her, these emerging realities required deliberate investments in health system preparedness and climate adaptation strategies.

El-Imam disclosed that the state had aligned with the Federal Government's Health National Adaptation Plan by developing the Kwara

State Climate and Health Adaptation Plan (KwCHAP).

She added that the plan provides a practical framework for protecting communities, strengthening health services and improving preparedness for climate-related health emergencies.

She noted that while developing a strategic plan is important, its success depends on effective implementation, stressing that measurable actions, sustained commitment and institutional accountability

will determine the extent to which the State is able to reduce climate-related health risks.

The Commissioner further emphasised that the Ministry of Health cannot implement the adaptation plan alone, describing health as a cross-cutting sector that requires the active participation of all relevant stakeholders.

She therefore, called on Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), to integrate climate-sensitive actions into their respective programmes.

According to her, key institutions including the Ministries of Environment, Water Resources, Agriculture, Planning, Finance, Works and Housing, Energy, Local Government, emergency management agencies, development partners and academia all have complementary roles to play in achieving the objectives of the adaptation plan.

El-Imam expressed satisfaction with the wide representation of stakeholders at the workshop, saying their presence reflects

a shared commitment to building a climate-resilient health system.

She also urged participants to translate discussions into practical actions that will deliver lasting benefits for communities across the state.

Delivering his presentation, Oluwatosin Fakayode, director of Public Health, described climate adaptation as the process of adjusting health systems, programmes and communities to reduce the adverse health effects of climate change.

He stressed that adaptation is essential for sustaining quality healthcare delivery amid changing climatic conditions. Fakayode explained that priority adaptation measures for Kwara State include; improving preparedness for floods and heatwaves, strengthening water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in vulnerable communities, enhancing disease surveillance and ensuring continuity of Primary Health Care services during climate-related emergencies.



Health and Living

UBTH seeks traditional ruler support to mobilise residents for free medical services

IDRIS UMAR MOMOH

The management of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) has sought the partnership of the traditional ruler of the Udo community, Ovia South West Local Government Area in Edo State to mobilise residents for three-day free medical programmes.

Idia Ize-Iyamu, chief medical director of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, courted the support of Patrick Igbinidu, the Iyase of Udo Dukedom.

Ize-Iyamu, represented by Philip Osho, deputy chairman, Medical Advisory Committee (DCMAC) Clinicals, said the three-day-free medical outreach would take place between Tuesday, August 11, 2026 and Thursday, August 13, 2026. She said that the programme would take

at the Comprehensive Health Centre (CHC) located in the Udo community.

She added that visit was to seek blessings, support, and partnership as UBTH prepares for the medical outreach, which aims to provide essential health services to the community.

According to her, I appealed to the traditional ruler of the community to lend his support by mobilising his subjects, community leaders, youth organisations, women groups, religious leaders and all relevant stakeholders to participate actively in the programme.

"We are deeply honoured to be received in your palace today. This visit reflects the high regard that UBTH has for our revered traditional institutions.

"This outreach is part of UBTH's unwavering commitment to taking



quality healthcare beyond the walls of the hospital and bringing essential medical services closer to the people.

"It is in line with our vision of ensuring equitable access to healthcare through community engagement, preventive medicine,

early diagnosis, treatment and health promotion.

"During the three-day outreach, our multidisciplinary team of highly skilled healthcare professionals will provide free medical consultations, screening for hypertension,

diabetes, eye diseases, Dental Care and other common health conditions.

"The outreach will also encompass health education, counselling, provision of essential medications where applicable, and referrals for patients requiring

specialist care at UBTH," she added.

She noted that the objective is to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Udo and neighbouring communities through quality, compassionate and accessible healthcare services.

In his remarks, Patrick Igbinidu, the Iyase of Udo Dukedom, expressed gratitude to the chief medical director of the UBTH for the visit.

The Iyase opined that the CMD's intervention at the Comprehensive Health Centre (CHC) signifies development and a new era for the community.

"It's a new dawn for the Udo community. I am very pleased to witness the development arriving in Udo. I can see hope shining upon Udo Dukedom, and I am especially delighted about the upcoming three-day free medical outreach," he stated.

Kogi govt, Sightsavers target 550,000 children in 10 LGAs for 2026 deworming, river blindness campaign

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE

The Kogi State Ministry of Health, Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), Control Programme in collaboration with Sightsavers has concluded a 2-day planning meeting for the 2026 Mass Administration of Medicines (MAM), for Soil Transmitted Helminth (STH), and Onchocerciasis (ONCHO).

Adewale Ayodeji of the Federal Ministry of Health said the FMOH is supporting state NTDs programmes to accelerate the elimination of NTDs through preventive chemotherapy, case management, disease surveillance and morbidity management, adding that the Federal government is strengthening health systems with technical

assistance, capacity building, supportive supervision and improved monitoring to ensure efficient use of resources and better health outcomes.

The goal, he said, is to reduce the burden of

NTDs and contribute to Universal Health Coverage and the SDGs.

Musa Momohjimoh, Kogi State NTD coordinator, said the meeting was to prepare for preventive chemotherapy where about 550,000

children aged 5 to 14 years will receive Albendazole 400mg tablets in 10 endemic LGAs.

He said: "This is a state-level planning meeting. Six weeks ago, we treated about 480,000 children in 15 LGAs. Now we are

preparing for another round.

"The 10 local government areas for this round are Omala, Ankpa, Idah, Kogi, Lokoja, Mopa-Muro, Ijumu, Ajaokuta, Okehi and Ogori-Magongo".

Momohjimoh said LGAs will train health workers and Community Drug Distributors, CDDs, after the meeting, and expressed optimism that by the end of July, every eligible child in the targeted LGAs would be treated, just as he commended Kogi State government and the Sightsavers for supporting the fight against NTDs and urged participants to cascade training to ensure children grow up healthy and free from preventable diseases.

Betsy Ibenu, state NTD Data manager, said the meeting aimed to develop strategies

to meet 2026 targets, strengthen coordination and agree on monitoring mechanisms, adding that STH are parasitic worms that cause malnutrition and stunted growth, while ONCHO, or river blindness, is endemic in all 21 local government areas of Kogi.

She said the WHO recommends MAM using Albendazole and Mebendazole, targeting at least 75 percent of school-age children.

Stakeholders identified challenges from the last MAM including absence of community registers, wrong dosing, poor documentation, data integrity issues, drug refusal due to fear of side effects, and limited capacity in digital tools.

Representatives of CAN and JINI reaffirmed their commitment to support the exercise across the LGAs.



Fashion Talk

'Quality Never Goes Out of Style': Ethel Eze on Shunning Fast Fashion for Exquisite Tailoring

There is a distinct magic in the way a perfect garment can make a woman feel. It is this emotional connection to clothing, the intersection of confidence, wanderlust and structure that defines the world of Ethel Eze. As the Founder and Creative Director of the contemporary Lagos-based fashion house SassybyEtty, Eze has spent years refining a design language that speaks directly to the modern African woman on the move. Fresh off the debut of her travel-inspired collection, *Escape to Summer*, and ahead of her highly anticipated August showcase at the TALES exhibition in London, Eze sits down with IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA to discuss the philosophy of wearable luxury, navigating the business realities of fashion in Nigeria, and why exceptional craftsmanship remains her non-negotiable standard

"Escape to Summer" is deeply rooted in the romance and freedom of travel. Was there a specific destination or a personal travel memory that sparked the mood board for this collection?

Rather than one destination, *Escape to Summer* was inspired by the feeling that travel evokes—the excitement of discovering new places, embracing different cultures, and creating unforgettable memories. Every destination has its own personality, and I wanted each piece in the collection to capture that same spirit. Whether it's the elegance of the Amalfi Coast, the vibrancy of Marrakech, the charm of Nice, or the serenity of a tropical island, the collection celebrates the joy, confidence, and freedom that come with exploring the world.

Ultimately, *Escape to Summer* isn't just about travel. It's about creating pieces that make women feel beautiful, confident and free, wherever they are.

Summer collections require a delicate balance between vibrant aesthetics and tropical wearability. How did you select the fabrics and colour palette to ensure they beat the heat while retaining that premium feel?

Fabric selection was one of the most intentional parts of creating *Escape to Summer*. We worked with a thoughtful combination of linen, cotton and different types of silk, because every fabric serves a different purpose.

Linen offers effortless elegance and breathability, making it perfect for warm-weather destinations. Cotton brings comfort and ease for everyday luxury, while silk introduces fluidity, softness and sophistication for occasions that call for elevated dressing. I wanted women to enjoy clothing that feels just as beautiful as it looks. Whether you're strolling through a coastal town, attending a destination wedding or enjoying dinner by the beach, the fabrics move with you effortlessly.

The colour palette reflects the warmth and optimism of summer, drawing inspiration from sunsets, coastlines, lush florals and Mediterranean architecture while remaining timeless enough to transcend seasons.

Many of the pieces look incredibly versatile. When designing, how do you balance the drama of high fashion with the practical packing needs of a modern woman on the go?



Today's woman wants versatility without compromising elegance.

When I design, I think about how one garment can accompany a woman throughout her day. She may begin with brunch, spend the afternoon sightseeing, and end the evening at an elegant dinner. I love creating pieces that travel well, pack easily and can be styled in multiple ways. That balance between beauty and practicality is something I intentionally build into every collection.

If a woman could only pack one defining piece from this collection for her summer getaway, which one would it be and why?

Without hesitation, I'd choose the Amalfi Dress.

It embodies everything *Escape to Summer* represents. Crafted in breathable linen, it's relaxed, lightweight and effortlessly elegant.

What makes it especially versatile is that it can be styled as either a halter-neck dress or a tube dress, giving the wearer two beautiful looks in one piece.

To me, that's modern luxury—beautiful clothing that adapts to a woman's lifestyle while remaining timeless.

You've described your brand as designing for the "confident, stylish and unforgettable" woman. How does that muse

influence your daily design process?

Every collection begins with the woman rather than the garment.

I design for women who lead, travel, celebrate, create and make an impact wherever they go. My goal is never to let the clothing overpower her personality but to amplify it.

When a woman wears SassybyEtty, I want her to feel elegant, confident and unforgettable.

Your brand places a massive emphasis on impeccable tailoring. In a market where fast fashion is highly accessible, why has maintaining rigorous craftsmanship remained non-negotiable for you?

Because quality never goes out of style.

Fashion trends may change, but exceptional craftsmanship always remains valuable.

Every seam, silhouette and finishing detail reflects our commitment to excellence. We want every garment to fit beautifully, last beyond one season and become a cherished part of a woman's wardrobe.

For us, craftsmanship isn't a luxury—it's our standard.

You've mentioned wanting to build an immersive client experience. What does that look like practically?

Luxury goes beyond the garment.



It's how a client discovers us, how she's welcomed into our showroom, how she's styled, how

her garment fits and even how it's packaged.

Every interaction should make her feel seen, appreciated and confident in her decision to invest in SassybyEtty.

We're building a fashion house where women don't simply shop—they experience the brand. Running a creative enterprise in Nigeria comes with unique operational hurdles. How are you navigating these challenges?

Nigeria certainly presents challenges, but challenges also inspire innovation.

We've become very intentional about planning, sourcing, production and operational efficiency. Rather than compromise quality, we've refined our systems to ensure that every garment still reflects the standard we've set for ourselves.

Building a sustainable fashion house requires resilience, adaptability and long-term thinking.

Many designers struggle to balance creativity with business management. How did you make that transition?

I've always believed that learning is one of the greatest investments a creative entrepreneur can make.

Over the years, I've intentionally continued my education through professional

courses at the University of the Arts London, studying styling, draping, leadership and other areas that have strengthened both my creative and business perspectives.

Those experiences have helped me build stronger systems, improve our client experience and grow beyond being just a designer into becoming a business leader.

Creativity starts a fashion house, but leadership is what sustains it.

With contemporary African fashion dominating global conversations, what are your strategic plans for taking SassybyEtty to international audiences?

Our vision has always been to build an African fashion house with global relevance.

Today, we proudly serve clients across Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, The Gambia and beyond, shipping our collections to customers around the world. One of our greatest achievements is the loyalty of our repeat clients, whose continued support inspires us to keep raising the standard.

Internationally, we've continued to expand our footprint through exhibitions and pop-ups. Last year, we showcased in London, and this year we've already returned to Accra. From 3rd to 9th August, we'll once again be in London, presenting our latest collection at TALES as we continue introducing SassybyEtty to a wider international audience.

For me, going global isn't simply about entering new markets. It's about showcasing African creativity, craftsmanship and excellence on the world stage.

What is the earliest memory you have of realising fashion was your true calling?

I've always been fascinated by the way clothing can transform not only how a woman looks but how she feels.

Over time, I realised fashion allowed me to combine creativity, storytelling and problem-solving in a way that felt purposeful.

That passion gradually became my profession, and today I'm grateful to build a brand that empowers women through thoughtful design.

Looking back from launching SassybyEtty to today, what is the biggest lesson you've learned?

I've learned that growth requires courage. Every new collection, every expansion and every challenge has demanded resilience and faith.



Fashion Talk



Ananse moves to plug fashion industry's capacity gap with 30 new entrepreneurs

MODESTUS ANAESORONYE

The Ananse Centre for Design Lagos has graduated more than 30 aspiring fashion entrepreneurs from its inaugural Fashion Incubator Scholarship Programme, marking a major milestone in Ananse's mission to build Africa's next generation of globally competitive fashion businesses.

Hosted at the Ananse Centre for Design Lagos in Ikate, Lekki, the graduation celebrated participants who entered the programme with little or no prior industry experience and successfully completed one of Nigeria's most comprehensive fashion incubation programmes.

Over several months, participants received hands-on training across fashion design, leatherwork, garment production, quality assurance, sustainability, product development, entrepreneurship, branding, e-commerce and market access, equipping them with the practical and commercial skills needed to launch and grow successful businesses.

Sam Mensah, founder and CEO of Ananse Africa speaking during the graduation ceremony, explained that the center was created to equip aspiring entrepreneurs not just with technical skills but also create opportunities for them to scale and access the global market.

"Africa has no shortage of talent. What has often been missing is access to world-class training, infrastructure and commercial opportunities. The Ananse

Centre for Design



Today's graduation isn't the finish line - it's the beginning. We're incredibly proud of what this cohort has achieved, but our role doesn't stop here

was created to bridge that gap, giving aspiring entrepreneurs not only technical skills, but also the business knowledge, production capabilities and market access they need to build sustainable fashion brands."

Onome Umukoro, hub country lead, Africa said the graduation of the first cohort marks the start of a new beginning, expressing Ananse's commitment to equip graduates with broader access to market.

"Today's graduation isn't the finish line - it's the beginning. We're incredibly proud of what this cohort has achieved, but our role doesn't stop here. Through Ananse's wider ecosystem, graduates continue to have opportunities

to produce, create content, access new markets and grow their businesses."

The event featured a runway showcase of original collections designed and produced by the graduates, highlighting the creativity, craftsmanship and entrepreneurial thinking developed throughout the programme.

Fashion Incubator Scholarship Programme is delivered through strategic partnerships with the Mastercard Foundation, ISHK Tolaram Foundation, and TVET, bringing together organisations committed to expanding opportunities for young people and strengthening Africa's creative economy.

Beyond technical training, graduates become part of the wider Ananse ecosystem, gaining continued access to production facilities, content creation services, business support, digital commerce and market access opportunities designed to help transform promising talent into commercially successful fashion businesses.

With operations across six African countries, Ananse says it continues to invest in the infrastructure, education and commercial platforms needed to position African fashion on the global stage while creating sustainable livelihoods for designers, artisans and creative entrepreneurs.

Travel

Contentious tourism laws: Why private sector seeks review at National Assembly

OBINNA EMELIKE

For months now, the Nigerian tourism industry has faced regulatory issues, which seem to be unresolved despite efforts from some quarters and concerned stakeholders.

The regulations were answers to the many calls for sweeping reforms in the tourism industry, mainly by the Federation of Tourism Associations of Nigeria (FTAN), the umbrella body of private sector tourism.

While the reforms are here, the provisions of the laws seem to antagonize the interest of the private sector, which is survival, especially considering the prevailing economic situations in the country. The laws are coming from the National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism (NIHOTOUR) Act and the Nigerian Tourism Development Authority (NTDA) Act, which seem to replicate each other.

Again, the private sector seems not to be carried along or consulted, going by the many contentious issues the laws have raised.

The contentious issues, according to FTAN, have been marked, communicated to the

relevant government agencies, and requests for stakeholders' engagements to deliberate on them before implementation is made. But the implementations are going on without the reviews, which are at the detriment of the private sector tourism businesses.

The above formed part of the discussions at FTAN's media parley in Lagos, where the leadership of the federation detailed its achievements for one year in office.

Speaking at the event, which was held at Presken Hotel, Ikeja, Badaki Aliyu, president, FTAN, commended the ongoing reforms across several industries in the country, but noted that those of the tourism sector need urgent reviews.

Considering the issues trailing tourism sector reforms, Aliyu, a PhD holder, urged the federal government to return the National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism (NIHOTOUR) Act and the Nigerian Tourism Development Authority (NTDA) Act to the National Assembly for comprehensive review.

He explained that the call for their return became necessary due to their controversies. "The existing laws have created regulatory overlaps, uncertainty and avoidable conflicts within the industry,"



the FTAN president said.

Narrowing down on the controversies, Aliyu noted that the implementation of the NIHOTOUR Act 2022 has generated unprecedented disputes and litigation across the tourism sector.

According to him, the disagreements surrounding the legislation were inherited from previous administrations, while regretting that the current legal framework has

failed to clearly define the responsibilities of government agencies and industry stakeholders.

"The confusion generated by the controversial Act has negatively affected operators, disrupted business activities and created divisions within the industry," he said.

He further regretted that some industry stakeholders, who rather than protect the interest of the private sector

players, have yielded themselves as tools in the hands of the agencies, further complicating the implementation of the law.

Looking at peaceful resolution, Aliyu, who led other members of the federation at the media parley called on the federal government, through the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy, to expedite the legislative review process in line with the Renewed Hope Agenda of the present administration.

According to him, the minister has severally urged for a stay of action on the implementation of the laws, yet the directives were often ignored.

For civility's sake, and pending the review, the FTAN president urged the NIHOTOUR and NTDA to temporarily return to their original statutory mandates to minimise conflicts and restore stability across the sector, as it remains committed to constructive dialogue with the government agencies and all stakeholders to achieve lasting solutions.

Answering questions from the media, especially on the rationale for challenging the implementation, Badaki said that as a federation, FTAN's primary responsibilities is to protect the interests, investments and businesses of mem-

ber associations.

The federation, according to him, exists as the umbrella body of the organised private tourism operators and will continue to champion policies that create a more enabling environment for businesses to thrive.

"Every advocacy effort we undertake is guided by the need to safeguard tourism operators from policies capable of discouraging investment or creating unnecessary regulatory burdens," he insisted.

"But we are not opposing government policies. What we do is to ensure that industry regulations reflect operational realities and support sustainable business growth because a vibrant tourism industry can only emerge when operators have confidence in government policies and regulatory institutions".

Moreover, the federation reviewed its one year in office and the progress made under its Tourism Transformation Mandate (TTM), which now serves as its strategic blueprint for institutional reforms.

He used the first year in office to implement programmes and to identify deep-rooted structural challenges limiting the growth of Nigeria's tourism industry.

Sierra Leone positions for historic 3rd UN Tourism Africa Gastronomy Forum at CAF in Seychelles

Sierra Leone has reaffirmed its readiness to host the third edition of the UN Tourism Africa Gastronomy Forum, using the 69th Meeting of the UN Tourism Commission for Africa (CAF) in Seychelles as a strategic platform to consolidate partnerships, align policy priorities and demonstrate preparedness for the continental event.

Led by Nabeela Farida Tunis, Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, the Sierra Leone's delegation joined tourism ministers, senior government officials, development partners and private sector leaders from across Africa to deliberate on the future of tourism development on the

continent. The forum is scheduled to take place from December 2-4, 2026.

The UN Tourism Africa Gastronomy Forum has quickly emerged as a flagship thematic platform within Africa's tourism calendar. The inaugural forum was hosted in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe in 2024, followed by the second edition in Arusha, Tanzania in 2025. Sierra Leone is now preparing to host the third edition, marking a significant milestone in the evolution of gastronomy tourism in Africa.

Importantly, the upcoming forum will be the first to be held since the appointment of Shaikha Al Nuwais as Secretary-General of UN

Tourism, adding further strategic weight and institutional significance to the event.

Discussions at CAF in Seychelles focused heavily on human capital development, sustainability, innovation and policy coherence — core pillars that align closely with Sierra Leone's vision for the gastronomy forum.

According to Minister Tunis, the Seychelles meeting provided a critical opportunity to deepen engagement with UN Tourism officials and African counterparts on how gastronomy can be leveraged as a driver of skills development, job creation, cultural preservation and inclusive growth.



Organisers unveil first lineup of speakers for 8th tourism leadership forum

As Africa travel and tourism industry stakeholders await this year's edition of the African Tourism Leadership Forum (ATLF), the organisers have unveiled the initial lineup for 2026, which is the forum's 8th edition.

This year's programme, according to them, features prominent pan-African sector leaders, including: Ministers of Tourism, CEOs, industry leaders, and hotel group development directors. The featured keynote speakers include: Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, CEO, Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBC-SA); Elcia Grandcourt, director, Africa Department, UN Tourism Spain; Dušan Borovčanin, advisor, EXPO 2027 and assistant professor, Singidunum University, Serbia; Shatha Alkaid, founder and CEO of Emportality Consultancy, Saudi Arabia; Mokwena Morulane, man-

aging director, Cresta Marakanelo, Botswana; Diego Rodriguez, president and co-founder, Passporter, Spain; and Lee-Anne Bac, partner, strategic development and advisory, BDO South Africa.

Others are: Kobby Mensah, CEO, Ghana Tourism Development Company, Ghana; Joel Kachi Benson, Emmy Award winner Documentary Filmmaker / VR Creator, Nigeria; Akwasi Obeng-Adjei, executive: Risk (Business Bank), Absa Group Limited, South Africa; June Chepkemei, CEO, Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) ad Bronwen Auret, chief quality assurance officer, Tourism Grading Council of South Africa.

Meanwhile, the C-suite speakers will tackle real-world issues and guide discussions on leveraging AI to accelerate growth in tourism, revenue generation, and hospitality in-

vestments across Africa's travel, hospitality, and investment landscape.

Beyond the forum, this year's host destination offers a brilliant case study in regional tourism development. Located at the crossroads of South Africa's cultural heartland, Polokwane City, Limpopo features state-of-the-art MICE facilities and direct access to Limpopo's rich biodiversity, wildlife experiences, and sustainable community-led tourism models.

The 8th Africa Tourism Leadership Forum (ATLF) & Awards is scheduled for September 2 to 4, 2026, at Meropa Casino in Polokwane City, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The forum will convene ministerial delegations, policy-makers, hotel executives, hospitality investors, and destination innovators to examine tourism growth and emerging business opportunities.



Real Estate Market Updates

with CHUKA UROKO

A Diary of Developments, Transactions, Appointments

More homes coming as Metrospeed, Shell COOPLAG partner to build smart city

Metrospeed Group has signed another partnership agreement for investment in its multi-billion-naira smart real estate development in Lagos called Metro Smart City. This time it is with the Shell Staff Cooperative Investment and Thrift Society Limited (COOPLAG).

By this partnership, more smart homes are expected in the Lagos housing market and, by extension, more Lagos residents will have the opportunity to own homes.

The agreement, signed at the headquarters of Metrospeed Property Development Limited in Lekki, brings one of Nigeria's most respected cooperative institutions into a project that is increasingly attracting major investors from the oil and gas sector.

Dele Oyefuga, a retired colonel and chief executive officer of Metrospeed Group, described the partnership as a strong endorsement of the company's vision and execution capability.

"This smart city is our flagship project, and we are determined to deliver on time and to precision. Whatever we have made as a promise to you, we will deliver," Oyefuga said.

He noted that the project which is being developed in collaboration with global partners, CCECC and Huawei, has also secured key regulatory approvals, revealing that Lagos State government has been very supportive.

"Our EIA has been granted, our



planning permit granted and our governor's consent granted," Oyefuga said, adding that COOPLAG's participation reinforces growing confidence in Metro Smart City among leading oil and gas organisations.

"It means that the IOCs are seeing what we are doing. We started with Chevron, went to ExxonMobil, Seplat and NLNG, and now we have Shell," he said, adding that the pace and quality of work have helped to attract institutional partners.

Oyefuga noted that the confidence these organisations have in the company is actually what is driving the project, saying they are very grateful to their development partners.

For COOPLAG, the decision followed extensive due diligence and ongoing monitoring of the project's progress.

Aremo Francis Adeoye, President of COOPLAG, noted that

COOPLAG is a brand, not just a cooperative society, adding that, over time, they have built a brand on trust and delivery.

Describing Metro Smart City as a landmark development, he noted that it will deliver over 2,000 housing units supported by smart-home technology and modern infrastructure.

"Before we do anything, we have to do our due diligence. We have seen Metrospeed, we have seen what they are doing, and we trust them," Adeoye said, adding that a recent inspection of the site exceeded expectations.

"What they have done is actually over 150 percent of what was expected as a target at that time, so we trust them and believe they are going to perform," he stated.

Levi Ngerere, COOPLAG Vice President, said the investment aligns with the cooperative's commitment to providing quality housing

and long-term value for members.

"At COOPLAG, it is always a source of joy when one of our visions materialises. In this case, we are having this good partnership that looks really promising with Metro Smart City," he said.

According to him, the cooperative was looking beyond simply providing houses to securing properties in strategic locations with modern infrastructure and long-term investment value.

"We needed to place our members in certain urban developments, put them in strategic places that are secure and have contemporary structures, and also provide a form of investment for the future and the next generation.

We have investigated, we have checked, we have seen what Metro Smart City is doing, and we know that it is a partner we want to be with," Ngerere said.

Fragmented efforts slow Nigeria's transition to sustainable cities—GBCN

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

Efforts to advance sustainable buildings and climate-resilient cities in Nigeria are being undermined by fragmented initiatives and a lack of coordination among stakeholders, the Green Building Council Nigeria (GBCN) said on Wednesday at the opening of the Future Cities Summit 2026 in Lagos.

Speaking at the summit themed "Building the Future: Scaling Sustainability for Greener Cities," Danjuma Wani, president of GBCN, said Nigeria is not short of sustainability initiatives, innovation or policy interventions, but lacks the framework needed to connect and scale them.

"The real issue is not that nothing is happening, but rather it's an issue of disconnectedness and fragmentation," Wani said.

"We have many different people and organisations who are doing great work in this space. But it often feels like there is no connective tissue. There is no clear framework connecting our efforts," he added.

The two-day summit, organised by the GBCN, brought together policymakers, developers, financiers, academics, urban planners and climate experts to discuss pathways to building sustainable and resilient cities.

Wani noted that sustainability activities are taking place across government institutions, the private sector, academia and local communities, but their impact remains limited because they are often implemented in isolation.

"They are often scattered. They are not visible enough. And so ultimately, even though a lot is happening, these things are not reinforcing one another and they are not delivering impact at the scale we would like," he said.

According to him, one of the central questions confronting the sector is why years of discussions, policies and projects have not translated into the scale of transformation needed to address climate risks and rapid urbanisation.

"Why does awareness not translate into action? Why does the finance that is available not reach the projects that need it? Why do policies remain on paper? Why do good ideas struggle to become normal practice?" he said.

es?" he said.

He added that the summit was designed to foster practical discussions on housing, climate resilience, urban growth, sustainable construction materials and financing mechanisms.

Representing Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu at the event, Oluwasegun Williams, senior special assistant on urban development, said Lagos' rapid population growth continues to place significant pressure on infrastructure, housing, transportation and environmental systems.

"Every day, thousands of people choose Lagos because they believe in its promise," Williams said while delivering the governor's address.

"That confidence inspires us, but it also reminds us that growth must be carefully planned, responsibly governed and sustainably managed."

He described Lagos as Africa's largest city and one of the continent's fastest-growing urban economies, noting that the challenge is not whether the city will continue to grow but how to ensure that growth remains inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

"The real question is, how do we ensure that our growth remains inclusive, resilient, environmentally responsible and economically sustainable?" he said.

Williams highlighted several infrastructure projects undertaken by the state government, including rail and water transportation systems aimed at reducing congestion and carbon emissions.

According to him, the Blue Line Rail carried more than 3.5 million passengers in 2025, while the 37-kilometre Red Line is already moving thousands of commuters daily.

He also pointed to the state's Omi Eko water transport initiative, which involves the deployment of electric ferries and upgrades to terminals and waterways.

On climate adaptation, Williams said Lagos has upgraded more than 40 critical drainage channels and implemented flood management measures to protect over one million residents exposed to flood risks.

The summit also featured discussions on sustainable housing, urban resilience, green finance and the development of a national decarbonisation and resilience roadmap for Nigeria's building and construction sector.

Sustainable infrastructure in focus as Elan Expo's mega project confab kicks in

When construction and real estate industry stakeholders gather for the Elan Expo's Mega Project Nigeria Expo 2026, sustainable infrastructure and economic growth in Nigeria will be the major focus of discussion.

Elan Expo is an international exhibition and event management company committed to creating world-class business platforms that connect industries, facilitate trade, promote investment and support economic development across Africa and other global markets.

This year's edition of the expo is very special to the company, as it will mark the first decade of organizing it.

The company announced recently that preparations were in top gear for the expo, which is Nigeria's premier infrastructure, construction, engineering and real estate exhibition,

scheduled for August 25–27, 2026, at the Landmark Centre, Victoria Island, Lagos.

Jude Chime, Country Director, Elan Exhibitions West Africa, explained that this year's edition, with the theme 'Building the Future: A Decade of Infrastructure, Innovation and National Development', celebrates 10 years of connecting government and investors.

Chime, who spoke at a press briefing in Laos, added that this edition also celebrates developers, contractors, engineers, manufacturers, consultants, financial institutions, and technology providers to drive sustainable infrastructure and economic growth in Nigeria.

"As we celebrate our 10th edition, we are proud of the impact Mega Project Nigeria Expo has made in advancing collaboration, promoting innovation and creating busi-

ness opportunities across Nigeria's built environment. This milestone is not just a celebration of our journey, but also a renewed commitment to supporting the nation's infrastructure and housing agenda."

Over the past decade, Mega Project Nigeria Expo has grown into a strategic platform for promoting investment, technology transfer, business networking and policy dialogue within Nigeria's construction and infrastructure ecosystem.

This year's Expo will feature an international exhibition, high-level conferences, investment forums, business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-government (B2G) meetings, product launches, networking sessions and strategic discussions focused on infrastructure financing, housing development, smart cities, sustainable construction and

public-private partnerships.

This year's event will be defined by strategic partnerships, and its major highlight is the strengthened collaboration with the Real Estate Developers Association of Nigeria (REDAN) and the Mortgage Banking Association of Nigeria (MBAN).

These partnerships underscore the Expo's commitment to supporting housing development, expanding access to mortgage finance, encouraging investment in the real estate sector and fostering stronger collaboration between developers, financial institutions and policymakers.

Chime disclosed that the organisers were also working closely with public institutions, professional bodies and private-sector stakeholders to ensure the event delivers meaningful outcomes that contribute to national development.

Food & Beverages

Food & Beverages With Ayo Oyoze Bajé



The piece of heart-warming news that Governor Dauda Lawal of Zamfara state has distributed 120 free trucks of fertiliser, 200,000 litres of herbicides, 100 crop residue crushers to farmers in the insecurity embattled state is highly commendable, that is more so at a time the Northern Governors Forum (NGF) has established the Northern Security Trust Fund, pledging N1bn monthly to tackle insecurity across the region.

The association stated that the initiative would improve security in farming communities, encourage increased agricultural production, and strengthen national food security.

It is worthy of note that the Zamfara 2026 wet-season fertiliser programme was recently launched at the Trade Fair Complex in Gusau, the state capital. According to a statement by the

Gov. Lawal and northern governors' exemplary support to farmers

governor's spokesperson, Sulaiman Bala Idris, the Zamfara State Government distributed 72,000 bags of fertiliser, 200,000 litres of herbicides, and 100 crop residue crushers.

Additional agricultural assets include 100 grass choppers, 100 feed milling machines, improved pasture seeds, 20 motorcycles, and 20 mobile phones designated for agricultural extension agents.

In his remarks, Governor Lawal said Zamfara State occupies a strategic position as one of Nigeria's agricultural strongholds. Said he: "Zamfara State has vast, fertile land and hardworking people whose history, culture, and economy are rooted in agriculture. Farming is the main livelihood and a key to inclusive growth and sustainable development, helping to fight poverty, banditry, and crime.

Furthermore, he explained that: "Our communities have long been known for agriculture, livestock, and trade that sustain livelihoods and regional food supply. Agriculture is not just an economic activity; it's part of our identity, heritage, resilience, and the foundation for prosperity that future generations will continue to build upon."

That should serve as food-for-thought for the policy makers and the people who are to benefit from both initiatives.

Good enough, the distribution of the fertilisers and agricultural assets will cover all 147 political wards across Zamfara State's 14 Local Government Areas. Each ward will receive 340 bags of fertiliser, while each Local Government Area will receive 8,000 litres of herbicides. This is worthy of commendation.

So also is the new policy by the Northern Governors' Forum of the N1bn monthly known as the Northern Security Trust Fund which the All Farmers Association of Nigeria has commended.

In a statement signed by its National President, Muhammad Gettado, AFAN also praised the inauguration of the fund's management board, describing its members as individuals with proven integrity and the capacity to manage the resources transparently.

According to Gettado, the governors have demonstrated commitment to addressing the security challenges that have continued to affect farming activities and livelihoods across northern Nigeria.

He added, "We particularly applaud the inauguration of the fund's management board, which comprises individuals of impeccable character, proven track records, and high integrity. This strategic appointment inspires confidence that the resources allocated will be managed transparently, accountably, and effectively to achieve lasting peace."

The AFAN president expressed optimism that the initiative would restore confidence among farmers, reduce attacks on agricultural communities, and increase food production.

He urged farmers, cooperative societies and AFAN chapters across the North to support the initiative by working closely with security agencies and providing useful information to help curb criminal activities.

He reaffirmed AFAN's commitment to partnering with governments and other stakeholders to achieve sustainable food production in a

peaceful and secure environment across Nigeria.

That brings us to an appraisal of the policies and programs and of significance, lessons to be learnt from countries that fully support agricultural revolution and by extension sustainable food security.

Based on the OECD Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation, countries that provide support to farmers primarily through market price support, direct payments, tax concessions, and subsidies include Norway, Switzerland, Japan, Iceland, Korea, and the United States. Others are Canada, Australia and New Zealand. But how do they achieve this feat? That is the million-naira question.

They do so by implementing agricultural subsidies, funding research and by mitigating climate risks. They are also good at protecting domestic markets.

These strategies have the salutary aim to stabilise food supplies, lower production costs, and ensure consistent earnings for growers.

In such countries governments provide financial assistance to reduce the cost of essential farming supplies like seeds and fertilizer. For instance, countries like Kenya and Malawi have utilised fertilizer and seed subsidy programs to boost crop production and lower domestic market prices.

Also, in the countries that boast of food security national budgets are often used to fund agricultural research, develop climate-smart farming techniques, and build irrigation systems. Investments in precision agriculture and digital supply chains (as seen in India's dairy sector) are utilised to improve yields and prevent

post-harvest loss.

To prevent dependence on volatile global markets, nations deploy import tariffs and price controls to ensure domestic farmers remain profitable. They also build strategic grain reserves to buffer against sudden shortages and emergencies.

Furthermore, programmes like subsidised crop insurance and credit guarantees are designed to protect farmers from climate disasters, crop diseases, and severe price fluctuations.

On the value chain development, many regions focus on agroecology, agroforestry, and local processing. These enable smallholder farmers to add value to their crops before selling. The scale of this support varies significantly by region due to available national budgets.

Considered from the perspectives of what is currently needed in the embattled region the significance of security to boost food production and create job in line what Gov. Lawal is doing to support the farmers and the NGF's pledge of N1bn monthly to boost security should be sustained.

But to make more impact on the Human Development Index of the populace there should be focus on organic food production, modern farming techniques, supply of disease-resistant, early maturing and high yielding hybrid seedlings. These should be facilitated through the input of young graduates with degrees in agriculture-related fields across the states.

This is also the moment for a holistic approach to the interventions with support from the private sector, NGOs and international donor agencies including the Food and Agriculture Organization, (FAO).

Gourmet Guide with Lydia Eke



Lafun is also known as white amala and cassava flour.

The flour is a traditional Nigerian swallow made from fermented, dried cassava flour.

Very smooth white looking powder, Lafun has this unique fine texture and a tender sour taste when being eaten.

It is usually made into a stretchy dough by cooking the flour in hot water and then served with hearty soups like Ila, (Okro Soup), ewedu, gbegiri, egusi or any other Nigerian soup.

It was an exciting culinary discussion on food journalism. The discussion in the newsroom with some Press Club students of the University of Lagos however prompted Mabel Shoyege, a student of English to take a swipe at this Nigerian South Western popular swallow.

What endeared me to Lafun was

Lafun: Nigeria's fermented cassava heritage in UNESCO ICH list

its easy to prepare technique. Unlike the yam flour Amala, that I have to cook for minutes over hot heat, Lafun cooks well with hot boiling water. Simply making it like my regular eba and seeing it look so fine and smooth, ready to eat with any draw soup sums it up.

Lafun is said to be entirely gluten-free, grain-free, and an excellent source of carbohydrates.

The flour is produced by soaking peeled cassava tubers in water to ferment for three to five days. The fermented chunks are then sun-dried and milled into a fine white powder.

Nutritionally it supports digestive health, regulates blood sugar through resistant starches, and provides essential nutrients like potassium and vitamin C. Because it is also low in calories, and serves as an excellent, filling weight-management meal.

Although gluten-free, the flour has little fiber, with negligible fat and protein. It also provides some Vitamin C, manganese, and resistant starch, which supports gut health.

Looking at its place in the UNESCO global plate is equally valuable. This is because over 30 culinary tradition globally have found their place on the plate, no Nigerian culinary tradition has positioned itself on this plate.

For instance, Kimchi earned its place on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013, not

simply because it is a beloved Korean dish, but because kimjang, the centuries-old tradition of preparing and sharing kimchi, represents living knowledge, community cooperation, and cultural identity passed from one generation to another.

By the same standard, Nigeria's lafun deserves this global recognition.

Lafun is far more than a cassava meal. It is the product of indigenous knowledge, careful fermentation, environmental wisdom, and cultural practices that have sustained many Yoruba communities and other parts of southwestern Nigeria for centuries.

Every stage of its preparation reflects traditional skills that cannot be replaced by machines or textbooks.

The journey begins with fresh cassava roots, which are peeled and soaked in water for three to five days to ferment naturally.

There are no digital thermom-

eters or laboratory instruments involved. Experienced producers determine when fermentation is complete through the distinctive aroma, texture, and appearance of the cassava.

The fermented roots are then carefully sun-dried, another stage that depends on generations of inherited knowledge, before being milled into the fine flour known as lafun.

These are not merely cooking techniques but living traditions transmitted from parents to children, grandparents to grandchildren, through observation, participation, and years of practice.

This intergenerational transfer of knowledge is precisely what UNESCO seeks to safeguard under its Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Convention.

The origin of lafun is deeply rooted in Yorubaland, where cassava became an essential staple after its introduction to West Africa several centuries ago. Over time, various Yoruba communities transformed cassava into several iconic foods, with lafun emerging as one of the most distinctive, owing to its natural fermentation process.

Today, it remains widely consumed across Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, Lagos, Kwara, and parts of Kogi and beyond the shores of the country, while Nigerian communities in Europe and North America continue to preserve the tradition

through African food stores and family kitchens.

Lafun occupies an important place in social and cultural life as families gather to process cassava during harvest seasons, women often lead the production process using knowledge inherited over generations, and local markets.

In this vein, local markets like Bodija and Oje in Ibadan remain centres where traders and consumers assess the quality of lafun by its colour, aroma, texture, and taste.

These community standards reflect a shared cultural understanding that has survived for generations.

Beyond its cultural importance, lafun also offers significant nutritional and health benefits. As a fermented cassava product, it provides easily digestible carbohydrates that serve as an excellent source of energy. The fermentation process helps reduce naturally occurring cyanogenic compounds in cassava, making it safer for consumption while improving digestibility.

Lafun is naturally gluten-free, making it suitable for individuals with gluten intolerance or celiac disease. It is also low in fat and cholesterol-free. When paired with traditional Nigerian soups such as ewedu, gbegiri, efo riro, ogbono, okra, or vegetable soup, lafun becomes part of a nutritionally balanced meal rich in protein, fibre, vitamins, and essential minerals.



The Worshipper

'PMF encourages collaboration rather than competitions, creating an atmosphere where ministers can share experiences'

For many years, young pastors across Nigeria have struggled with maintaining a balance between ministry and socioeconomic realities of the country, which forces some to want to quit altogether. Recently an Abuja-based pastor was in the news after announcing the closure of his church; alleged to have said that continuing to lead the church and preach the word of God had become a waste of his time because the ministry was no longer providing enough income to support his family. Chidi Anthony, founder, Kings in Christ Power Ministries International and president of the Pentecostal Ministers' Forum (PMF) speaks on the possible implications of abandoning the flock in pursuit of political/economic gains, and what the Church can do to help young ministers. Excerpts by JOHN SALAU

The stories of pastors abandoning their church or ministry for a better life are common among young pastors across the country. As president of PMF, should pastors/church leaders abandon their flock in pursuit of political relevance?

The straightforward biblical answer is No. The primary calling of a pastor is to shepherd the flock of God, not to pursue political power, influence, or public recognition. While Christians, including pastors, may positively influence government and society, no shepherd should neglect or abandon the flock entrusted to him simply to attain political relevance. Our Lord Jesus Christ clearly distinguished between a true shepherd and a hireling: The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away' (John 10:12-13). Likewise, the Apostle Paul charged the elders of the church: Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). A pastor's calling is a sacred trust. It is not an office to be exchanged for political prominence or earthly influence.

This is not to say that God cannot call an individual into

public service or political leadership. Throughout Scripture, God raised individuals to serve in governmental positions for His divine purposes. However, if a man is serving as a shepherd of God's people, he must never abandon that divine assignment merely because politics appears more attractive, influential, or financially rewarding. The real question is not whether a pastor can enter politics, but whether God has released him from his pastoral assignment and specifically redirected him into another divine assignment. Until then, the flock remains his God-given responsibility. Faithfulness to God's assignment must always take precedence over the pursuit of earthly relevance.

Should or can a pastor drop his ministerial calling because of financial challenges?

Financial hardship is a reality that many people face, including ministers of the Gospel. However, an important question confronts the Church today: Should a pastor abandon his God-given calling because of financial challenges? The biblical answer is No. A genuine ministerial calling is not based on financial comfort but on God's sovereign purpose. When God calls a man into His service, the assignment remains valid regardless of economic circumstances. Difficult seasons may arise, but they do not cancel a divine commission. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that God's



Chidi Anthony

call originates with Him, not with human convenience: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you... I appointed you as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5). Scripture never teaches that ministry will always be free from hardship. Many of God's servants experienced lack, persecution, and adversity, yet they remained faithful to the work entrusted to them. The Apostle Paul stands as a remarkable example. During parts of his ministry, he worked as a tentmaker to support himself while continuing to preach the Gospel (Acts 18:3). Rather than abandoning his calling because of financial pressure, he combined honest labour with unwavering commitment to God's work. This demonstrates an important biblical

principle: there is nothing wrong with a pastor engaging in legitimate work or business to provide for personal and family needs, provided such activities do not replace or compromise the ministry to which God has called him. Financial challenges may require a minister to acquire additional skills, seek lawful employment, manage resources wisely, or pursue other legitimate means of income. These are practical responses to difficult circumstances, not evidence that God has withdrawn His calling. The Apostle Paul captured the heart of true ministry when he declared, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16). His commitment was driven by divine conviction, not financial reward.

In situations like this; what should the Church do to help young ministers?

The Church must therefore resist the growing notion that ministry should be abandoned whenever economic conditions become difficult. A calling from God is not a career to be discarded when challenges arise; it is a sacred trust to be faithfully fulfilled. The God who calls is able to sustain His servants. Though His provision may not always come according to human expectations, His faithfulness never fails. Faithful ministers may adapt to changing financial realities, but they must never forsake the assignment God has entrusted to them simply because of financial difficulties.

In practical terms, what is the PMF doing to help young pastors within its ranks?

The Pentecostal Ministers Forum (PMF) is committed to the growth, well-being, and sustainability of young pastors within its fold. The Forum recognizes that ministry is a lifelong calling that requires spiritual maturity, sound leadership, continuous learning, and a strong support system. To this end, PMF provides opportunities for mentorship, where seasoned ministers guide younger pastors in matters of doctrine, leadership, character, and effective ministry. Through conferences, seminars, retreats, and leadership development

programmes, young ministers are equipped to meet the demands of contemporary ministry while remaining firmly rooted in biblical truth. Beyond training, PMF fosters genuine unity and fellowship among ministers. It is a family of pastors who stand with one another in both seasons of celebration and seasons of challenge. The Forum encourages collaboration rather than competitions, creating an atmosphere where ministers can share experiences, learn from one another, pray together, and provide mutual encouragement and support. This sense of belonging helps to reduce the isolation many young ministers experience and strengthen them for long-term effectiveness in ministry. The Forum also emphasizes integrity, accountability, and holistic development. Young pastors are encouraged to grow spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and administratively so they can lead healthy, impactful, and sustainable ministries. Ultimately, PMF is raising a generation of ministers who are spiritually sound, ethically grounded, united in purpose, and equipped to serve God faithfully. By investing in mentorship, leadership development, fellowship, and mutual support, the Pentecostal Ministers Forum is helping to ensure that young pastors not only begin well but remain steadfast, fruitful, and effective throughout their ministerial journey.

Young Christians must stand firm despite growing pressures – Rev Aderonmu

EMMANUEL SALAWU

Samuel Adesoji Aderonmu, the lead pastor of New Life Baptist Church, Owode, Ajah, has urged young Christians to remain steadfast in their faith despite the growing moral, economic and social pressures confronting society.

"There is actually nothing new upon the surface of the earth. Pressures have always existed and will continue to exist. Young Christians must resolve not to compromise their faith in the face of whatever pressure they encounter. They should stand firm and trust God for the fulfillment of their God-given purpose," he said during a recent inter-

view to mark his 60th birthday.

Aderonmu said that challenges have always existed throughout history, noting that the ability to remain faithful to God in difficult times distinguishes true believers.

According to him, biblical figures such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Joseph demonstrated unwavering commitment to God despite intense pressure and temptation, adding that their lives remain examples for today's generation.

Reflecting on his six decades of life, Aderonmu expressed gratitude to God for preserving his life and family, recalling a serious road accident along the Lagos-Ibadan

Expressway in 2010 in which no member of his family died despite sustaining severe injuries.



Samuel Adesoji Aderonmu

He described God's faithfulness as the defining factor in his life and ministry, saying the experience reinforced

his belief that God never abandons those who trust in Him. The cleric also recounted challenges he had faced in ministry, including financial difficulties and personal temptations, saying God's grace enabled him to remain committed to biblical principles.

On the future of the Church, Aderonmu said his vision is to raise genuine disciples of Jesus Christ whose lives reflect Christian values rather than mere religious activities. He added that he hopes to be remembered as a minister who remained faithful to God's Word without compromising biblical standards.

Commenting on Nigeria's security situation, the cleric called for stronger efforts by

government to tackle insecurity, while urging the Church to continue praying for the nation and citizens to cooperate with security agencies by reporting criminal activities.

He also expressed optimism that Nigeria would overcome its economic challenges, urging citizens not to lose hope but to remain prayerful and exercise their civic responsibility by voting according to their conscience during future elections.

As he begins a new chapter of life, Aderonmu said his prayer is for greater grace to finish his ministry well, while expressing hope for a Church focused on preparing people for Christ's return and a Nigeria where righteousness, peace and justice prevail.

How Segun Johnson, Gordons thrilled guests at Glo event for trade partners

It was a fun-packed night last Thursday as national telecommunications company, Globacom, rolled out the drums to celebrate its trade partners.

The operator had a lineup of entertainment heavyweights who treated guests to electrifying performances at the event, tagged “2026 Glo Partners’ Reward Gala”, which was held at the Eko Hotel & Suites, Victoria Island, Lagos.

Segun Johnson, legendary Nigerian singer and live band maestro, spiced up the evening with a huge dose of musical entertainment that kept the audience rocking and vibing.

There was also non stop laughter from the master of ceremony and hilarious comedian, Godwin Komone, popularly known as Gordons, who was ably supported by Mo Abebe, TV host and brand influencer.

KieKie, a brand influencer, also added glamour to the fun-filled evening. Toyin Aimaku, Nollywood actor and movie producer, was also at the event to add colour and ensure a memorable experience for the exclusive show.

Globacom organised the event to reward its partners across the country with mouth-watering prizes based on their performance within the first six months of the year and also spur them to a better performance in the years ahead.

A total of 115 outstanding business partners drawn from all over the country and various trade segments were rewarded with millions of Naira in cash and other prizes for their great performance within the six months period.

While welcoming the guests on behalf of the company, Abdul Rasaq Ande, cluster head, Lagos 2, Globacom, explained that the event was organised to celebrate not just



the individuals, but also the synergy, the shared vision, and the collaborative mindset that sparks true innovation. “Our partners have, over the years, been the bedrock of the Globacom ecosystem, and their success is our success,” Ande said.

“It has been 23 years of technological revolution, innovation and service excellence. We will continue to invest heavily in next-generation tools, upgrading our infrastructure, and ensuring our network stays second to none.”

Globacom also used the occasion to highlight its technical and marketing initiatives intended to ensure optimal services to the customers nationwide. The partners received comprehensive information on Globacom’s achievements over the past year and new initiatives, including the introduction of Gloria, an AI-powered Glo Café

voice assistant, designed to enhance customer engagement and service delivery through six languages for the benefit of the customers.

The company also highlighted its focus on putting more value directly in the pockets of its subscribers by introducing a new suite of consumer offerings, starting with “More Data More Value” which it stated was designed to ensure that every Naira spent by a Nigerian consumer yields the highest possible digital return, thus reinforcing Globacom’s long-standing reputation for affordability and empowerment.

“There is also the “Borrow Me Credit” service, a strategic initiative which has been expanded to ensure that no subscriber is ever disconnected due to a low or zero



balance. The Glo Café is also being reinvigorated to ensure unique on-line experiences for millions of Glo Subscribers,” Ande added.

The night was not just about talk, food and drinks. It was also a blend of glamour, laughter, and top-tier entertainment. The highlight was the “Rep Your Region” Best Dressed Competition, where some of the partners took to a quick runway experience in stunning attires that promoted rich Nigerian culture. At the end of the very interesting parade, Alamin Muhammed Suleiman of Benjee Communication and Anthonia Agbasi of Chicadef Global Limited, emerged winners of the 500,000 prize each in the male and female categories.

It was an evening filled with joy, camaraderie, and appreciation, a fitting tribute to excellence and partnership.

Several business partners went home with mouthwatering gifts, as part of their prizes. Keys to brand new vehicles, including Suzuki Alto, Kia Rion Toyota Corolla and Toyota Camry were presented to those partners who excelled in various categories.

The evening’s highest award, the Top National Partner Star Prize, was awarded to Demi Global Resources, which drove home a brand-new 2026 Toyota Camry in recognition of its outstanding performance and contribution to Globacom’s success nationwide.

Grateful dealers praised Globacom for its generosity. Speaking for the group, Managing Director of Demmy Global Resources, Ademola Akinlabi and Alhaji Yusuf Yahaya of Lambadaya Stores commended the company for rewarding dealers across multiple categories with cars as well as millions of Naira and other incentives.

The event, which ended in the early hours of Friday, again demonstrated Globacom’s enduring focus on recognizing and rewarding excellence among its business partners in order to continue to offer the best services to customers nationwide.

LIFANIMA, Nigeria’s first and only animation film festival, has announced the close of submissions for its 10th anniversary edition, recording an unprecedented 1,298 animated short film entries from more than 120 countries across the globe. The overwhelming response underscores LIFANIMA’s growing reputation as one of Africa’s leading platforms for animation, storytelling, creativity and industry collaboration. Since its inception, the festival has provided a unique platform for showcasing outstanding animated films, nurturing emerging talent, promoting cultural exchange and connecting African creators with the global animation community.

Scheduled to hold October 20 - 22, 2026, in Lagos, the 10th anniversary festival promises to be the biggest edition in the festival’s history. Audiences and industry stakeholders can look forward to an exciting programme featuring international film screenings, masterclasses, work-

LIFANIMA animation festival sets for October, gets 1,298 entries from over 120 countries

shops, networking sessions, panel discussions and special events celebrating a decade of excellence in animation.

A major highlight of this year’s festival is the introduction of the NOA Animation Awards, sponsored by the National Orientation Agency (NOA). The awards will offer a total of N22.5 million in cash prizes, making it one of the richest animation awards on the African continent. The NOA Animation Awards seek to inspire Nigerian animators to harness the power of animation as a tool for promoting positive values, national orientation and social development while encouraging world-class creativity among the country’s growing community of animation profession-

als.

Those who entered for the NOA Awards were asked to make a 3-minute animation film on the theme that answers the question, Who is a Real Nigerian? Winners will go home with prizes that range from N10 million for first prize, N7.5 million for the second position to N5 million for the third best short film.

Speaking on the milestone, Muiwa Kayode, festival director, expressed delight at the unprecedented global participation, noting, “Receiving 1,298 submissions from over 120 countries is a remarkable achievement and a testament to how far LIFANIMA has come in the past 10 years. We are proud that creators from every region of the world con-

tinue to see Nigeria as an important destination for animation. The introduction of the NOA Animation Awards further demonstrates our commitment to growing the industry while encouraging animation that positively impacts society.”

As preparations intensify, an international panel of industry professionals will begin the rigorous selection process to determine the Official Selections, nominees and eventual award winners.

LIFANIMA therefore invites filmmakers, animation studios, students, industry professionals, investors, government agencies, corporate organisations and animation enthusiasts to join the celebration of 10 years of African animation excel-

lence in Lagos this October.

LIFANIMA is Nigeria’s Animation Film Festival, dedicated to celebrating excellence in animation while promoting creativity, innovation, education and industry development. Since its inception, the festival has served as a premier platform for showcasing animated films from Africa and around the world, fostering international collaboration and advancing the growth of Africa’s animation ecosystem.

LIFANIMA is proudly presented by USP Communications Limited, with sponsorship support of official partners including: National Orientation Agency (NOA), Embassy of France in Nigeria, Bank of Industry and Checkers Africa Limited.

Art

The Offer: When love, ambition, survival collide on stage at Terra Kulture

OBINNA EMELIKE

Once again, Terra Kulture Arena has lived up to its billing as the hub for enthralling theatrical performances and entertainment.

The month of July has really been more engaging for lovers of live performances, particularly stage play as 'The Offer' has been keeping the stage alive.

Since July 4, 2026, the theatrical masterpiece has been staging and entertaining the audience, amid passing salient messages, and also offering a platform for networking at Terra Kulture Arena, until July 26th when the play will end.

Last weekend, the play was staged at the Terra Kulture Garden, a unique outdoor stage, within the Terra Kulture Arena, that allowed nature to compliment the fun on stage.

The open space setting brought the cast members closer to the audience amid a free flow of fun and especially interaction, which included answering questions from the cast members and frequent cheering from the audience.

Another uniqueness was the two cards; red and green, given to the audience, which they raise when required to support or reject actions of the cast members.

Back on stage, 'The Offer' is truly a psychological drama, amid a perfect setting between Lagos and Abuja. It explores love, ambition, power, and the moral cost of survival in today's Nigeria.

Of course, Tobi and Amara Akinwale, a young middle-class couple, gave the audience more thrills than they asked for. The audience felt the reality and pressure of life for the couple, a story many in the audience said is very relatable.

Like most ambitious young couples, Tobi and Amara had a dream of owning a home, starting a family, and finally escaping the instability of Lagos survival. They also made N22 million commitment, over five years, with an investment fund at realizing their dreams.

It was all rosy and peaceful for the couple, with even the husband singing praise of his wife's love and sacrifice for their family and future. "My love makes dinner for N1500. Imagine, can your love do the same?" Tobi asked the audience, who replied Nooh!

"That is why I love her so much," Tobi replied to the audience.

Also, Tobi showered the same love on Amara, his wife, depicting a perfect home, which got some of the audience envious. But considering their bad generator, which neighbors complain about, making dinner with N1500 when their N22 million in their savings, many asked if love was enough in marriage as the couple's suffering and sacrifice were becoming unbearable.

Despite the suffering, Tobi kept dreaming of his billionaire life,



which he insisted was going to be very soon.

But the trouble that will test their love was loading. It came when the investment fund suddenly collapsed under suspicious circumstances.

"Do you mean that our dreams are gone," Amara asked her husband in response to the shocking news.

But her husband kept on hope, assuring her that their investment cannot go down the drain.

The dare situation made the couple become desperate, considering many options and running out of many. As expected, cracks started to emerge in the relationship as it seems impossible to rescue the situation.

As expected, the desperate couple asked for help from all quarters including Kola, who they harbour,

but kept being disappointed.

Running out of options, they turned to Chief Adebayo Cole, Tobi's wealthy employer, a charismatic billionaire whose influence stretches across oil, banking, politics, and the highest levels of Nigerian society.

But Kola, who couldn't help his friend, laughed at Tobi when he mentioned going to Chief Cole to ask for assistance. "Can the rich ever help the poor? Kola asked the audience, who gave him different answers including 'it depends', 'what kind of help' and so on.

Emboldened by the saying, 'there is harm in trial', Tobi and his wife went to Chief Cole and the inevitable happened.

The chief agreed to help, but on a shocking condition that Amara, Tobi's wife, must spend one week with

him in Abuja as his companion.

The questions were thrown to the audience: Should Tobi accept the offer? Should Amara go or not?

At that point, the biggest test for love emerged as the unthinkable proposition becomes a dangerous negotiation between love and desperation.

Majority of the audience were happy when the couple rejected the offer, but were equally saddened when they later considered it due to the pressure of financial ruin, delayed dreams, and emotional exhaustion.

The Abuja trip happened, but did not go as planned. First, Chief Cole did not seem to take advantage of Amara, but treated her differently, listening to her more. Amar also was not moved by the wealth, so-

phistication, and emotional ease she experienced in Abuja, which was far removed from their suffering in Lagos.

For Tobi, the damage has been done the moment Amara left for Abuja, leaving him jealous, insecure, and guilty of pushing his wife into accepting the offer to better their lives.

Amara left Abuja three days into the one week offer without being touched by Chief Cole. But her husband never believed her. Do you expect her to come back the same? The audience asked. Accept her even if she slept with Chief, you made her accept the offer? Some said.

Having received the promised money from Chief Cole, and unable to face his wife, the painful truths begin to surface, one of which is the big crack in their marriage.

Another truth is Chief Cole's interest in Amara began long before the offer — and that he may have orchestrated the collapse of their finances to force them into desperation.

The chief confessed orchestrating the whole show to test the couple's love, citing his sad story as an instance. According to Chief Cole, his ex-wife used to love him, despite his poverty, she defended him against landlords, and made dishes from nothing, but left for a richer man when he least expected.

As their marriage unravels under the weight of suspicion and betrayal, Tobi and Amara are forced to confront a devastating question: What happens when the pursuit of a better life costs you the very thing you were trying to protect?

At the end, the audience, who were made the jury, were divided in their verdicts. For some, Tobi used Amara to pursue his selfish goal and may not love her again, others said it was Amara who wanted the offer because of her big dreams. But more red cards were raised for Tobi, while the green cards were in Amara's favour.

For the green cards, Amara's decision to leave Tobi was perfect, knowing well that her husband cannot love her like before again, as well as leaving to take her destiny in her hands.

As the cast and crew take their final bow, the audience could not help but appreciate them for their wonderful deliveries on stage and behind the scenes.

From Anatomy Alvin, who played Tobi; Maryann Ivy Amakor who played Amara, to Novo Imnieroh, who played Chief Adebayo Cole, to Akorede Ajayi and Nadiz, the cast lived up to the expectations of the audience.

The Offer, written by Bolanle Austen-Peters and Kanyinsola Kongi and directed by Luwamide Femi-Ise-dowo, stages at Terra Kulture Arena across the month of July.

It is a tense and emotionally charged stage play about class, marriage, power, and the hidden price of ambition in a contemporary Nigerian society.

Art

Tosin Adeyemi exudes finesse in 'Èbọ', one-act play

OBINNA EMELIKE

In an enchanting one-act play held on July 10 and 12, 2026, in Lagos, Tosin Adeyemi, played the role of Simi Adeyinka-Cole, exuding class and depth. It was her first time doing a one-act play. The enthralled audience was very much handy in the call and response aspects when the actor needed them. This is what makes b an absorbing experience.

Written and directed by Bimbo Olorunmola and presented by B-Rated Productions, it was a triplicate show held on Friday by 5pm and twice on Sunday 5pm and 7pm, at the American Guest Quarters (GQ), 16, Oyinkan Abayomi Drive, Ikoyi, Lagos.

b (The Offering) portrays a litany of internal conflicts of a woman named Simi Adeyinka-Cole. In her prime, Simi pours out her mind through a compelling monologue and phone calls. Using the call and response technique, she invites the audience to



participate in the ensuing ruminations. No doubts, watching b prompts the question: "when a friend's achievement stirs deep introspection or envy in you and perhaps, motivates you to take decisions on certain things, is this what is called witchcraft?"

Simi Adeyinka-Cole's loyalty with Kemi, her childhood friend of 23 years comes under scrutiny when she finds out that, on the eve of Kemi's wedding, she has been assigned Table 11. This is the major conflict the play revolves around. Simi,

subsequently, delves into immersive contemplation, questioning what might be responsible for being pushed to the fringes. Why is she given the back seat at a supposedly best friend's wedding where she should ordinarily be one of the key players? It's through this self-analysis that the loyalty of Simi is tested and her mixed feelings towards her friend Kemi are brought to the front burners. The layers of human nature, as reflected through the lens of a chronic spinster, are carefully peeled off. Depth, class, intensity and

delicateness of friendship, are what make b (The offering) relatable to the audience.

Simi talks emotionally about three types of Nigerian men. Reflecting deeply on her past relationships, she recalls cherished moments and expresses desire for true and committed love. Thus, Simi becomes the subject of her pastor's Sunday sermons. However, when she is assigned Table 11 at the wedding, by her friends-- Kemi and aunty Ngozi, who know she needs a man to spice up her chequered life, Simi's

interpretation of the gesture is unexpected. Suffering from the pain of losing a beloved friend to another person, Simi, nevertheless, decides to be at the wedding but insists: "The question is not whether I am going to the wedding but which version of me goes through that door."

Bimbo Manuel, a Nollywood actor, was part of the audience. The film veteran conceded that the play was well-executed and brilliantly performed. "I liked that it was very organic and the use of other media (the music and phone messages) made that more real," Manuel said.

"This is one of the boldest exploration of the psychology of the modern urban Nigerian young woman, her struggles, identity and the inner battles of conforming pitched against feminism," Manuel further observed.

Amanda Oruh, an award-winning actress, producer and host, said that she learnt a lot while watching Tosin Adeyemi on stage. Oruh added that she was particularly fascinated by how the actor was able to transition seamlessly

ly in telling the story, in bringing the audience into her world.

"I could tell when she was feeling irritated, disappointed, and angry. When she was actually grieving her friendship," Oruh said. Furthermore, the 2026 Special Jury Award at Sundance winner revealed the particular part of the play that she loves the most. "It is how the actor was able to tell a relatable story. Friendships are very unique. It's you intentionally choosing to love this person, to be there for them, to grow with them, cry with them and now, this person that you have known for 23 years is getting married. Let's be honest, it is not witchcraft. There is a part of you that feels like you are going to lose this person," she concluded.

Those who couldn't see b in July do have a second chance to experience the impressive play. It's better to be seen than be told. In Abuja, the play has been scheduled for 8th and 9th August, 2026. Thereafter, it goes on an international tour in the UK.

Why stakes are higher in Big Brother Naija Season 11

Once again, entertainment lovers and viewers across Nigeria and Africa are set to clue their eyes on TV screens as Big Brother Naija returns for Season 11.

Unarguably Africa's biggest reality television show, Big Brother premieres on July 26, 2026, on DStv and GOtv.

But while more excitement is brewing for viewers, the stakes are much more higher for the contestants this time.

With N100 million cash prize and a brand new SUV, which sum up a N160 million grand prize, the highest in the history of the show, contestants have something to really fight for, making this year's show a landmark season.

As rightly pointed out by Atinuke Babatunde, executive head, Content and Channels, West Africa, MultiChoice, Season

11 builds on the legacies of previous editions with even bigger stakes, fresh twists and an exciting mix of housemates that will keep audiences engaged from premiere night through to the finale.

Apart from its higher stakes for the contestants, Babatunde assured on quality excitement for viewers, promising redefined entertainment, authentic storytelling, compelling personalities and moments that resonate with millions of viewers.

Yet, the new season is throwing up new names and faces, especially an exciting lineup of brand partners.

One of the new names is betPawa, a betting company, which is the headline sponsor of season 11.

But the familiar names include; Guinness, last season's headline sponsor, which is returning as the



Caption: Opeyemi "Imisi" Ayanwale, winner, 2025 Big Brother Naija (Season 10, also known as the "10/10" season)

gold sponsor this year. Minimie also comes onboard as an associate sponsor.

Another familiar name and face is Ebuka Obi-Uchendu, who is returning as the show's host. His return delights many viewers who anticipate a season filled with unexpected twists, dynamic tasks, strategic gameplay, entertaining challenges and the authentic interactions that have made Big Brother Naija one of Africa's most-watched reality TV show franchises.

For betPawa, leading the season's sponsors will enable it to further create unforgettable experiences that will bring people together through the things they are passionate about, with Big Brother Naija being one of such passions.

According to Borah Omary Ndanyungu, head, local marketing & CSR, betPawa, Big Brother Naija is one of Africa's most

celebrated entertainment properties, hence betPawa is proud to be the headline sponsor for Season 11.

"We look forward to rewarding fans, deepening engagement throughout the season and delivering exciting experiences that complement the energy and excitement of the show," Ndanyungu promised.

With the premiere, viewers can follow every moment of the action throughout the season on DStv, GOtv, DStv Stream and GOtv Stream, while eligible subscribers can vote through the MyDStv and MyGOtv self-service apps.

Since its return in 2017, Big Brother Naija has evolved beyond a reality TV show into a cultural phenomenon, creating household names, creating jobs across the creative economy, and shaping popular culture.

Book Presentation

Rechael Okonkwo: Giving hope to women striving to overcome life's challenges

BLESSING ADIMABUA

Women are emotional by nature, and when life does not go as planned, especially when faced with challenges, many of them tend to lose hope, while some go as far as abandoning their dreams.

According to the experts, this is why many have several unfulfilled goals in life.

To encourage women and remind them that they can rise above every setback, Rechael Okonkwo, a popular Nollywood actress, chronicled her career journey in a memoir tagged 'Odogwu Girl: From Dreams to Reality'.

Speaking at the unveiling of the book in Lagos recently, Rechael Okonkwo, popularly known as Nkoli Nwa Nsukka, said the book, which focuses on her personal journey from humble beginnings to becoming one of Nollywood's most recognisable actresses, offers readers an honest account of the obstacles, setbacks and triumphs that shaped her path to success.

She described the book as a message of hope for women and anyone striving to overcome life's challenges.

"I am happy to have written something that will inspire, encourage and motivate women to keep believing in themselves, no matter what they are going through or where they come from. I want everyone who reads this book to leave feeling encouraged and empowered," she said.

According to her, Odogwu Girl captures years of perseverance, resilience, and unwavering faith capable of inspiring young people, especially women, to believe that their circumstances do not de-



fine their future.

Known for her humanitarian initiatives and programmes that support women and young people, she said the publication aligns with her long-standing commitment to empowering others through mentorship, education and personal development.

She further said that many of the experiences shared in the book reflect lessons that have shaped both her career and her outreach efforts.

She told readers to expect practical life lessons, personal experiences and words of encouragement drawn from her own journey.

"This book is beyond acting. It contains my experiences, my insights about life and, most importantly, encouragement,"



she added.

Reflecting on what inspired the book, Rechael said her own life is a story she needed to tell.

According to her, losing her father at the age of 13 and becoming the first child responsible for helping to support five younger siblings shaped her determination to succeed despite numerous hardships.

"Life has never been easy for me, but one thing has always stood out: my decision to keep going and to thrive no matter what comes my way. My life is proof that a woman can overcome challenges, break stereotypes and still succeed," she explained.

Beyond recounting her rise in the entertainment industry, the book explores themes of determination, purpose, self-belief and resilience, encouraging readers to remain focused despite disappointments and obstacles.

Audience at the launch, including veterans in the literary and entertainment communities, described the publication as another significant achievement for the actress, adding that there has been a growing number of Nigerian entertainers who are documenting their life journeys through books to inspire future generations.

The launch of 'Odogwu Girl: From Dreams to Reality' was attended by family, friends, colleagues and admirers, who congratulated the actress on expanding her legacy beyond film into literature.

The book is expected to resonate with readers seeking motivation, practical life lessons, and an authentic account of how resilience, hard work and purpose can transform dreams into reality.

TOPE OMOGBOLAGUN

Tinubu's reforms raised Imo FAAC allocation from N100m to N10.7bn, cut debt to below N90bn - Uzodimma

Governor Hope Uzodimma has credited the economic reforms of President Bola Tinubu for the sharp increase in Imo State's revenues, saying the state's monthly allocation from the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) rose from about N100 million after salaries in 2020 to over N10.7 billion following the removal of fuel subsidy.

Uzodimma also said the state's internally generated revenue had increased from less than N400 million to nearly N6 billion monthly, while its debt profile had dropped from N287 billion in 2020 to less than N90 billion.

The governor made this known at the Government House in Owerri while receiving members of the Renewed Hope Ambassadors the Media Team who toured infrastructure projects across the state.

Drawing parallels between Nigeria's current reforms and the biblical journey of the Israelites from Egypt, Uzodimma urged Nigerians to remain patient with the Tinubu administration.

"I want to liken what is happening today in Nigeria to the experience of the Israelites in the book of Exodus," he said.

"Everything God did for the Israelites; all the wars that the Israelites won. God did not ask for anything but gratitude. He gives us therefore, a lesson to our day-to-day living on earth."

According to him, Tinubu assumed office with a clear understanding of the reforms required to reposition the country.

"When on May 29, 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu was sworn in and he started rolling out reform policies, he was a man who was prepared, who understood clearly what he came to do as

president," Uzodimma said.

Recalling the financial situation he inherited after assuming office in January 2020, the governor said the state had virtually no funds after paying salaries.

"In 2020, January 15 when I was sworn in to be governor of this state, the Accountant-General told me they were going for FAAC. He came back from the FAAC meeting. I thought he was going to bring money. He told me after salary we had only N100 million.

"Immediately May 29, 2023 came, after FAAC I saw over N10.7 billion. I said, What?"

He added, "So, when people were trying to oppose removal of subsidy, I had to put my belt and my jeans, I came out and said subsidy must be

removed.

"So, whatever this man has done to make us have access to funds to help the people. Today, I am indeed very happy and glad that we were able to deploy these resources to visible programmes and projects."

Uzodimma said the additional revenues had enabled the state to improve its finances significantly.

"I met an IGR of less than N400 million in 2020. My IGR is very close to N6 billion a month now.

"I met a debt profile... in 2020, we were owing N287 billion. Today, as I speak to you, we are less than N90 billion. So, day by day, we are reducing the debt profile so that the state can become very sovereign."

He also highlighted improvements in transportation

and electricity infrastructure across the state.

"In 2020, movement from one end of Imo State to another took an average of two to three hours. As I speak, it is under 45 minutes.

"As today I speak, we generate, we transmit, we distribute electricity. In Owerri capital, including this Government House, this is home-made electricity. By the end of this year, we will continue to expand to the local government areas. Imo is ready for business."

Uzodimma argued that governance and visible projects constituted the best form of political campaign.

"People are talking about campaigns. From May 29, 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu started his campaign for a second term.

"Campaign is getting peo-

ple to believe or buy into your vision as a leader who has come to do what you desire."

He insisted that infrastructure delivery was a better use of public resources than online political propaganda.

"Rather than spending N2.3 billion to dominate the social media, is it not better we use it to do quality roads so that you can come and see for yourself? So, sustainable development, that is the business we are doing here."

The governor maintained that the projects executed in Imo were made possible by the Federal Government's economic reforms.

"What you have seen, it is only possible because of the reform policies of the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

"Our people have already decided that they want President Bola Ahmed Tinubu back as president because without him and his policies and programmes, this environment we are enjoying today would have been very impossible to achieve."

Trend

Why leadership narratives matter in Nigeria's 'Olodo Uprising' moment

By every indication, Nigeria's youth are no longer simply asking to be heard; they are asking to be taken seriously.

OMOLARAENI OLAOSEBIKAN

Over the past week, what began as a social media trend under the banner of the "Olodo Uprising" quickly evolved into a national conversation. Beyond the memes, debates and outrage lies a deeper question about the kind of society Nigeria is becoming: one where many young people increasingly believe that hard work, education and talent no longer guarantee opportunity.

Whether that perception is entirely accurate is almost beside the point. Perception drives confidence, confidence shapes behaviour, and behaviour ultimately influences national development.

That is why leadership communication matters.

The recent suggestion by the First Lady that young Nigerians could consider selling kulikuli and akara as a means of livelihood generated strong reactions across the country. There is little reason to doubt that the advice was offered in good faith. Yet communication is judged not only by the intentions behind it but also by the context in which it is delivered.

At a time when millions of young Nigerians are navigating a difficult economy, rising living costs and uncertain career prospects, many interpreted the message as disconnected from the scale of the challenge before them.

This should not be mistaken for disrespect towards small businesses. Across Nigeria, countless families have built honest and dignified livelihoods selling food, running market stalls, and operating small enterprises. These businesses are the backbone of our informal economy and deserve recognition, not condescension. But there is an important distinction between respecting entrepreneurship and reducing national economic ambition to subsistence.

Selling akara can sustain a household. It cannot, on its own, address a youth employment challenge in a nation of more than 230 million people. It cannot replace industrial policy, strengthen education, expand access to finance, or create the scale of opportunity that Nigeria's growing



youth population requires. That is where the conversation should begin.

As someone who works in strategic communications and reputation management, I have learned that narratives are never neutral. Every message sends a signal about priorities, values, and expectations. In moments of economic uncertainty, public communication does more than explain policy; it shapes hope, confidence and belief in the future.

Words matter because they influence what people believe is possible. When leadership narratives appear to redefine survival as empowerment, they unintentionally lower expectations. They shift the conversation from building prosperity to managing hardship.

Nigeria's young people are asking for something fundamentally

different. They are not demanding guarantees of success. They are asking for a fair chance to succeed.

Nigeria's young people are ask-

Nigeria's youthful population remains one of its greatest competitive advantages, but only if we choose to invest in it

ing for something fundamentally different. They are not demanding guarantees of success; they are asking for a fair chance. A fair chance to receive an education that prepares them for today's economy, to access finance that turns promising ideas into viable businesses, and to compete in an economy where competence, innovation and enterprise are rewarded. Above all, they want leadership that matches the scale of their aspirations.

Too often, our national conversation celebrates resilience while overlooking the conditions that make resilience necessary in the first place. Nigerians are undoubtedly resilient. We have demonstrated extraordinary ingenuity in difficult circumstances. But resilience should never become a substitute for sound economic policy, nor should survival become the benchmark for successful youth empowerment.

Nigeria's youthful population remains one of its greatest competitive advantages, but only if we choose to invest in it. That investment begins with an education system aligned to the demands of a changing economy. It requires stronger collaboration between government, industry, and academia, while expanding access to affordable finance for young entrepreneurs whose ideas often fail, not because they lack promise, but because they lack capital.

It also demands an economy that creates jobs at scale. Manufacturing contributes less than one-tenth of Nigeria's GDP, while sectors such as technology, agribusiness, renewable energy, and the creative economy remain capable of absorbing far more young talent than they currently do. Unlocking that potential requires deliberate policy, long-term thinking and consistent execution.

The private sector has responsibilities too. Businesses cannot continue lamenting the shortage of skilled talent while investing too little in internships, apprenticeships, mentorship and workforce development. Building Nigeria's future workforce is a shared responsibility.

The media also has a role to play. We cannot continue rewarding outrage while neglecting ideas. Every viral controversy should become an opportunity for deeper

conversations about productivity, competitiveness, innovation, and inclusive economic growth. The stories we amplify shape the society we eventually become. Perhaps that is the greatest lesson from the so-called "Olodo Uprising."

It is not merely about one comment, one public figure, or one week of social media debates. It is about a generation searching for evidence that its country believes in its potential.

History shows that nations rise or fall on how they treat their young people. Countries that invest in youth create innovation, prosperity, and social stability. Those that fail to do so eventually pay the price through declining productivity, talent migration, widening inequality, and growing public frustration.

Nigeria now stands at one of those defining moments. Leadership is not only about making policy. It is about communicating possibility, inspiring confidence, and creating the conditions for people to believe that their future is worth building at home.

Our national conversation should therefore move beyond whether young people can sell kulikuli or akara. The more important question is whether Nigeria is creating an environment where a young person can build a technology company, establish a manufacturing business, commercialise an agricultural innovation, produce globally competitive creative content or transform a small enterprise into a multinational brand. That is the standard by which genuine youth empowerment should be measured.

Nigeria's young people have spoken with remarkable clarity. The challenge before our leaders is not simply to respond with comforting words, but to match those words with a vision worthy of the generation that will inherit this nation.

Final thought

The debate was never really about kulikuli or akara. Nor was it simply about another week of social media controversy. It was about the stories a nation tells its young people, and the futures those stories make possible. Leadership begins with policy, but it is sustained by narrative.

Because in the end, the narratives we choose today shape the realities we will live tomorrow.

Sport

Shearer tips Liverpool to target \$135M rated Brazilian winger

Stories by JOHN SALAU

Former England and Newcastle forward Alan Shearer has tipped Liverpool to make a transfer swoop for \$135 million rated Brazil winger Rayan.

Shearer believes the winger would be reunited with Andoni Iraola being one of the stars of his Bournemouth team.

Rayan has been linked with a move to Liverpool this summer in some quarters, despite only arriving in the Premier League back in January, and Shearer says it would be a great option to target.

"They're going to have to replace Salah on that side. Rayan obviously worked with Andoni Iraola last year and he's clearly going on to big things, so that would be a big one for Liverpool," Shearer told Betfair when asked about Liverpool and Rayan.

With Mohamed Salah having moved on, Liverpool needs someone to come in



and play off the right-hand side.

Federico Chiesa, who has never been a regular starter, is the only senior player who operates in that position at the moment.

"Liverpool are going to have to make two or three big signings and that would start them off nicely.

"They were pretty awful last year in terms of where they wanted to be, so they have to go out and they have to sign."

Andoni Iraola is spearheading a new era at Liverpool this summer following his arrival from Bournemouth.

Earlier last week, Iraola confirmed that Liverpool is pursuing a right winger.

The Spaniard is anticipating further signings this summer as he reshapes his new squad alongside sporting director Richard Hughes.

"We cannot expect to sign a winger that is going to replace Mo Salah because otherwise we are preparing him to fail almost," Iraola said.

Celtic needs about £10m on summer transfer rebuild - former captain

Paul Lambert, a former captain of Scottish Championship side Celtic says the club needs between £8 million to £10 million in rebuilding during this summer's transfer window.

"Celtic is not a development club, it's a winning club where you have to win titles. You have to compete.

"You have to compete domestically and you have to compete in European terms," says Lambert who captained Celtic during

manager Martin O'Neill's first spell at the club.

The former captain said Celtic are currently nowhere near good enough without further recruitment - but added that there is no need for "panic."

Striker Camilo Duran is the sole summer arrival so far for the Scottish champions, while midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain has signed a new contract after a short-term deal last term.

But forward Kelechi Ihe-

anacho and former left-back loanee Marcelo Saracchi, who had been linked with returns, will not be back in Glasgow this season.

Iheanacho has joined Bursaspor as a free agent, while Saracchi bade farewell to Celtic fans on social media and said he and his agent "did absolutely everything within our power to make a return to Glasgow happen".

Also, Maik Nawrocki, the German centre-half has been sold to Lens.

"The squad's not strong enough," Lambert told BBC Radio Scotland's Sport-sound.

Michael Nicholson, Celtic's chief executive, disclosed earlier that the Scottish champions are finding it "difficult" to attract top players.

According to him, Scottish champions are competing with English Premier League and Championship clubs for players and dealing with agents.



Antonelli takes Belgium pole from Verstappen

Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli took a scintillating pole position at the Belgian Grand Prix, leaving team-mate and title rival George Russell trailing in fourth, more than 0.5 seconds adrift.

The Italian, who leads the championship from Russell by 25 points, beat Red Bull's Max Verstappen by 0.317secs, even though the four-time champion had the help of a tow from team-mate Isack Hadjar.

McLaren's Lando Norris was an impressive third, 0.440secs back, despite bailing on his final lap, but the world champion has a 10-place grid penalty for exceeding his allowance of engine parts.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton were fifth and sixth, ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri and the upgraded Racing Bull of British rookie Arvid Lindblad.

Antonelli has looked the man to beat since topping Friday practice and he delivered on his potential with his sixth pole position in 10 races so far this year.

On the slowing down lap, he sent his best wishes to his



father Marco, who is celebrating his 61st birthday on Saturday.

Red Bull employed Hadjar to help Verstappen with a slipstream on the long flat-out section to the final chicane as the Frenchman has a 30-place grid penalty for taking a new engine, which puts him over the limit for the year.

Verstappen said: "It was

definitely helping me otherwise I would not be standing here, it would be P6 or something.

"Isack, knowing he had a penalty and would be starting at the back, he helped me. I will be looking in my mirrors tomorrow. But we are happy to be on the front row with how we executed it as a team."

Sport

NFF supports programmes that enhance capacity of women in football - Sanusi

Stories by JOHN SALAU

Mohammed Sanusi, the General Secretary of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), has assured stakeholders that the present administration will not cease to support programmes that seek to enhance the capacity of women in football or advance the cause of the girl-child.

Sanusi made this known while declaring open the FIFA capacity-building workshop for women football administrators in Nigeria, on Friday July 17, in Abuja.

The NFF general secretary noted that women empowerment and elevation remain priori-



ties for the current NFF leadership.

He also conveyed the goodwill message of Ibrahim Musa Gusau, the NFF President, while urging the participants to remain focused and ensure that lessons from the programme are translated into practical action within the football space.

"The present NFF administration headed by Alhaji Ibrahim Musa Gusau is very passionate about the issue of women empowerment."

The NFF scribe described the workshop as timely and important, stressing that the Federation will continue to back initiatives aimed at developing women in football administration.

"You must ensure that whatever you learn here is translated to reality. How do you translate it?

It is in the way and manner you comport yourself in society, and how you lead in administration.

"We have had several women's programmes, ranging from the CAF D Coaching Course to the CAF C-License course (exclusively for women), to the recent WAFU B Women Administrators' program."

The three-day workshop, facilitated by FIFA, is designed to equip women administrators with modern tools for governance, competition management, marketing, and the development of the women's game in Nigeria.

The programme is part of FIFA's commitment to strengthening the capacity of Member Associations to grow women's football at all levels.

WAFU B U20 Tourney: Flying Eagles begin title defence against Black Satellites in Yamoussoukro

Nigeria's U20 boys, Flying Eagles, will kick off their WAFU B title defence against the Black Satellites of Ghana on Monday July 27, at the Lycée Scientifique de Yamoussoukro in Côte d'Ivoire.

The match, which is a repeat of the 2024 final in Lome, in which the Flying Eagles defeated the Satellites 2-1 to emerge cham-

pions, will kick off at 2pm local time (3pm Nigeria time).

The Coach Abdu Maikaba-led side will depart the shores of Nigeria on Monday after weeks of intensive training and screening in Abuja.

Matchday 2 on July 30 will see the seven-time African champions trade tackles with Junior Sparrow Hawks of Togo at the same Lycée Scientifique de

Yamoussoukro.

The game is scheduled to get underway at 2pm local time (3pm Nigeria time).

The Cup-holders will wrap up their group B matches against Young Stallions of Burkina Faso on August 2, also at the Lycée Scientifique with kick-off time scheduled at 2pm local time (3pm Nigeria time).



Stars Builders, Greenpeg partner for 2026/27 football season

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan.

Stars Builders, a fast-rising Nigerian football Academy, has announced a partnership agreement with Greenpeg Engineering ahead of the 2026/27 football season.

Stars Builders' management disclosed that the partnership will help the team in accelerating the growth of the academy in no distant future.

"We have been trying our best, and along the line, we realised that we needed partners who can help us grow. Thankfully, Greenpeg came along," Ayodeji Adegbenro, CEO, Stars Builders, stated.

He added that the management wants the Academy's growth to be organic, which informed its current status in the Nationwide League One (NLO).

"It is a partnership that started many years ago in a hostel room in FUTA about 25 years ago, even though we are just signing the papers now.

Our values align, and



Greenpeg is the perfect partner to accompany us on this journey. We do hope that this is the start of something beautiful and long-term," Adegbenro stated.

He also disclosed that the Academy hopes to compete in the NPFL against the likes of Enyimba, Sporting Lagos, among others.

Since its establishment in 2021, Stars Builders have made rapid strides in Nigerian grassroots football.

After winning the Ogun State League in their debut campaign in 2022, the academy achieved back-to-back promotions to reach the Nationwide League

One (NLO), the third tier of Nigerian football, ahead of the new season.

"We are excited about this partnership with Stars Builders," Bolaji Adegkunle, MD, Greenpeg Engineering, stated.

According to him, Greenpeg Engineering is a multifaceted engineering firm that specializes in procuring essential and hard-to-find industrial components.

"What Stars Builders are doing is not entirely different from that. So it makes it easier for us from an impact perspective; the interest has grown so far and will continue to grow," Adegkunle stated.

Tackling the menace of illegal mining in Nigeria

Though Nigeria is abundantly blessed with over 44 solid minerals, spread across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, with these enormous resources expected to drive sustained construction, power generation, and manufacturing, the menace of

Illegal mining in the country costs an estimated, whopping \$9 billion annually in lost revenue.

Furthermore, illegal mining severely degrades the green environment, and directly fuels the recurring insecurity. This crisis is characterized by three main threats such as Insecurity and banditry: Illicit extraction—particularly of gold, lithium, and tin. These are intertwined with armed conflict, banditry, and militia groups that use the proceeds to fund their operations.

So serious the matter is that the Osun State Governor Ademola Adeleke recently raised the alarm over an unregulated influx of individuals from northern states into Osun's mining communities. He warned that these movements risk importing banditry and terrorism financing.

That informed the establishment of a Mining Community Intelligence Architecture with the noble aim to combat banditry and criminal infiltration linked to illegal mining in the state. The new security framework mandates the creation of seven-member community committees across the Ife-Ijesa axis to profile newcomers and improve intelligence gathering.

In other parts of the country, the most affected areas with the key mineral deposits that span from industrial materials including limestone and kaolin to precious metals like gold and lithium are Zamfara, Kaduna, Kogi, Kwara, down to Ondo, Osun and Oyo.

For instance, some of the major, commercially viable solid minerals and their primary states of occurrence, include gold and lithium found in states

"Illegal mining has evolved into a major national security threat, linked to criminal and terrorist financing... Combating it has become an urgent priority to stop economic sabotage."

— **NSCDC/Mining Marshals Squad**

such as Zamfara, Kaduna, Kwara, and Nasarawa. Also, industrial minerals like limestone/kaolin/talc are located across Kogi, Ogun, Sokoto, and Niger states. As for energy and metal ores such as coal/iron ore/tin they are found mostly in Enugu, Kogi, and Plateau states.

Other important deposits including lead/zinc are found in large quantities in Ebonyi/Taraba while bitumen is in Ondo and Lagos states. This piece of vital information is, based on data from Facebook USAfrika.

The resultant effects of illegal mining include environmental disasters: unregulated excavation and the use of toxic chemicals that severely degrade farmlands and contaminate important water sources, such as the Osun River.

With regards to economic sabotage there are foreign cartels and illicit syndicates who exploit artisanal miners, smuggling strategic minerals out of the country with little to no taxation or royalties returning to local communities. And it has been revealed that some of the traditional rulers are accomplices in this unpatriotic act. But what are the significant factors facilitating illegal mining of minerals in Nigeria? That is the million-naira question.

According to experts on solid mineral mining and the after effects on the host communities in particular and the country in general, illegal mining thrives here due to extreme poverty, weak regulatory enforcement, and powerful cartels that smuggle billions in minerals annually. There are also corrupt elites and foreign actors who fund illicit operations, while locals participate for mainly for survival, as we are currently experiencing in the country. But what is of importance are the needed steps to be taken to frontally tackle the criminal act and save the country from its deleterious, socio-economic effects?

Solutions to illegal mining in Nigeria require a holistic and multi-dimensional approach that combines technology, law enforcement, policy formalization, and community integration. In this regard, according to the Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake, the federal government is deploying,

an uncompromising crackdown on illegal mining and its financial sponsors. He emphasised it as a national security threat that fuels banditry.

The government is therefore, utilising tech-infused surveillance and the Nigeria Mining Marshals to dismantle illicit camps nationwide. But more has to be done than said for the enforcement of this laudable initiative.

In the light of this is zero tolerance for sponsors of illegal mining in the country. That perhaps, explains why the Ministry is actively tracking wealthy backers and financiers of illegal operations. That is, rather than focusing mainly on low-level artisanal workers. So far, operations have resulted in the arrest of over 300 illegal miners and the prosecution of more than 150 suspects, including foreign nationals. This is highly commendable.

Another bold step taken forward to secure vast mining corridors is the Federal Executive Council (FEC)'s approval of N2.5 billion for satellite surveillance



AYO OYOZE BAJE

Baje is Nigerian first food technologist in the media and author of 'Drumbeats of Democracy'

equipment to monitor mining sites in real-time.

Hitting the nail on the head, Alake has urged the traditional rulers and local communities to stop the selling of land to unauthorised miners and to report illicit activities to security agencies.

Good enough, it is on record that the Ministry of Solid Minerals has revoked thousands of dormant mining titles and continues to formalise artisanal miners into regulated cooperatives to plug revenue leakages. There are ongoing efforts to track ongoing enforcement updates and read official statements directly on the Ministry of Solid Minerals Development portal.

On the whole, much as one commends efforts to curb this menace, the federal and state governments should keep enforcing the crackdowns and regulatory reforms through the Mining Marshals. Also, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) who are deployed as a specialised squad of "Mining Marshals." should be well trained and equipped to curb the activities of the criminals.

Doing so will eventually save Nigeria from the loss of huge revenue, protect the environment from degradation and provide livelihood for several job-seeking Nigerians.



IKEDDY ISIGUZO

Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues

MANY who think they know Trigo Egbegi, easily Nigeria's most in-depth boxing writer, never knew the man who immersed himself so much into boxing that he pined away as the sport he loved went into irrelevance with such declivity that he could not stand it.

Trigo, Aboy Trigo, as I called him, did very few things because he was not interested in things that did not elicit his passion. Aboy was a testimony to his youthful looks. He called me Ikeddyleeeeeee, drawing the added letters until they sounded like a village ululation. He was nine years older than me.

A roar of laughter rounded off the salutations before we delved into "national issues".

He was a private person. Growing up between Ghana and Nigeria, working for Prisons, playing for its football, produced a man who weighed his words before using them.

Quiet though not for lack of something to say. When he spoke, it was usually a probing question that dripped with wisdom. His position could redirect a conversation. He was so spartan that it appeared he had no needs.

The rigour that resulted in his pieces is more appreciated by those who know his work ethic. Often, Trigo could spend hours waiting to recollect a word that he thought best fitted into a sentence. He could take a lunch break, took off to join a banter session, but he must find that word that brings his description of a situation to live.

Deed done, he rubs his palms once more as if to acknowledge the conclusion of that phase of a journey to another masterpiece.

To know Trigo is to know a man who accorded his work due diligence, a man who was fair to all parties and seemed not to have enemies or they were enamoured with his work and forgave his trespasses.

Trigo was established before we met physically. If you did not read boxing stories because of him, it was a matter time for you to be converted.

He was on the pages of Daily Times, The

Two weeks without Trigo Egbegi, my brother, my friend

Guardian, where he was an able deputy to our now departed boss, Sunny Ojeagbase. The great desk also had Chris Okojie, later my boss at Vanguard, Mitchell Obi, who brought new verve to football reporting, and Pat Opara, our Sub-Editor who reported golf in unforgettable ways.

Trigo was later Sports Editor of The National Concord, The Republic, SportsLink and the Sportsword.

He was the one who received me to The Guardian in August 1983 when I arrived for the National Youth Service Corps and handed me a list of things Mr. Ojeagbase who was covering Wimbledon from where he continued to the US Open, had made. I was to learn it was Mr. Ojeagbase's practice to assign roles specifically.

The desk had great team spirit which accounted for the fast ascendancy of The Guardian sports reporting. The only complaint about Trigo was that he would not be hurried. We let him be.

In semi retirement, he anchored the renowned TV show titled "Big Fights of the decade" on the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA. He held Nigerians in rapt attention for the one hour duration of the programme.

With encouragement from Onochie Anibeze, he wrote a weekly boxing column in the Vanguard. His interest had waned. Trigo was focused in travelling to US where his daughter was with a relation.

He called as circumstances permitted and had his heart back home. One day, his voice rang with joy as he announced that he was back. He considered life in US too boring.

Trigo had a knack for reporting boxing with details that others miss easily. Each time I read his reports, I was boxing reporter then at The Punch, I felt inadequate. He was a motivation to do better.

Those reports we cherished arrived through loads of risks. Trigo would travel to Lanlate, in Oyo State, Nigeria's satellite town, spend the night, to watch those fights staged at unholy hours.

He knew the big boxers of the decades and reeled out statistics and their fighting styles as if they were filled away in an invisible library he can always call up.

Trigo was gratitude in motion. During the trying 2021 flooding that had most of Bayelsa under water, I made a post that he was safe.

Many of our colleagues asked for his contacts and sent him money, well beyond his modest expectations. He was very grateful and regretted he had no way of reaching them most of them to say 'thank you'.

A great family man, Trigo cared beyond his immediate family. The larger Egbegi family literally was in hell until Captain Graham Egbegi, a younger brother, was released by Somali pirates in June 2009 after a traumatic 10-month hostage ordeal. Egbegi was commanding the MV Yenagoa Ocean, a vessel operated by a 10-man, all-Nigerian crew. Somali pirates intercepted and hijacked the ship in the Gulf of Aden/Indian Ocean on August 4, 2008, while the crew was sailing the newly purchased vessel to Nigeria from Dubai. The pirates wanted \$1m-\$2m ransom which they said the Nigerian government can easily pay. Trigo was to be seen in Abuja moving from office to office seeking assistance to free his brother.

One of my regrets is not honouring Trigo's invitations to his home in Yenagoa. He visited me twice in Toru-Orua, Sagbama local government area. On one occasion he slept over. We barely slept. There were too many memories from the one year I spent with that great team at The Guardian.

Alfred, his younger brother, who I have never met sent me the Facebook messenger item on 5 July: Trigo was gone.

I was benumbed. We had spoken on 25 June, 10 days earlier. The connection was unfriendly and we promised to speak later. That never happened.

Was that the farewell? What a farewell!

Condolences to his wife, children, the larger Egbegi family and all whose life Trigo impacted.

May the Almighty rest my brother, my friend, Aboy Trigo.

Finally...

FROM where did we get a Senate President called Obong Godswill Akpabio who thinks his brief consists mostly in making light of sensitive public issues. A former university Vice-Chancellor was being screened for an ambassadorial position. Different groups were opposed to his confirmation based on allegations of sexual harassment against him by his university staff. The case is in court. Adams Oshiomole, a notable Akpabio opponent, rose against the confirmation, suggesting that the

nominee can wait until he clears the matter in court. Akpabio started giggling, choking in his own laughter before reminding Oshiomole of a senator who was caught massaging a girl's leg in a private jet. Akpabio was about now beside him in raucous laughter that left him rocking in his chair. He was referencing a February incident involving Oshiomole. The differences were glaring and exposed Akpabio's shallowness - the Oshiomole issue seemed consensual, nobody has complained of harassment, there is no case in court over the leg massage, and Oshiomole was not being screened for an ambassadorial position. Akpabio can trifle with anything dragging his high office down with it.

MINISTER of Works David Umahi has neither the sobriety nor appreciation of the public outrage after news broke that a corpse was moved out of the Minister's Uburu home in Ebonyi State. Umuahi moved faster, including allegedly leaving the crime scene before investigation started. He is the one relating a private telephone conversation between the deceased Mary Habila and her unnamed boyfriend to the public. The story keeps spiralling in different angles, with Umahi knocking off parts he doesn't like. With investigation in full swing, a mourning Umahi is back to work. We would not have known if he didn't announce, "That (coastal) highway is named President Bola Ahmed Tinubu Coastal Highway. By the powers conferred on me as Minister of Works, in consultation with my Permanent Secretary, the Minister of State, directors and staff of the ministry, we decided to name it after him because of his dream for it," Umahi said. All these as Habila's death and its controversies continue.

KILLINGS and kidnapping continued in different parts of Nigeria, Plateau and Benue States, particularly. Muted attention has attended the attacks. Attacked communities in Idoma reportedly rejected coffins and a N5 million donation from Governor Hyacinth Alia. They said they want security not humiliating hand downs to bury their dead.

SAFE schools. Everyone mouths it. Nobody seems to know what to do about it. Oriire pupils and teachers released, students writing national examinations in Kogi State abducted. There is a lot of work yet undone.