

**FDI: Enugu Govt, Haier Group launch \$20m factory, set for \$30m expansion**

REGIS ANUKWUOJI

**G**overnor Peter Mbah of Enugu State, on Saturday, inaugurated the Enugu Haier

Factory, a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by the Chinese Haier Global Business in partnership with the state government.

At the event, Sun Yongle, vice president of Haier Group, said that the FDI

**Continues on Page 51**

See story  
on page 48

# Despite record FAAC windfalls, states sink deeper into debt, poverty worsens

**Shock, mixed reactions trail Kwankwaso's name on US 'extremists' list**



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**Valentine in the digital age: What has happened to its economy?**



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**Life feels like climbing a mountain daily for Lupus patients**



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**Northern economy and the tightening grip of terror and banditry**



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**Ineffective intelligence or sheer negligence?**



L-R: Arinola Odulana, 2nd vice president; Grace Oladimeji, 1st vice president; Nurudeen Ojora-Adejiyan, president, all of ALARHOSPS; Adesegun Ogunlewe, chairman, BoT, Association of Lagos State Retired Heads of Service and Permanent Secretaries (ALARHOSPS); Governor Babajide Sanwo-olu; Abeke Taire; MA Olagbeye; Folashade Jaji, former Head of Service, and Kayode Braimoh, during a courtesy visit to the governor at Lagos House, Marina on Friday.

## Transmission 'Wahala': As lawmakers tinker, trust in 2027 election wanes

■ INEC fixes dates for polls amid Electoral Act delay

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

**B**y 8 a.m. on February 20, 2027, millions of Nigerians are expected to queue under the sun, ballot papers in hand, once again placing their faith in a system many believe is still struggling to protect their votes. Yet, nearly a year before the first ballot is cast, a battle in Abuja over how results should be transmitted is already

casting a long shadow over the credibility of the exercise.

At the heart of the controversy is the amendment to the Electoral Act currently before the National Assembly. The dispute is not about who will win the election, but about how the votes will travel, from polling units to collation centres and ultimately into the national consciousness.

**The transmission question**  
For many Nigerians, the debate boils down to one word:

transparency.

Since the introduction of the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) Result Viewing Portal (IReV) during the 2023 general election, citizens have grown accustomed to the idea that results from polling units can be uploaded electronically, creating a digital trail that reduces room for manipulation.

But the Senate's handling of the amendment has unset-

**Continues on page 50**

## Disaster waiting to happen as developers build on buffer zones

■ Environmentalists raise alarm  
■ Urge govt to take urgent action to mitigate disaster

OBINNA EMELIKE and JOHN SALAU

**W**hen Festac Town was commissioned in 1977, it was the most glamorous estate that even those in highbrow Ikoyi, Victoria Island and Ikeja GRA desired to live in.

"I have never seen this level of beauty and organised living in any part of the country. The town is alluring," Pa

Isibor Ehimen, a young artist with the then Bendel State contingent, said.

The octogenarian, who is now retired and lives in Ekpoma, would cry if he visited Festac Town today because the beauty has not just faded, but gone.

There are many who witnessed the town at its peak, when it was still an organised and decent place to live, when the trees offered shade from

**Continues on page 49**

# News

## Kwara PDP chieftain, Ajia, dumps opposition for APC

...Throws weight behind Tinubu's security push

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

**M**ohammed Ajia Ibrahim, a philanthropist and politician of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), has formally announced his decision to defect to the All Progressives Congress (APC), citing conscience, patriotism, and national duty as reasons behind his move.

In a press statement he personally signed and made available to newsmen on Monday, Ajia said his decision followed months of deep reflection, wide consultations and a careful examination of Nigeria's current political and security realities.

He explained that his upbringing from a humble background, where his parents laboured tirelessly to cater for their family, shaped his life-long commitment to public service and improving the

lives of ordinary Nigerians.

"I took a firm decision from an early age to do whatever is within my powers to make life more meaningful for as many people as I can. That has remained my guiding principle in life, and it has shaped my involvement in business and politics," he stated.

Ajia noted that after evaluating various political platforms, he concluded that the APC currently offers the most realistic avenue for him to contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's security and survival, particularly at a time the country is grappling with insurgency, banditry and other forms of criminality.

He specifically commended President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for appointing General Christopher Musa as Chief of Defence Staff and later as Minister of Defence, describing the appointment as a reassuring signal of the administration's seriousness in tackling the nation's security challenges.

According to him, General Musa is a disciplined and a professional officer who does not approach issues of insurgency and criminality with sentiment or bias, adding that the appointment strengthened his confidence in the present government's commitment to addressing insecurity.

Drawing from his background and experience, Ajia said his understanding of Nigeria's security challenges is based on practical engagement rather than theory, noting that years of neglect, manipulation and socio-economic hardship have pushed many young people into violence.

He stressed the need for a holistic approach that combines professionalism at the leadership level with meaningful grassroots engagement, particularly with the youth, as a pathway to ending insecurity in the country.

"I believe strongly that without engaging the younger

generation with understanding and compassion, Nigeria cannot defeat insecurity," he said.

Ajia further clarified that his decision to join the APC was not motivated by any intention to seek elective office or political appointment, disclosing that since his resignation from the Nigeria Police Force in 2017, he has not accepted any government appointment and has continued to serve the nation in his personal capacity.

He reaffirmed his readiness to support ongoing efforts to combat insurgency and insecurity using his knowledge of Nigeria's security landscape, his professional experience and his grassroots connections.

The APC stalwart expressed optimism that with a combination of professional leadership at the top and community-based understanding at the grassroots, Nigeria can overcome its current security challenges.



L-R: Chairman, Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) Nigeria; Group CEO NNPCL, Bayo Ojulari; Manager Communications, Chevron Nigeria Ltd, Victor Anyaegbudi; Events - Communications, Corporate Affairs Joy Emeghara and Chief Relations Officer, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Ltd, Morenike Adewumi during Ojulari's visit to Chevron Stand at the Nigeria International Energy Summit with the theme: 'Energy for Peace and Prosperity' in Abuja.

## Dangote Cement bolsters Kogi healthcare with multi-million-naira cottage hospital at Obajana

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE, Lokoja

**I**n a major move to expand healthcare access in Nigeria, Dangote Cement Plc has announced plans to deliver a state-of-the-art multimillion naira cottage hospital in its plant community of Obajana, Kogi State.

In a statement from Branding and Corporate Communication Department of the company made available to journalists in Lokoja on Thursday, Azad Nawabuddin, Plant director of Dangote Cement Plc, Obajana, described the project as a critical pillar of the company's ongoing commitment to the well-being of its host communities.

He said: "The facility is

designed to provide comprehensive primary and secondary medical services to thousands of residents across the plant's catchment areas.

"The cottage hospital will significantly reduce the burden on state-owned medical facilities by providing modern equipment and specialised care closer to the people."

The Plant Director said that the project shows the company's "good neighbourliness" philosophy, ensuring that industrial growth translates directly into tangible social benefits for the local population, as he commends the Kogi State Government for fostering a conducive environment for industrial operations.

He lauded the government

of the state for focusing on peace, security and development of the state.

Ademola Adeyemi, general manager, Social Performance Department at the Obajana Plant, equally noted that the new hospital was a strategic addition to the company's healthcare portfolio, adding that it follows the successful delivery of a multimillion-naira clinic at the Iwaa community in 2021, which has since become a lifeline for residents in the Lokoja Local Government Area.

Reacting to the development, the Bajana of Obajana, Idowu Isenibi, expressed deep appreciation for the company's sustained interest in the community's welfare.

"We are immensely grate-

ful to the Dangote Cement Plc and the management of the plant for this life-saving initiative. This hospital represents a new chapter for our people, who have long looked forward to having a world-class medical facility right at their doorstep to handle emergencies and routine care," he said.

The traditional ruler, however, urged the company to maintain the momentum to ensure the project's timely delivery.

"While we celebrate this milestone, I want to appeal to the management for the prompt and seamless release of funds required for the various stages of construction. Our prayer is to see this project completed and commissioned in record time, so that

## CSR-in-Action, ACI unveil committee for Women SDG Conference 2026 to mark International Women's Day

ANTHONY NLEBEM

**T**he African CleanUp Initiative (ACI), in strategic partnership with CSR-in-Action Advocacy, has announced the Women SDG Advocates Conference (WSAC) 2026, themed 'Give to Gain: Empowering Women Through Shared Action.'

The hybrid conference, scheduled for March 11, 2026, will take place at The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), Commerce House, Lagos. It is expected to convene more than 200 women leaders advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across communities, business and the public sector.

Organisers have also unveiled the Conference Committee, which will provide strategic oversight and drive stakeholder engagement ahead of the event. The committee is chaired by Dr. Bekeme Masade-Olowola, Group Chief Executive of CSR-in-Action, alongside Victoria Uwadoka, Corporate Communications, Public Affairs and Sustainability Lead at Nestle Nigeria. Other members include Titilope Ogungba, Director of Sustainability at IHS Towers, and Bukola Adeoye, Executive Director, Corporate Services, System Specs Holdings Limited.

Positioned as a high-level strategic convening, WSAC 2026 will assemble women leaders, entrepreneurs, civil society actors, development practitioners and corporate stakeholders committed to accelerating SDG implementation. Commemorating International Women's Day 2026, the conference is designed to catalyse partnerships, inspire shared responsibility and promote scalable,

measurable solutions.

The theme reflects the value of collaboration, highlighting how collective contributions can amplify voices, strengthen outcomes and drive meaningful impact for women and communities.

Alexander Akhigbe, founder and chief executive of ACI, described the initiative as a strategic investment in sustainable development. "Empowering women is not charity; it is a global strategy for sustainable development. When women SDG advocates rise together, they unlock opportunities that transform communities and nations," he said.

The programme will feature keynote addresses, panel discussions, spotlight sessions and interactive workshops covering funding access, strategic partnerships, advocacy, digital innovation and impact measurement. Structured networking and partnership clinics will further support collaboration and accountability.

Dr. Masade-Olowola emphasised the importance of disciplined execution. "Progress on sustainability and the SDGs requires clear priorities, delivery-focused partnerships and rigorous measurement. WSAC 2026 will spotlight proven women-led solutions while equipping participants with practical tools to strengthen results beyond the event," she noted.

Oreoluwa Finnih, special adviser on Sustainable Development Goals and Investment (SDGI) to the Lagos State Governor, will deliver a special keynote address, while Eunice Akhigbe will serve as Master of Ceremonies. The event will be held physically at LCCI, with virtual participation available. Zenera Consulting is among the supporting partners.

the immediate benefits of quality healthcare can begin to reach every family in Obajana and beyond," Oba Isenibi said.

Officials from the Social Performance Department stated that the hospital would offer several advantages, including reduced infant mortality rates, improved maternal health, and rapid emergency response for the community.

They said beyond healthcare, Dangote Cement has a track record of impactful CSR programmes in Kogi State.

These include the recent expansion of its scholarship scheme to the Oworo community, providing financial support to students in higher institutions.

Other recent interventions in the state include the installa-

tion of 50 solar-powered streetlights, the construction of drainage systems, and the conversion of motorized boreholes to solar power to ensure a steady water supply for host communities.

The company has also provided Farmers Assistance Grants and vocational training for women and youths in Oyo and Iwaa.

The company has also delivered the 43km Obajana-Kabba road, Nigeria's longest concrete road.

A statement from the Branding and Corporate Communications Department of the company said that the hospital was expected to be fully equipped with modern diagnostic tools and staffed by qualified medical professionals.


**BUSINESS DAY**

# STATES COMPETITIVENESS / INVESTMENT READINESS AWARDS (SCIRA) 2026

## PUBLIC CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

### States Competitiveness / Investment Readiness Awards (SCIRA) 2026

#### Recognising the States Shaping Nigeria's Economic Future

BusinessDay Media Limited, Nigeria's leading business, economic and policy intelligence platform, hereby announces a **public call for nominations for the States Competitiveness / Investment Readiness Awards (SCIRA)**.

The call is open to the general public, including but not limited to:

State Governments and Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)  
Private sector operators and investors  
Business associations and chambers of commerce  
Development partners and civil society organisations  
Policy analysts, researchers, and informed citizens

SCIRA is a data-driven, evidence-based national platform established to recognise states that are translating policy into performance, reform into results, and governance into measurable economic value.

By opening the nomination process to the public, SCIRA reinforces its core principle: credibility is strengthened through transparency, plurality, and independent verification.

#### Award Categories (Competitiveness Pillars)

States will be evaluated across the following nine pillars of competitiveness and investment readiness:

1. **Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) Growth**  
Fiscal efficiency, revenue diversification, and sustainability of own-source revenues.
2. **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) & Capital Attraction**  
Ability to attract, retain, and convert domestic and foreign investment into productive assets.
3. **Ease of Doing Business (EoDB)**  
Regulatory efficiency, institutional responsiveness, and the quality of the business operating environment.
4. **Infrastructure Competitiveness**  
Quality, functionality, resilience, and economic impact of physical and social infrastructure.
5. **Health Insurance Coverage & Health Systems Strength**  
Expansion of coverage, financial protection, and access to quality healthcare outcomes.
6. **Education & Human Capital Development**  
Investment depth, workforce readiness, skills alignment, and long-term productivity outcomes.
7. **Agriculture & Agro-Industrial Competitiveness**  
Productivity, value-chain development, food security, agro-processing, and export readiness.
8. **Tourism, Culture & Creative Economy Competitiveness**  
Asset development, destination readiness, visitor economy growth, and cultural capital monetisation.
9. **Fiscal Transparency & Governance (Accountability & Trust)**  
Budget openness, fiscal discipline, procurement transparency, and institutional credibility.

#### Methodology: How States Are Assessed

SCIRA adopts a hybrid evaluation framework developed by the BusinessDay Research & Intelligence Unit (BRIU), combining quantitative metrics, qualitative policy signals, and outcome-based indicators.

Each category is assessed using a weighted composite index examining:

- \* **Performance Data**  
(e.g. revenue growth, investment inflows, service coverage, capital expenditure)
- \* **Policy & Reform Execution**  
(clarity of strategy, institutional capacity, reform consistency, delivery discipline)
- \* **Economic & Social Impact**  
(job creation, productivity gains, inclusion, and sustainability)
- \* **Investment Readiness Signals**  
(PPP frameworks, investor protections, scalability, and governance quality)

All nominations - whether submitted by governments or the public - are subjected to the **same independent validation process**, drawing on public data, official records, and third-party sources to ensure **comparability, transparency, and integrity**.

Simply put: **SCIRA rewards outcomes, not advocacy**.

#### Why SCIRA Matters

SCIRA is not a ceremonial exercise. It is a strategic reputation and signalling platform.

- \* It informs investors where capital is most likely to be protected and productive.
- \* It provides development partners with credible sub-national performance benchmarks.
- \* It offers citizens and markets a trusted lens on how governance translates into growth.

Recognition at SCIRA positions a state not merely for commendation, but for **capital inflows, partnerships, and sustained economic advantage**.

#### Eligibility & Nomination Process

- \* All 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory are eligible.
- \* **Nominations are open to the general public**, including institutions and individuals with verifiable information.
- \* Multiple nominations for a single state are permitted.
- \* Shortlisted states will be formally contacted for **documentation, clarification, and validation briefings**.

Final award recipients will be determined by the **SCIRA Awards Review Board** based on aggregate scores and independent verification.

#### Important Dates

- \* **Nomination Window Opens: 2nd February**
- \* **Validation & Review Period: 9th - 16th March**
- \* **Awards Ceremony: 26 March 2026**

#### What This Signals

Competitiveness is no longer asserted.  
Investment no longer follows intention.  
It follows evidence.

The **States Competitiveness / Investment Readiness Awards** exist to spotlight the states that are demonstrating - openly, measurably, and consistently - that they are ready for the future.

We invite the public to nominate.  
We invite the data to decide.

#### For nomination guidelines or enquiries, please contact:

|                    |  |             |
|--------------------|--|-------------|
| John Osadolor:     | john.osadolor@businessday.ng,            | 08023165436 |
| Zebulon Agomuo:    | 080232838322                             |             |
| Geoffrey Essien:   | geoffrey.essien@businessday.ng,          | 08184934934 |
| Stephen Onyekwelu: | stephen.onyekwelu@businessdayonline.com, | 08137433034 |

# Sports



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One week of sack, rumour and fan  
**base influence in football**

Qatar Open:  
 Muchova de-  
 feats Mboko to  
**win first title**

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# Osimhen amongs IFFHS World's top scorers

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Kane becomes  
**first Englishman to  
 reach 500 career  
 goals**



Page 75

Tottenham ap-  
 point Igor Tudor  
**to lead relegation  
 survival battle**



Page 75

James Trafford  
 wants more  
 at Manchester  
 City



Page 73

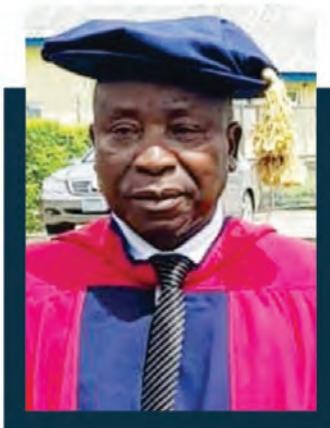
Two Nigerians  
 drafted in 10th  
**'Basketball  
 Without Bor-  
 ders' all-star**



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**BUSINESS DAY****TRAINING****ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY  
TRAINING 2026**

THEME:

**EMPLOYEE APPRAISAL AND  
COMPENSATION MASTER-CLASS****Dr C. S. Biriowu PhD, FCIPM.**

HOD Dept Of Employment Relations And  
Human Resource Management (RSU)  
Former Human Resource Compliance Manager  
& Industrial Relations Advisor sub Saharan  
Africa Schlumberger Group

**WEDNESDAY 18TH MARCH 2026**  
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<https://bit.ly/4a9SIz>

# News

## Education most reliable pathway to sustainable development – Kogi governor

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE, Lokoja

**A**hmed Usman Ododo, Kogi State governor, has said that his administration believed education was the most potent force for sustainable development.

Ododo made the remark at the 5th Combined Convocation Ceremony of Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja.

"This gathering is a solemn reaffirmation of our collective belief in education as the most reliable pathway to personal advancement, institutional relevance and sustainable development for our dear state and nation," he said.

Ododo, who was represented by Joel Oyibo, deputy governor, said it was in recognition of this fact that the polytechnic has benefited from various targeted and impact-

ful interventions aimed at improving infrastructure, security, staff welfare and student support, adding that to further strengthen the security architecture of the institution, Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras have been installed at strategic locations within the institution.

He said: "Solar-powered streetlights have been installed across the campus to enhance visibility and safety, while the Itakpe Campus has been fully fenced, effectively curbing encroachment and protecting lives and property.

"This intervention reinforces our zero-tolerance stance on criminality and our commitment to preserving a serene and conducive academic environment."

Ododo acknowledged the support of the Federal Government, saying, "I warmly acknowledge the continued support of the Federal Gov-

ernment of Nigeria, under the visionary leadership of His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Mr. President's bold and courageous policies, particularly in the areas of economic reform, infrastructure development and education funding, are already yielding tangible dividends."

He noted that "Kogi State has benefitted immensely from these far-reaching interventions, and we remain deeply appreciative of his enduring commitment to national progress and renewal."

According to him, "The convocation offers the opportunity to celebrate academic excellence, institutional strength and visionary leadership, the steady progress of the polytechnic as a strategic pillar of technical education and human capital development in Kogi State."

He commended the Governing Council, Academic

Board, management, staff and students of the polytechnic for sustaining the noble academic tradition, as he congratulated the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 graduands for completing their National Diploma and Higher Diploma programmes.

He said: "I recall that two years ago, as Governor-Elect, I joined the polytechnic community at this same venue for the 4th Combined Convocation Ceremony, when concerns were expressed about the combination of ten graduating sets.

"Your perseverance, discipline and determination have culminated in this proud moment. I equally commend your parents and guardians for their sacrifices, and appreciate the polytechnic for equipping you with the skills and competencies required to thrive in an increasingly competitive world."



Monica Maduekwe

## Aid dependence undermining Nigeria's power sector, new research reveals

BLESSING ADIMABUA

**T**o optimise Nigeria's electricity potential, the country needs to critically examine the terms and conditions attached to foreign incentives coming to the power sector, according to a new study published in Energy Research & Social Science, a peer-reviewed Elsevier journal, focusing on the interdisciplinary links between energy systems, markets, business, and society, spanning topics like energy transitions, policy, climate, and social acceptance.

The study titled, 'Energy Transition in the Global South: Donor Bargains and the Future of the Aid Machine', which was authored by Monica Maduekwe, founder of PUTTRU, examined several West African countries to show how financial stress shapes aid negotiations and how those negotiations, in turn, affect institutional performance in the power sector.

According to the research, countries under heavy financial pressure are more likely to accept aid conditions that reduce their ability to plan effectively, coordinate agencies, and build long-term technical capacity, and over time, this traps power sectors in cycles of reform that look good on paper but deliver little improvement in practice.

"Aid becomes costly because of the bargaining process. The terms under which aid is negotiated shape institutional outcomes long after projects end," she explains.

Maduekwe's research reveals that not all aid-recipient countries are treated the same and that negotiation tactics, leverage and processes vary, and one of the most decisive factors shaping these differences is financial stress.

"Countries with high debt levels and heavy aid dependence typically have less bargaining power. When financial pressure is acute, governments are less able to resist conditions that may under-

mine institutional authority, coordination, and long-term capacity. In such situations, donors may impose conditions that appear reasonable in the short term, but over time erode governance systems, weaken institutions, and limit a country's ability to deliver sustained development outcomes, including reliable electricity."

The study warns of a dangerous feedback loop: Financial stress weakens a country's negotiating position. Weak negotiating positions lead to harmful aid conditions. Those conditions erode institutional capacity.

Weakened institutions reduce the country's ability to develop and to eventually break free from aid dependence.

"If countries do not pay attention to how aid is negotiated, financial stress can lock them into a vicious cycle where aid undermines the very institutions needed for development," Maduekwe said.

The study calls on aid-recipient countries, including Nigeria, to approach aid negotiations more strategically especially during periods of financial stress. Governments must assess their vulnerabilities, understand their leverage, and recognise that poorly negotiated aid can compromise long-term development prospects.

To support this, the paper presents a new diagnostic tool developed by Maduekwe, the Donor-Bargain Model, designed to help governments assess the long-term institutional impacts of aid conditions before agreements are finalised.

The model helps policymakers identify when aid is likely to become institutionally costly and how conditions can be structured to support, rather than undermine, long-term sector performance.

True development, the study argues, requires not just funding and projects, but institutions strong enough to govern, adapt, and eventually operate without aid.

## Govt, corporate bodies urged to partner NGOs for women, youth empowerment

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

**G**overnment and corporate organisations have been urged to partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focused on youths and women empowerment, to enable them drive impactful projects and initiatives that benefit these demographics.

Modupe Oyekunle, executive director and founder of Masterpiece Resource Development Center (MRDC), made the call while speaking at the organisation's annual 'mentoring dinner and success showcase' in Lagos.

Oyekunle further emphasised that partnerships between like-minded individuals and NGOs focused on youths and women development can catalyse societal transformation.

On the annual event which held under the theme, 'Strategic expansion: Aligning entrepreneurial vision with limitless possibilities,' the founder of Masterpiece Resource Development Centre, noted that the event was a fitting occasion, providing an opportunity for the organisers to express gratitude for the past year's blessings and acknowledge individuals and organisations that have lent their support.

"At the beginning of the year, we set aside a day like this to express gratitude for the past year's blessings.

"During the event, we share our success story from



Participants at the event.

the previous year, and take time to thank our sponsors and partners who've stood by us. It's also a great opportunity for members to connect, network, and mentor one another. The progress we've made so far has been encouraging, inspiring fellow entrepreneurs," she said.

Oyekunle, who is also a co-pastor of His Masterpiece Church, advised women entrepreneurs to be more strategic in their businesses as such would lead to increased economic impact and growth.

According to her: "As a woman entrepreneur, it is crucial to position yourself for excellence, going above and beyond the norm. Be honest with yourself take stock of your strengths and weaknesses, and focus on improving areas that need work, that is where growth happens."

For her, "an average Nigerian youth is steady and stable when given the right environment."

She further said: "I have yet to see a young person who is been mentored or supported by good people and has not made the most of it, except those struggling with substance abuse, and even then,

our religious organisations are working hard to help them get back on track. Nigerian youth are ambitious, driven, and goal-oriented, they just need the right guidance and opportunities."

On the other hand, she advised parents to get more involved in their child's training adding, "It is good to look for money but not at the expense of the lives of the children because what they need mostly is the presence of their parents in their lives."

Olamide Ajayi, keynote speaker at the event, encouraged entrepreneurs to trust God and stay resilient, emphasising that businesses built on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ were sustainable and would not collapse.

Ajayi also urged entrepreneurs to practise "delayed gratification", prioritising investment consolidation over luxury, highlighted the importance of diversifying income streams, given the current global economic challenges, saying it would help entrepreneurs stay afloat.

BUSINESS DAY

# PROPERTY INVESTMENT & SMART CITIES

## CONFERENCE 2026



Keynote Speaker



**Hakeem Ogunniran**  
CEO, Eximia Realty Co Ltd  
/Chairman, Lagos Building  
Investment Co Plc

Speakers



**Chudi Ubosi**  
Principal Partner,  
Ubosi Eleh & Co.



**Odunayo Ojo**  
CEO, UPDC Plc



**Udo Okonjo**  
CEO, Fine & Country  
International



**Tola Akinhanmi**  
Head, Real Estate Finance,  
West Africa, Stanbic IBTC  
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Orimalade, mni**  
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**Erejuwa Gbadebo**  
MD, Eko Development  
Company



**Okereke Bright**  
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Foundation Group



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**FEBRUARY 25  
2026 | 9AM**

THEME

**PROPERTY INVESTMENT  
IN AN ERA OF CAPITAL DISCIPLINE**

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# News

## Group unhappy over PENGASSAN's silence on maltreatment of Nigerians by IOC

SAMUEL ESE, Port Harcourt

The Movement of Intellectuals for National Development (MIND), a civil society group, has expressed misgivings over the continued silence of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) over alleged maltreatment of Nigerian staff of an international oil company.

This was contained in a statement signed by Ebi Warekromo, western coordinator, MIND, and made available to BusinessDay at the weekend.

MIND chided PENGASSAN for its attempts to distance itself from the petition it submitted to the senate president regarding what it described as a persistent and well-documented ill-treatment of Nigerian employees by the management of TotalEnergies in Nigeria.

Jerry Aman, PENGASSAN's acting general secretary, had in a statement, distanced the association from MIND's petition, noting that all issues relating to unfair labour practices raised were internal and not meant for public consumption.

But MIND stressed that PENGASSAN's response was deeply disappointing, evasive, and fundamentally inconsistent with the core responsibilities of a labour union that claims to exist for the protection and



Festus Osifo, PENGASSAN's president

welfare of its members.

Warekromo said that the petition was not based on conjecture or hearsay, but on verifiable facts, the live experiences of Nigerian workers, and written correspondence authored by the local branch of PENGASSAN.

He disclosed that the local branch of PENGASSAN had raised concerns about unfair labour practices and managerial excesses within the IOC, including hostile work environments and allegations of bullying and intimidation by expatriate staff.

Warekromo further disclosed that other issues the local PENGASSAN branch raised include serious security breaches and blatant local content violations, particularly the illegal perpetuation of expatriate positions beyond approved tenures, which is a clear contravention of the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Content De-

velopment (NOGICD) Act.

Lamenting the decision of PENGASSAN's national secretariat to describe the concerns as internal affairs of the company and not fit for public discourse, Warekromo said it showed that the association was both weak and disingenuous.

"Issues involving workers' rights violations, systemic oppression, and abuse of corporate power cease to be internal once they remain unresolved and continue to harm Nigerian workers," he said.

Warekromo said that it was troubling for PENGASSAN's national leadership to distance itself from issues it has already acknowledged in writing, stressing that it raised serious questions about the union's independence, credibility, and willingness to confront powerful corporate interests on behalf of its members.

The statement read in part:

"MIND wishes to state clearly that our intervention is not an attack on PENGASSAN as an institution. It is a response to a vacuum of effective representation that has allowed oppressive practices to persist unchecked. Where unions fail or refuse to act decisively, civil society has both the right and the duty to step in."

"If PENGASSAN truly has nothing to hide, nothing to fear, and nothing to explain, it should welcome rather than resist public scrutiny."

"Accordingly, MIND formally challenges the leadership of PENGASSAN to make itself available for a transparent public hearing before the Nigerian Senate, alongside other relevant stakeholders, to openly address the substance of the grievances raised against TotalEnergies Nigeria."

"Attempts to intimidate whistleblowers or investigate breaches of confidentiality only deepen public concern and reinforce the perception of institutional complicity."

"The Nigerian public, Nigerian workers, and the Senate of the Federal Republic deserve honesty, not distancing statements, procedural excuses, or selective amnesia."

"MIND remains steadfast in its commitment to justice, fairness, and accountability in Nigeria's extractive sector."

"We urge PENGASSAN's leadership to reflect deeply on the path it is choosing and to realign itself with the workers whose dues, trust, and mandate give it legitimacy."

## Uzodinma pledges support for Imo contingents for NDDC Games at Edo

SABY ELEMBA, Owerri

The Governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma has pledged to support the Imo State contingents for the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Games holding at Edo State from February 20, 2026.

The governor who was represented by Nnamdi Anyaeche, Chief of Staff, received the Torch of Unity for the NDDC Games from Governor Alex Oti of Abia State. The Chief of Staff noted that expressed confidence in the team's preparedness and determination.

"I am sure you are ready to go and do justice — to make us proud and bring back all the gold," he said.

Receiving the Torch of Unity from Abia State for onward transmission, Anyaeche described the moment as

symbolic of regional cooperation and shared aspirations among Niger Delta States.

He commended the NDDC for initiating the Niger Delta Games, noting that the competition served as a vital platform for unity and youth development, and urged other institutions to emulate the NDDC's initiative, and emphasised that sports have remained a powerful tool for national integration and



Hope Uzodinma

youth empowerment.

"May the Almighty God, in His infinite mercy, grant our athletes safe travels across all participating States and grant them success as they strive to bring home as many gold medals as possible," he added.

The Niger Delta Games, an initiative of the NDDC, aims to promote unity, discover young talents, and strengthen bonds among States in the region through healthy sporting competition.

Earlier, Obinna Onyeocha, the Imo State Commissioner for Sports said the Ministry of Sports and the Sports Commission are fully prepared to support the contingents who will represent the State at the competition.

He explained that the torch began its tour in Cross River State on February 9, moving through Akwa Ibom and Abia before arriving in Imo.

"We are here with our brothers from Abia State who brought the Unity Torch, as well as representatives of Du-namis Icon, the consultants overseeing the programme," he said.

The Commissioner described the torch as a symbol of unity among the nine Niger Delta States and reaffirmed Imo's commitment to a successful outing at the Games.

Also speaking, the leader of the delegation from Du-namis Icon Limited, Fred Edoreh said the torch was lit in Cross River State before moving through Akwa Ibom and Abia, where it was handed over for onward transmission to Imo in a symbolic relay of unity.

He expressed optimism that the spirit of cooperation and solidarity among the States would ensure successful Games in Edo State.

The Torch of Unity is expected to continue its symbolic journey across participating States ahead of the official commencement of the games.

## Nigeria spends over \$20 bn annually on expatriate service, maintenances - NACCIMA

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE, Lokoja

The National Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) has estimated that Nigeria spends over \$20 billion annually on expatriate services and remittances, with a significant portion going to technical personnel from India, China, and the Philippines.

Christian Ezeibe, dean, Student Affairs, University of Nigeria Nsukka, disclosed this while delivering a lecture themed, 'Skills over Certificates: Repositioning Technical Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria,' at the 5th combined convocation of the Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, pointing

out that in the power sector alone, despite billions invested "we still depend on foreign technicians to maintain our turbines and grid infrastructure."

According to him, "We have become a nation that worships the certificate but neglect the competence it is supposed to certify. We have perfected the ritual of schooling but have lost the essence of learning. This ceremony today is a ritual; what you do after it will define our essence."

Ezeibe equally disclosed that in 2019 alone the national aggregate estimate for Nigerian tertiary graduations including Polytechnics was 600,000, adding that certificate is a licence to learn, a skill is the capacity to do, to create and to solve problems.

## ABC, OIS partner to fast-track Nigerian business visas for US executives

CHISOM MICHAEL

The American Business Council (ABC) has entered into partnership with OIS Services to introduce a premium, compliant visa facilitation pathway designed to accelerate processing for qualified business travellers.

The initiative was announced at a CEO high-level roundtable focused on streamlining business travel between the United States and Nigeria. Discussions addressed persistent visa delays that hinder executive mobility and disrupt the timely execution of trade and investment activities, followed by direct stakeholder engagement on operational concerns and implementation timelines.

Speaking at the event, Margaret Odele, chief executive officer of the American Business Council, said the partnership followed years of engagement around visa processes and business mobility. She noted that despite improvements by the Nigerian Immigration Service, gaps remained in the system.

"We must commend the Nigerian Immigration Service for its e-visa platform; significant improvements have been made over the years," she said. "But we realised that we can even do better."

According to her, the platform will function as a "one-stop-shop" to support applicants through the process, reducing wait times and removing the need for some applicants to visit embassies in person, particularly those applying for business visas exceeding three months.

"For business visas or anything more than three months, you have to go to the

embassy. Well, with this kind of platform, you don't need to do that," she added.

A senior representative from OIS Services said the partnership creates a dedicated fast-track channel for ABC members.

"Applicants for business visas to Nigeria, especially those coming in for partnerships, business expansion, or investment, we're creating a fast-track process for them," he said.

Under the arrangement, applicants can submit their documents at OIS offices in Atlanta, New York and Washington. "The application is fast track. It's going to be processed within 48 hours so that they can get their visa," he said.

He confirmed that the service will offer multiple-entry visas, alongside mobile biometric enrolment and application support. "We have a support team on the ground to help you so that it will be seamless for your travel needs," he said.

Regarding concerns about delays, he stated that applications submitted through the ABC channel would be directed directly to decision-makers. "Applications going through that route go directly," he said, adding that the system identifies them as ABC fast-track submissions.

The fast-track service is currently exclusive to ABC members, while non-members will continue to apply through existing visa channels.

The roundtable hosted senior representatives from U.S. companies, including Uber, The Coca-Cola Company, VisionSpring, TREXM Holdings, Tolaram, ExxonMobil, United Airlines, Mastercard, J.P. Morgan, American Business Council Nigeria, KPMG, EY, Flutterwave, Outcess, American Express and Chevron.

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# News

## Nigeria's edible oil producers seek protection as import surge threatens local market

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

**S**takeholders across Nigeria's oil palm, soybean and vegetable oil value chains have warned that a surge in imports, weak border enforcement and policy inconsistency are pushing the sector toward crisis, threatening billions of dollars in investment and millions of rural jobs.

At a press conference on Wednesday convened by Fatai Afolabi, MD of Foremost Development Services Limited, industry leaders said the Federal Government's recent food import adjustments, though aimed at easing consumer prices, are depressing farm-gate prices below production cost and destabilising domestic producers.

In his keynote address, Afolabi said while food price moderation had brought relief to households, "beneath this welcome price moderation lies a more troubling reality for local farmers and agriculture value chain investors."

He warned that about 3,500 rice farmers were contemplating exiting production after incurring estimated losses of N93 billion, adding that similar distress was spreading across cassava, vegetable oil and tree crop segments.

"Food security is not solely about ensuring that food is available and affordable today," Afolabi said. "It is also



about safeguarding the capacity of local producers to continue producing tomorrow."

Emmanuel Ibru, chairman of the Plantation Owners Forum of Nigeria (POFON), said a proliferation of imported vegetable oil late last year had sharply undercut domestic producers.

"You can imagine what the effect has been in the last few months on vegetable oil producers and also down the chain," he said, noting that commercial palm oil is a key input in vegetable oil refining.

Ibru recalled that protective policies under the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo, including duties on crude palm oil and a ban on refined vegetable oil imports, helped revive an industry that had been "almost comatose" in the 1970s and 1980s.

According to him, palm oil production has grown from roughly 800,000 tonnes

two decades ago to between 1.3 million and 1.4 million tonnes, driven by billions of dollars in private investment.

"It's estimated that anything from 2 to 3 million people are involved in the various value chains of the oil industry," Ibru said. "While you're trying to push down the price of food commodities in the country, what's the point if the people that are meant to benefit from it don't have the jobs or the resources to even partake in it?"

### 50% price crash, smuggling allegations

Alphonsus Inyang, president of the National Palm Produce Association of Nigeria (NPPAN), said palm oil prices had fallen by about 50 percent in less than two months, even during the lean season.

"Currently, at the price we are selling palm oil in this

country, we are selling at less than production price," he said, adding that smallholder farmers depend on oil palm income for "school fees... medicine... and general economic well-being."

Inyang blamed porous borders and smuggling, alleging multiple land and sea entry points funneling cheap oil into the country and forcing local producers to sell at prices determined by foreign supply.

"Government is losing revenue. The farmers are being suppressed through influx of oil that come in at very cheap prices," he said.

He contrasted Nigeria's approach with Ghana, which he said had committed \$100 million this year to oil palm development under a structured national programme.

### Enforcement, policy inconsistency

Mohammed Tahir, chair-

man of the Vegetable Oil Sub-Sector of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), described the situation as a "knee-jerk decision" that effectively opened the market despite existing import port restrictions.

"What happened to enforcement?" he asked repeatedly, questioning why import prohibition policies were not being implemented.

He warned that vegetable oil refineries were operating at low-capacity utilisation due to high production costs and cheaper imports, arguing that the shift represented "a kind of preference of trade over production."

"When you talk of food security, it is not about only bringing food into the country," Tahir said. "If you are not able to be self-reliant, actually there is a big problem there."

Christopher Ayodele Uwala, president of the Soybean Association of Nigeria, said soybean prices had crashed to about one-quarter of previous levels, discouraging farmers.

"If let's say Nigeria is consuming 1.6 million and it's 1.2 that we have, then only 400,000 should be imported," he said, arguing that imports should be based on verified shortfalls.

He criticised what he described as a lack of reliable national statistics and warned that excessive imports could undermine domestic production capacity.

### Call for strategic protection under AfCFTA

Okey Ikoro, chairman of the Vegetable and Edible Oil Producers Association of Nigeria (VEOPAN), said Nigeria's vegetable oil market, valued at over \$2 billion monthly, was increasingly controlled by foreign supply, with domestic players now holding about 34 percent.

He warned that inconsistent policies, smuggling and foreign subsidised products were destabilising the industry.

"Plantation is not something you do and after one year you start harvesting it. It has a long gestation period," Ikoro said. "But if you cannot have the policy that will sustain this gestation period, how can you do more?"

Ikoro dismissed suggestions that import liberalisation was compelled by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), arguing that the agreement allows member states to protect strategic products.

"Vegetable oil is a strategic product and very, very sensitive," he said. "There is no need for any government to justify AfCFTA and then kill your country's production."

Across the board, stakeholders urged the government to time imports outside peak harvest periods, strengthen price stabilisation mechanisms, subsidise inputs, enforce border controls and provide policy clarity to restore investor confidence.

"A food strategy that feeds the nation today must also empower those who will feed it tomorrow," Afolabi said.

Industry leaders warned that without swift intervention, Nigeria risks deepening import dependence, eroding rural employment and weakening long-term food security.

## Jenik Freight CEO applauds oil and gas policies driving indigenous capacity at SAIPEC 2026

EMMANUEL SALAWU

**A**s Nigeria intensifies efforts to raise crude oil production to two million barrels per day, industry stakeholders are expressing optimism about stronger policy alignment to expand indigenous participation in the country's petroleum recovery and growth agenda.

During discussions at the 2026 Sub-Saharan Africa International Petroleum Exhibition and Conference SAIPEC in Lagos, the CEO of Jenik Freight, Chukwujekwu Onwughalu, commended reforms aimed at strengthening local content and boosting production.

He encouraged the government to sustain existing oil and gas policies that empower local operators, ease import bottlenecks, and unlock financing for capital intensive investments.

According to Chukwujekwu, reforms promoting indig-

enous capacity and production growth have stimulated renewed activity across the sector, with international oil companies and local operators scaling operations to meet national output targets.

"There is significant momentum in the industry right now," he said. "Companies are increasing production, sourcing more equipment, and reactivating dormant assets. For logistics providers like us, this translates into higher demand and stronger collaboration with indigenous operators."

Jenik Freight is a Calgary based international logistics company specializing in freight forwarding for the oil and gas industry. The company provides import and export services through ocean and air freight to global destinations, supporting operators with the cross border movement of critical industrial equipment.

Founded in 2016, Jenik Freight emerged from a practical market need to assist oil and gas professionals in sourcing

and shipping specialized equipment into Nigeria and other emerging energy markets.

With academic qualifications in mechanical engineering (BSc) and petroleum engineering (MSc) and having spent nearly 15 years working in Oil and Gas with international experience supervising drilling and Workover operations and logistics, Chukwujekwu identified a gap in dependable freight forwarding for operators sourcing equipment from North America

and other global hubs.

Today, the company manages heavy and time sensitive cargo, using ocean freight for large industrial assets and air freight for urgent components required at project sites.



Chukwujekwu Onwughalu

"Our model is straightforward," Onwughalu explained. "Once clients identify their equipment needs, we take responsibility for moving it efficiently from origin to deployment. Reliability, speed, and strong customer relationships define our operations."

The company supports several indigenous oil service firms, coordinating logistics for wireline operations, pumping services, and field equipment as operators expand activities in response to production targets.

Drawing from his background in drilling and well completions across Nigeria and international markets, Onwughalu described Nigeria's local content framework as a pivotal phase for the petroleum industry, noting that indigenous companies are increasingly delivering services previously dominated by international operators.

"The capacity of local firms is growing rapidly," he said. "At SAIPEC, Nigerian companies

are providing advanced services and technologies. The ecosystem has matured and logistics demand continues to rise as operators scale."

He added that SAIPEC remains a strategic platform for strengthening partnerships and identifying new opportunities across the upstream and services value chain.

While acknowledging progress, Onwughalu noted that challenges remain, particularly around financing and import duties for equipment critical to oil and gas operations.

He encouraged continued government support for indigenous companies investing in vessels, rigs, and heavy machinery, assets that require substantial capital commitments.

"Lower import duties and targeted policy incentives can improve project economics and accelerate production timelines," he said. "Achieving the two million barrels per day milestone will require deliberate support for indigenous operators."



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# News

## Docenti Global Business School emphasizes happiness as catalyst for productivity

...Hosts business excellence programme on 'The Happy Workplace'

BLESSING ADIMABUA

**D**ocenti Global Business School (DGBS) has said that happiness in the workplace influenced productivity, engagement, and organisational performance. The company made the observation recently when it hosted its Business Excellence Programme themed 'The Happy Workplace: Helping Employees Connect Their Daily Tasks to a Larger Meaningful Mission.'

The event brought together academics, professionals, and corporate leaders.

The programme, delivered as part of Docenti Global Business School's MBA Human Resources academic framework, was designed to explore workplace happiness in depth and demonstrate how emotionally healthy environments enhance organisational output, leadership effectiveness, and employee commitment.

Present at the session were Pradit Withisuphakorn, dean of Docenti Global Business School and vice president of Bodhisattva University; Humphrey Akanazu, executive principal of Docenti Global Business School; Juthamas



Keawpjjit, associate professor and dean of the School of Human Resource Development Management at National Institute of Development Administration, who delivered the keynote address; and Stephen Abah, managing director and CEO of Crown Pay, who moderated the session.

Holland Suthirawut, a current Ph.D. student from Batch 12 from the International HROD programme, reflected on NIDA's School of Human Resource Development's 35-year journey and its commitment to global learning.

She highlighted the importance of shared perspectives, noting that students benefit from learning alongside international experts and experienced professionals across

industries.

"We get to learn from each other, and we learn from different perspectives — how we deal with people," she said, stressing that despite advances in artificial intelligence, human qualities remain irreplaceable. "Even AI cannot replace human features like empathy and emotional intelligence," Suthirawut said.

In her keynote address, Keawpjjit, a professor, disclosed that since 2012, she had conducted extensive research on happiness in the workplace, a concept that has evolved over time into well-being at work.

She also carried out interactive exercises during the session to assess the happiness levels of participants.

She explained that in Thailand, workplace happiness was treated with utmost seriousness, supported by a dedicated public agency that promotes wellbeing among workers.

Reflecting on her landmark research, she said, "Back then, I studied 102 organizations. We did this to gather enough data on how the workspace is being handled. I spent a whole year visiting these organizations across Thailand."

She added, "I carried out a survey asking questions like: 'What makes them happy in their workspace? What kind of things do they do that make them happy at work? What are the key success factors?' Among these 102 organizations, about

20 percent were no longer happy with their jobs."

Keawpjjit described happiness as fluid rather than constant. "I think happiness is like a snapshot. I don't think everyone can be happy every day."

"Sometimes you feel down, sometimes you feel the world is not fair, sometimes you feel your team doesn't understand you. The more work you do, the less value you feel you contribute."

"This happens in our lives from time to time — especially during midlife crisis or when you become a manager," she said, noting that these realities motivated her continued research and collaboration with Jaiga to further examine workplace happiness.

She explained that her studies covered Thailand's east, west, north, south, and Bangkok, comparing regions to determine where people felt happiest and least happy. She also reviewed earlier studies, including the 4D research model, which categorized happiness across different eras.

According to her, from 1984 to 2001, happiness was largely viewed as an individual life experience, with some people naturally happier than others.

She further observed how external interactions can quickly influence emotional well-being: "You can be the

happiest person in the world, but have a conversation with someone who gives a negative attitude or doesn't like you, and it can give you a bad day. It can make you upset or anxious."

She noted that periods of dissatisfaction often emerge during major career transitions, such as midlife stages and entry into managerial roles.

These insights informed her continued research and the development of the Being, Becoming, and Belonging Model, which defines three core pillars of workplace happiness. She explained, "If you are in the right place, under the right leadership, and in the right job, you are going to be very happy in the workplace."

Professor Keawpjjit also shared the practical impact of the framework, noting its successful implementation within Thailand's prison system.

"We have implemented the Happy Workplace Framework in Thai prisons, and we have been able to get good results. The prisoners are more relaxed, and this has led to more productivity," she said.

Commending her presentation, Professor Pradit Withisuphakorn, Dean of Docenti Global Business School, described her as an outstanding lecturer and said she is on her way to becoming a full professor.

"I remember my first time in Nigeria when a Nigerian Ambassador said I was a friend of Nigeria — so Professor, you are a friend of Nigeria now," he remarked.

## Lessons for Nigeria as Angolan president approves over \$500m investment for tourism infrastructure

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIECHA

**J**oão Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, the President of Angola, has approved a public investment of over \$500 million for the development of integrated infrastructure in key tourism areas, including Cabo Ledo, Quicombo and Namibe.

Stakeholders say the development is a lesson for Nigeria whose tourism contributes minimal to its country's Gross Domestic Products (GDP) as Angola's decision reinforces the government's strategy to promote tourism as a driver for economic diversification, which was steered by an international investment expert, Julia Kleber, CEO and Co-founder, Kleber Group by re-imaging Angola as a potential tourist destination in Africa.

The investment will support the development of the Cabo Ledo Tourism Development Hub and the country's coastal tourism corridor, covering areas such as Pipas Bay

the Planifica Turismo programme, approved last year, which sets out measures for tourism planning and territorial organisation.

The programme aims to improve accessibility, safety, urban functionality and overall attractiveness in areas with high tourism potential, creating favorable conditions for private investment.

The \$500 million investment will be financed through external funding provided by Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG).

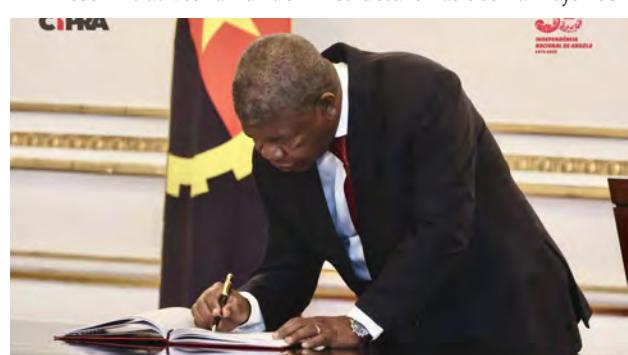
According to the government, the lack of basic infrastructure has been a major ob-

stacle preventing the effective exploitation of the tourism potential of these regions, despite growing interest from national and international investors.

The Ministry of Tourism has confirmed that several private investors have already expressed interest in developing projects in these areas, but many initiatives have faced delays due to insufficient infrastructure.

By prioritising public investment in infrastructure, the Executive seeks to reduce entry costs for investors, boost destination competitiveness and foster sustainable tourism development. The initiative is also expected to generate employment, stimulate local economies and improve living conditions for nearby communities.

Angola has been intensifying efforts to position itself as an attractive destination for tourism investment. In 2025, the country was recognized as the Best Tourism Investment Destination by the Global Tourism Forum, an award that reflects ongoing reforms and growing investor confidence.



João Lourenço

## Council chairman convenes emergency security meeting over alleged threat letter

SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

but across the entire Oyun Local Government," the Chairman said.

Akanbi called for stronger collaboration among security agencies, traditional institutions, and community leaders to ensure law and order are maintained across the local government. He stressed that community policing and timely information-sharing remain key to preventing crime.

The Chairman, however, commended the efforts of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Kwara State Governor Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq in tackling insecurity across the country and the state, pledging the full support of Oyun Local Government to all security initiatives.

He assured residents that the council would continue to work closely with security agencies to ensure the safety of lives and properties in the Oyun Local Government.

He ended that his address with prayers for peace and stability in Kwara State and Nigeria at large, as various security agencies and stakeholders reaffirmed their commitment to collective vigilance and community safety, reaffirming the sacrosanct of power belonging to God. Therefore, in God, we trust.

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# News

## Bank CEOs deepen strategic partnership with Nigeria Police

...Discuss frameworks for strengthening financial systems' security ecosystem

BLESSING ADIMABUA

The Body of Banks' Chief Executive Officers in Nigeria has reaffirmed its commitment towards strengthening collaboration with the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) towards enhancing the security and resilience of Nigeria's financial system.

Speaking during a stakeholders' engagement with the Inspector-General of Police, Olukayode Egbetokun, Oliver Alawuba, chairman of the Body of Banks' CEOs, commended the IGP for his steadfast support to the banking industry and his commitment to modernising the nation's policing architecture.

Alawuba, who is also the group managing director/CEO, United Bank for Africa (UBA) Plc, noted that the banking sector operates at the heart of Nigeria's economic stability and requires a secure and enabling environment to effectively mobilise financial resources, support businesses, and drive inclusive growth.

He applauded the operational milestones recorded



Olukayode Egbetokun, inspector-general of Police (IGP), and Oliver Alawuba, chairman, Body of Banks' CEOs, and group managing director/CEO, UBA Group, at the interactive meeting held at Chartered Institute of Bankers, between the IGP and Banks' CEOs in Lagos, recently.

under the IGP's leadership, including strengthened intelligence-led policing, the establishment of the Special Intervention Squad, and enhanced personnel welfare initiatives.

He further emphasised that as financial services become increasingly digitised and interconnected, security collaboration between law

enforcement and financial institutions must evolve accordingly, adding that "The integrity, continuity, and resilience of Nigeria's financial system are directly linked to public confidence and investor perception. Sustained partnership with the Nigeria Police Force remains critical to safeguarding this vital na-

tional asset."

Alawuba further reassured the police of the readiness of the banks to support the new security architecture for banks, equipping cyber security frameworks established by police and the modernisation of police stations across the country.

Earlier in his speech,

the President/Chairman of Council, CIBN, Pius Deji Olanrewaju, described the engagement as both timely and strategic, noting that national security and economic resilience are increasingly interconnected.

"The banking sector plays a pivotal role in Nigeria's economic development, and our critical functions can only flourish in a secure and stable environment," he said. "As financial services evolve rapidly through digital transformation; the security landscape is also becoming more complex. Addressing emerging risks, particularly cyber-enabled fraud and financial crimes, requires sustained cooperation between law enforcement and the financial sector," Olanrewaju stated.

He reaffirmed the Institute's commitment to professionalism, ethical standards, and constructive engagement with the Nigeria Police Force, adding that deeper institutional collaboration would further strengthen the foundations of national stability and financial system integrity.

The IGP, Olukayode Egbetokun, who took time to un-

derscore the strategic importance of the banking industry to national security and economic governance, just as he highlighted the evolving threat landscape facing the sector, including cyber-enabled fraud, organised financial crime, and illicit financial flows. He noted that these risks extend beyond institutional losses to issues of investor confidence and Nigeria's standing within the global compliance environment.

"The Nigerian banking industry is not merely a driver of economic activity; it is a core component of our national stability architecture," Egbetokun stated, adding that; financial security and national security have become deeply interconnected. "The protection of our financial infrastructure must therefore be approached as a shared national priority requiring structured partnership between law enforcement, regulators, and financial institutions."

He emphasised the Nigeria Police Force's ongoing shift toward intelligence-led financial infrastructure protection and strengthened coordination with key enforcement and regulatory stakeholders.

## UNILAG, CreditRegistry move to prepare students for real-world credit and finance

CHISOM MICHAEL

The University of Lagos (UNILAG) and CreditRegistry have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote financial literacy, responsible credit use, and economic participation among students and staff of the university.

The agreement brings CreditRegistry's education arm, the African Consumer Credit Academy (ACCA), into collaboration with the university to deliver structured learning on personal finance, credit management, entrepreneurship, and wealth creation. Supported by Afreximbank, the initiative targets students across all faculties, with a focus on early exposure to how the credit system works and how financial choices affect long-term outcomes.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, the Managing Director of CreditRegistry, Dr Jameel Sharrieff-Ayedun, described the MoU as more than a ceremonial event. She was represented by the company's Chief Information Officer, Nse Ikiddeh.

She said, "It is a declaration of intent, and partnering with prestigious institutions

like the University of Lagos, we are bringing the same gold standard to the very place where Africa's future is being forged.

"We aim to uphold the standards of our industry and ensure that the core of our economy remains informed and involved. Our goal is to guarantee that students graduate with more than just a degree.

"The collaboration is designed to bridge the gap between academic brilliance and economic resilience. We have seen far too many brilliant African ideas fail. Not because the product was bad but because the person does not exist in the financial system to access capital. The VC has a powerful vision that aligns perfectly with ours; this is why we are investing in students who will not graduate to start paying bills but command the creation of generational wealth."

On behalf of the university, the Vice Chancellor of UNILAG, Professor Folasade Ogunso, was represented by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Bolanle Olufunmilayo Oboh. She thanked CreditRegistry for the partnership and said it would play a role in shaping the future of students.

She said, "Our students will gain early exposure to how credit works and is assessed in the real world, and the benefits are both immediate and long-term.

"They will gain access to practical financial literacy training that complements the academic, regardless of faculty or course of study. They will understand how to budget, how to manage credit responsibly, how to build a positive financial profile, and how to avoid the pitfalls that derail many promising careers and businesses.

"Beyond knowledge, the partnership opens pathways for real opportunities, inclusive certification, mentorship, and exposure to financial institutions including key pan-African partners like Afreximbank and industry professionals through platforms such as the Africa Credit Expo. Of equal importance is the value this collaboration brings to our faculty members."

Both parties said the partnership reflects a shared focus on preparing students to take part in the financial system with understanding and confidence, and to support economic participation beyond the university environment.

## Abia Senior Citizens Centre designed for social welfare, not money shearing - Govt

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

Abia State Government has stated that the Senior Citizens Centre was not a free money distribution scheme, but a structured social welfare and support system designed to provide care, coordination, dignity, and inclusion for senior citizens-not direct cash handouts.

Okey Kanu, commissioner for Information, in a statement said that the clarification became necessary in order to properly inform the public and dispel misconceptions surrounding the law Number 4 of 2025, which established the Abia State Senior Citizens Centre.

Kanu noted that the legislation was a deliberate and compassionate response by the administration of Governor Alex Otti to the growing population of elderly persons in Abia State and the long-standing absence of a structured, government-backed system dedicated to their care, welfare, and social inclusion.

Highlighting the contributions of senior citizens

over the decades, he added that ageing often comes with health challenges, social isolation, and economic vulnerability.

He emphasised that Law No. 4 of 2025 was a social protection policy, not political symbolism, aimed at restoring dignity, care, and relevance to elderly citizens.

According to him, the law formally establishes the Abia State Senior Citizens Centre, as a government-recognised institution, stressing that the Centre is not a retirement home or a place of abandonment.

Kanu added that the centre serves as a coordinated hub where senior citizens can access support services, engage socially, receive guidance, participate in recreational and skills-sharing activities, and benefit from structured welfare programmes.

Through the Centre, the State Government now has a unified platform to plan, coordinate, and implement elderly-focused interventions across the State, replacing the previously fragmented and informal approach to senior citizens' welfare.

Kanu explained that the Centre is mandated to pro-

mote the welfare, dignity, and quality of life of senior citizens by providing social, psychological, and health-related support, while also serving as an advocacy platform for the protection of their rights.

"It is empowered to develop programmes, maintain a reliable database of elderly persons, facilitate access to healthcare and social welfare schemes, and collaborate with relevant ministries, agencies, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and development partners.

"Administratively, the Centre operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection to ensure accountability, transparency, and alignment with the state's broader social welfare policies.

"Funding is to be sourced through lawful budgetary allocations, grants, and approved donations, in line with due process."

He noted that the Law No. 4 of 2025, is a bold and humane policy choice that places Abia State among progressive States that recognise ageing as a governance issue and institutionalise care for senior citizens.

## Senate President lauds Tonlagha's Niger Delta development efforts

NGOZI OKPALAKUNNE

Godswill Akpabio, Senate president, has lauded Matthew Tonlagha, chairman, Maton Engineering Nigeria Limited, for his contributions to the development of Niger Delta region and Nigeria in general.

Speaking at the 50th birthday of Tonlagha and the public presentation of the book: "Forged in the Creeks", written by Olaokun Soyinka which held in Abuja, Akpabio, affirmed that the celebrant contributions to enterprise, community development and national growth stand as enduring testimonies to a life of committed progress and excellence.

While unveiling the book, the Senate president said: "Your life's journey has consistently reflected vision, discipline and an unwavering commitment to high standards, qualities that have not only defined your leadership but have continued to inspire many within and beyond your professional sphere."

In his remarks, former President Goodluck Jonathan described Tonlagha as a visionary who worked diligently to achieve his dreams.



He said: "Turning 50 is a significant milestone, one that offers the opportunity to reflect on a life of purpose, impact and service. Your journey as an entrepreneur and patriot exemplifies the virtues of resilience and commitment to national development.

"Through Maton Engineering Nigeria Limited, you have demonstrated how indigenous enterprises can contribute meaningfully to economic growth, job creation and capacity development in Nigeria."

The Celebrant was presented with awards by the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Coalition of Civil Society

Organisations, and Nigerian Youth Council.

And in a related development, the EMT Foundation donated a coaster bus to Ugborikoko Secondary School in Delta State, the celebrant's alma mater, as part of the celebration.

The donation was made by the Esther Matthew Tonlagha Foundation at the school premises.

Esther Tonlagha, founder of EMTF, noted that education remains a powerful tool for shaping the future, adding that investing in young people is the surest way to build strong communities.

According to her: "The foundation chose to mark not

with fanfare alone, but with a meaningful gift that would directly support students and teachers."

The school's principal, Irhirihi Masson Ufuoma, described the donation as timely and transformative, noting that it would improve school operations and student engagement beyond the classroom.

For the school, Ufuoma said the bus represents a solution to long-standing transportation challenges that have limited participation in academic trips, inter-school competitions, and extracurricular activities. With the new addition, opportunities once out of reach are now within reach.

Students welcomed the bus with excitement, while teachers and community leaders praised the foundation for turning a personal celebration into a shared blessing.

Over the years, the Esther Matthew Tonlagha Foundation has remained committed to supporting education, health, and empowerment initiatives across Delta State, and the donation to Ugborikoko Secondary School further reflects its vision of building sustainable impact through purposeful giving.

## Bauchi Varsity don tasks students on good character, academic excellence

AYUBA MAFFI, Bauchi

Musa Adamu Wunti, a lecturer at the Bauchi State Sa'adu Zungur University, has tasked fresh students on good character and academic excellence.

Wunti gave the charge during a one-day orientation programme, which held at the Yuli campus of the institution. Urged them to regard university education as a serious business that requires dedication, discipline and commitment.

He described the orientation as a necessary platform designed to expose students to the dos and don'ts of the University system.

"The orientation is a necessary thing which will expose you to the dos and don'ts of the University. You need to be told what you must do and what not to do in order to achieve the objectives of your coming here," he said.



Musa Wunti

He cautioned the students against engaging in anti-social vices, stressing that the University does not condone cultism and other misconduct capable of bringing the institution into disrepute.

According to him, students must always remember the purpose of their admission into the institution, noting that their recent matriculation marked the beginning of a new academic journey.

"University education is a business of serious commitment. We brief you on two

important things — character and academic excellence," he emphasised.

He further stated that students were expected to demonstrate good character and build on the values instilled in them by their parents before gaining admission into the University.

He assured them that the orientation would guide them on the workings, rules and regulations governing the institution, including examination conduct and career development. He added

He described the Registry as the gateway into and out of the University, advising students to familiarize themselves with the Office of the Registrar for proper administrative guidance.

The orientation programme featured presentations on examination malpractice, dangers of illicit drug abuse, campus relationships and other academic-related matters aimed at equipping the students for a successful university experience.

## Otti calls for synergy to achieve security across Nigeria

...Declares open security summit in Umuahia

UDOKA AGWU, Umuahia

Alex Otti, governor of Abia State, has called for synergy to achieve security across Nigeria. The governor made the call when he formally declared open a 2-day Federal and States Security Administrators (FASA) meeting in Umuahia.

The security meeting provided participants the opportunity to critically examine and share practical experiences on security issues from across states as well as develop actionable recommendations to strengthen collective response to national security.

While declaring open the security meeting organised by the Federal Government in collaboration with Abia State Government, held at the International Conference Centre, Ogurube Layout, Umuahia, Otti said that the presence of the participants in Abia State underscored the shared commitment for all stakeholders in Nigeria, adding that they all have the responsibility to safeguard the nation.

"I welcome you all to Abia for this important Federal and State Security Administrators conference. Your presence here underscores the shared commitment we all have.

"The responsibility to safeguard our nation and strengthen our institutions. And ensure that governance at every level delivers safety, stability and progress to our people," Otti said.

Otti called for synergy and collaboration among stakeholders, including security agencies, INEC, political actors and relevant institutions to ensure credible elections, as well as make efforts to curb activities of hoodlums and political thugs; who often seek to disrupt campaigns, intimidate voters and undermine political and democratic results.

He said that no nation or state can achieve meaningful development without security.

According to him, "Infrastructure projects, industrial growth, investment attraction and job creation, all rest on a secure and predictable environment.

"We are yet to see any society that makes progress without credible elections. Whatever it will cost us, I would enjoin us to ensure



that we have peaceful, free and fair election as we approach 2027."

The governor noted that his reform agenda in Abia State were anchored on rebuilding public confidence in governance, restoring critical infrastructure, revitalising the economy and strengthening institutions.

Otti maintained that none of these could be achieved without a stable security architecture, adding that security is not an isolated function of force, but that it is the enabling environment for prosperity.

George Akume, Secretary to the Government of the federation, in his speech said that the Summit focuses on the preparation for the general election in 2027.

Akume, represented by the Chairman of FASA and Permanent Secretary, Special Services Office of the Presidency, noted that the menace of false information and its negative impact on national security, and the need for a collaborative effort in fighting terrorism and banditry, among others ahead of the 2027 general election.

He appreciated the Abia state governor for accepting to host the meeting in Umuahia and commended his giant achievements in the state.

Nuhu Ribadu, National Security Adviser, represented by A. B. Okoro, his Special Adviser on Governance and Sub-national Matters, said that the Federal Government remains committed to working collaboratively with state governments and all relevant institutions to strengthen the collective security architecture of the nation.

He said that security today, demands coordination, trust, and structured engagement across all levels of government, maintaining that Nigeria's security is a shared responsibility, and with all working together, Nigeria would continue to make measurable progress.

# Politics

## Why Wike is sure Rivers' political crisis is finally over

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

**N**yesom Wike, the FCT minister, who is immediate past governor of Rivers State, has openly declared that the rift between him and his estranged political son, Governor Sim Fubara, which had thrown the state into turmoil and political crisis, was over, after President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's fourth intervention. He emphatically said it would not come back.

This has forced many political observers to want to know why Wike thinks so. Many ask whether it is because he seems to be the alpha and omega of the crisis, and decides when it starts and when it ends?

To prove this, he seems to have resumed the marketing of the same state and administration he had de-marketed over the period. Many say soon, they will find him praising Fubara in public and rallying support for the governor he installed.

He had once said he was ready to fight Fubara, whether he was sure to win or not, so long as enough crisis was generated, saying with crisis, nobody can deliver and that the masses would not be happy.

The change of tone in the week came after President Tinubu's latest intervention (the fourth so far). Tinubu first intervened in 2024 with the eight-point peace accord, which later broke down due to half-hearted implementation by both parties.

The president intervened again in March 2025 with declaration of state of emergency which lasted for six months with the suspension of Fubara and the lawmakers (though many say the lawmakers were not fully suspended because they still went on what they called legislative vacation abroad and got SUVs and N350million each within the suspension period).

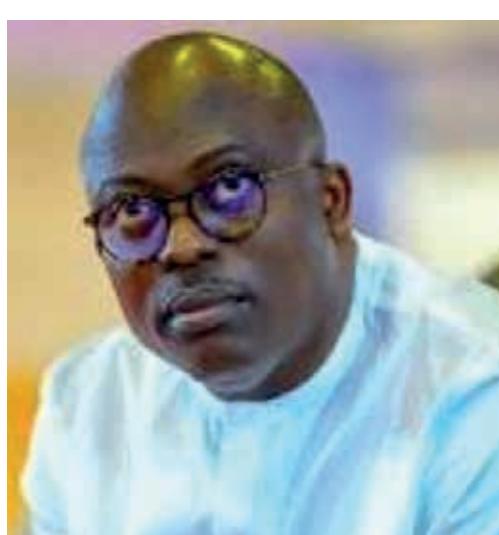
The president intervened again when he allegedly played host to Governor Fubara to conclude the governor's defection to the national ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), an action that sent dangerous signals to Wike into believing that the President was now backing Fubara as new arrowhead in the state.

The last has just taken place, leading to the statement by Wike that the fight was finally over and that it is the President's last intervention.

Observers believe that Wike must be echoing President Tinubu's mind in saying the President will not intervene again. Some think that must be what Tinubu told them in the latest intervention, apparently warning both parties that he will not bother to intervene. He must have used body



President Tinubu



Fubara



Wike

language to let them know what would happen should they go back to crisis. The subtle threat may be something none of the parties is willing to face.

### Has Wike made a kill?

Many say for the FCT Minister who wastes no time to move down to Port Harcourt to start war moves to be declaring end to the fight, the obvious demands and conditions may have been met at the Aso Rock peace meeting. Many had hinted during the latest impeachment push which began after he paid a visit to the lawmakers in Port Harcourt and after he mounted state-wide "thank you" tour of 22 out of the 23 LGAs. He launched verbal threats and missiles at Fubara and energised his followers and supporters into believing that he (Wike) was in charge, was the real leader, and remains the man Tinubu knows in Rivers State.

Insiders said the impeachment plot was actually not to get Fubara out but to force the presidency to make one more intervention this time by getting both parties into a firmest commitment to the peace deal. They had claimed that Wike wanted the president to commit during the peace talks to ensure a prominent position for him (Wike) in the 2027 Tinubu administration after election because of widespread belief that the president may discard Wike either before or after 2027.

Others say that the latest agreement must have made it clear that Fubara must not attempt to continue in 2027, meaning that he would not be involved in the primaries which would begin soon this 2026. The other concession many said Wike was seeking is that the lawmakers who are believed to be Gov Fubara's targets of removal through recall or at the primaries must be returned. The lawmakers had openly accused the governor of being bent on removing them

through recall.

Two other conditions or demands that may not have been openly canvassed include what share of state allocations (plus IGR) would be handed out, and the issue of allocation of slots in the cabinet. Wike had recently said he was not keen on nominating persons to the cabinet, any more. Both parties have kept mum on demands for share of the revenue of the state, but Fubara has made different allusions to the point of mentioning 35percent. The troubles were said to have begun in 2023 when IGR statements were said to be kept opaque to Fubara and meagre amount was being submitted. Fubara said he opened his eyes and the amount changed from regular N10bn per month to N28bn per month. Fubara was required to get approvals on who would visit the governor and where the governor was to travel to.

During the emergency rule, Fubara lost the LGA structure back to Wike, which was a major reason for the crisis of 2024 after 2023 version. So, at the end of the emergency rule, Fubara lost the LGA structure, had already lost the House of Assembly, lost the budget, and only had the cabinet. He is said to get only one concession; no more impeachment. Many now call it 'one-point-victory' out of five key points.

Now, after the Aso Rock peace accord details of which remain secret, Fubara rushed back to Port Harcourt and dissolved his cabinet. This was seen as firm indication that both parties have irreversibly agreed to obey Mr. President. Many say, if Wike is happy, the state would be in peace.

### Wike makes it clear:

It was reported after the meeting that the FCT Minister told newsmen that President Tinubu's latest intervention was expected to bring an end to the prolonged standoff between the executive and the legislature (actually between him and

Fubara).

Speaking, Wike described the president's role as that of a father stepping in to resolve disputes between the state governor and the legislature.

"He is very kind to the people of the state. If there seems to be any problem between the legislature and the governor, as a father, he really has to intervene," Wike said.

He said this was the second time (actually fourth) Tinubu was personally intervening in the Rivers' political rift and expressed strong confidence that the latest effort would permanently resolve the discord.

"I believe by the grace of God that this will be the last time Mr. President will intervene," Wike said.

The former Rivers' governor said he had already instructed the parties involved to comply fully with the president's directives, adding that he was certain they would not disobey.

"And I have told them to obey Mr. President and I know that they would not hesitate," he said.

Wike expressed the optimism that Siminalayi Fubara, governor of Rivers, would fulfil his own part of the agreement or understanding reached during the presidential intervention.

"And I know that the governor would carry out his own part to make sure that this is the final time that Rivers' people will hear this kind of discord," he added.

### Fubara takes first step...

Truly as Wike predicted, compliance seems fast. Governor Fubara has dissolved the state's Executive Council, days after the latest round of peace process between Fubara and Wike.

Those close to the governor gave hints, saying it was actually part of the broader realignment expected to produce a more inclusive executive council reflecting the new political understanding between camps loyal to the governor and Wike.

Analysts suggested the move may open the door for the reconstitution of the cabinet to accommodate loyalists from both political blocs, thereby stabilising governance and restoring cohesion within the state's political leadership.

While details of the reconciliation terms have not been made public, the development is being seen as a strategic reset aimed at ending months of acrimony and restoring administrative focus.

With the executive council now dissolved, attention turns to the governor's next move — particularly the composition of a new cabinet and whether it will cement the fragile peace forged at the highest level of the Presidency.

### Conclusion

The Presidency may have finally made itself clear because it seemed to rather be confusing the people of the state and most Nigerians on who was in charge in Rivers State.

Daniel Bwala had spoken for the presidency reaffirming what the national secretary of the APC had said earlier that Fubara, now in APC as governor, was 001. Bwala added that Wike was not even a member of the APC let alone to be leader of the APC in Rivers State.

This was followed by Kashim Shettima, vice president, who made it clear that governors including the defecting ones, were now the leaders of the APC in their various states. Tinubu was however, to be quoted few days later that as far as he was concerned, Wike remained the 'Ultimate Leader' of Rivers State no matter his party. This created huge confusion and a big lull in the Fubara camp. Now, Tinubu seems to have returned everything to Wike, and Fubara seems to have accepted his fate. His gain: no more impeachment.

Has Wike got all the terms he was said to have demanded for provoking the latest crisis and impeachment? The facts are fast exploding.

# 2027: Internal fault lines, legal clouds test Amaechi's bid for ADC presidential ticket

SAAWUA TERZUNGWE

**A**s political permutations ahead of the 2027 general election begin to crystallise, Rotimi Amaechi, former governor of Rivers State and ex-minister of Transportation, finds himself navigating a complex web of ambition, uncertainty, and internal party dynamics within the African Democratic Congress (ADC).

Amaechi, who formally exited the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) after months of strained relations with its leadership, is yet to officially register as a member of the ADC, despite regularly attending its meetings and engaging with key figures in the opposition coalition.

His prolonged silence and hesitation have fuelled intense speculation across political circles, raising questions about his true intentions and the viability of his presidential ambition.

Widely regarded as ambitious, bold, and politically experienced, sources close to Amaechi, have hinted that the former minister is meticulously weighing his options amid an evolving opposition landscape marked by coalition politics, internal competition, and unresolved legal disputes.

Observers say his next move, whether to formally declare for the presidency, align with another contender, or position himself as a power broker, could significantly influence the shape of the 2027 race.

Like Labour Party's 2023 presidential candidate, Peter Obi, Amaechi has hinted on the idea of a single-term presidency if elected. Supporters interpret this as an attempt to sell himself as a transitional leader, one capable of reconciling southern political expectations with broader national stability.

Analysts say this messaging is designed to appeal to voters wary of prolonged power struggles while acknowledging the prevailing sentiment that the South should complete its eight-year tenure at the presidency.

Yet, while Amaechi's credentials as former governor, minister, and party chieftain are not in doubt, the path to securing the ADC's presidential ticket appears increasingly steep.

## Coalition politics and the Obi-Kwankwaso factor

One of the major variables reshaping calculations within the opposition is the growing speculation around a potential joint ticket between Peter Obi and former Kano State governor, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, who was the presidential candidate of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) in the 2023 election.

Political analysts view such an alliance as a significant threat to Amaechi's chances, particularly within a coalition-driven platform like the ADC. An Obi-Kwankwaso ticket, proponents argue, could combine Obi's appeal in the South and among urban, youth voters with Kwankwaso's dominance in Kano State and parts of the North-West.

In the 2023 elections, Obi secured over six million votes nationwide,



Amaechi

winning the Federal Capital Territory, Lagos, most South-East states, and galvanising an unprecedented youth-driven Obidient Movement.

Kwankwaso, on his part, delivered a decisive victory in Kano State, reaffirming his grip on one of Nigeria's largest voting blocs through the well-entrenched Kwankwaso Movement.

Supporters of the proposed alliance argue that an Obi-Kwankwaso ticket could correct some of the structural and geographical weaknesses that undermined the opposition in 2023.

For Amaechi, analysts say, such a development would further shrink his political space within the ADC, particularly if the party prioritises electoral mathematics over individual ambition.

Beyond coalition dynamics, Amaechi faces formidable competition from heavyweight figures within the ADC itself. Aminu Yakudima, a political analyst, has expressed doubts about Amaechi's ability to secure the party's presidential ticket.

In a telephone interview with BusinessDay, Yakudima said Amaechi is contending with more prominent political figures such as former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Kwankwaso, and Obi, each of whom commands broader national recognition and followership.

"I don't think Amaechi will secure the ADC presidential ticket because he is not as popular or as politically experienced as Atiku, Kwankwaso and Obi. He also does not command the kind of large followership these figures enjoy," Yakudima said.

According to him, Amaechi's strengths, administrative experience and political boldness, may not be enough in a contest shaped by mass

appeal, coalition bargaining, and grassroots mobilisation.

He argued that a vice-presidential slot may represent a more realistic pathway for Amaechi, despite the prevailing sentiment favouring a southern presidential candidate.

Yakudima noted that the 2027 election is largely framed by the expectation that the South should retain power for eight years, either through the re-election of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu or the emergence of another southern candidate from the opposition.

"Everything about the 2027 presidency is centred on the South. Even Atiku's political re-engineering may not be strong enough, given the emphasis on producing a president from the south," he said.

Still, Yakudima warned that coalition politics can upset assumptions, adding that an Obi-Kwankwaso ticket could spring surprises. He advised Amaechi to either seek another platform or strategically position himself for a vice-presidential role should Atiku emerge as the dominant contender.

"Otherwise, he risks being disappointed at the eleventh hour," the analyst warned.

## Legal uncertainty and the ADC's internal crisis

Adding another layer of uncertainty is an unresolved legal battle hanging over the ADC. Chekwasi Okorie, elder statesman and founder of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) and the defunct United People's Party (UPP), has warned that all presidential aspirants within the ADC, including Amaechi, face a common legal hurdle.

Okorie told BusinessDay in a telephone chat that the leadership crisis arising from the adoption of former

formidable politicians, boasting of deep political networks, vast resources, extensive campaign experience, and a proven ability to win party primaries.

Many observers see Atiku as a direct threat to Amaechi's ambition. However, Atiku's recent closed-door meeting with the leadership of the Action Democratic Party (ADP) has fuelled speculation that he may be exploring fallback options, possibly in anticipation of adverse legal outcomes or internal manoeuvring within the ADC.

## Amaechi's silence and structural weaknesses

Amid the political scheming, Amaechi has remained notably silent. He is yet to officially pick up an ADC membership card following his resignation from the APC, reinforcing perceptions that he is still testing the waters rather than fully committing to the party.

Jackson Lekan Ojo, a political analyst based in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, believes this hesitation reflects deeper structural challenges facing Amaechi within the ADC.

While acknowledging Amaechi's credentials as a presidential contender, Ojo argued that he lacks the political clout, strategic depth, and broad-based followership required to win the party's ticket.

"The ADC has little or no functional structure in Rivers State, which is Amaechi's home base. Without grassroots structures, it will be difficult to mobilise delegates or voters," Ojo told BusinessDay in a telephone interview.

He added that even if Amaechi were to leave the ADC in search of another platform, the outcome might not be significantly different, given similar structural constraints.

## The zoning question

BusinessDay reports that compounding the uncertainty is the fact that the ADC leadership is yet to unveil its zoning arrangement for the 2027 elections.

Until that framework is clarified, pundits say aspirants like Amaechi remain in a political limbo, unsure of how power-sharing calculations within the party will ultimately play out.

In a recent statement, the ADC National Publicity Secretary, Bolaji Abdullahi, said, "Nigerians are still waiting for us to see that we will do differently. So, zoning or no zoning is not our focus at the moment. When we get to the stage where zoning becomes a priority, we will take a decision."

## A narrowing path

Pundits have argued that internal competition, coalition realignments, legal uncertainty, and organisational weaknesses suggest that Amaechi's presidential ambition faces formidable headwinds within the ADC.

While his experience and political boldness remain assets, analysts say timing, structure, and coalition arithmetic may prove decisive.

As 2027 draws closer, Amaechi's silence, and eventual decision, will not only define his political future but also shape the broader dynamics of Nigeria's opposition politics.

# Politics

## Fubara should learn how to use power – Bayelsa CLO leader

**David West** is chairman of the Civil Liberties Organisation in Bayelsa State and hails from Asari/Toru Local Government Area of Rivers State. In this interview with **SAMUEL ESE**, he spoke on issues surrounding the tussle for the leadership of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Rivers State, the impeachment threat to Governor Siminalayi Fubara and urges the governor to learn how to use the power at his disposal. Excerpts:

**R**ecently, the Special Adviser on Public Communications and Media to the President, Daniel Bwala said Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara was the leader of the All Progressives Congress in the state. What does this mean for the governor?

The statement of the Special Adviser to Mr. President, Daniel Bwala with respect to the issues happening in Rivers State and his position, because from what he said, he made us to understand that or rather, if Bwala speaks, I think it's Mr. President that is also speaking. For Bwala to say or convey the message of Mr. President to everybody or anybody that cares to listen that His Excellency Siminalayi Fubara, the Governor of Rivers State is the leader of the APC is a true position by virtue of the way we play our politics in Nigeria, the governor automatically becomes the leader of the party in a state. The president automatically becomes the leader of the party at the national level.

Although I know fully well that by right that the leader of the party, for instance, in the state is supposed to be the chairman, then at the national level, it is supposed to be the national chairman of the party.

But because of the preference given to the governors and presidents, the governor automatically assumes that position and, if we can recall, on the day that His Excellency Siminalayi Fubara was moving from his party, from the PDP to the APC, on that day, even the Vice President who represented the President, and for all those that were in that occasion, the Vice President made that pronouncement that the governor automatically becomes the leader of the party.

The same position that was taking place in Bayelsa State too when the governor, His Excellency Senator Douye Diri moved from the PDP to the APC, the vice president also made the same pronouncement that from that day henceforth, the leader of the party becomes the governor.

So, what David Bwala had said is the true position of what Mr. President has told us. Again, too, it should also represent the position of the party, both at the national and at the state level in all the states where APC is governing; the governors of the various states are the leaders of the party, and, Rivers State cannot be an exception to that, talking about the political aspect of it.

I think too, talking about the political aspect of such statement, it will rather give more support or more encouragement to the govern-



David West

ment. You will agree with me that Rivers State is in serious internal crisis between the FCT Minister and the governor, and the state House of Assembly and the governor.

To those on this back and forth argument and issues surrounding the leadership of the party, Tinubu or Mr. President, the overall leader of the APC, has made it clear and conferred that power on the position of His Excellency Siminalayi Fubara as the leader of the party.

So, every other person that is in the party will stand behind him; if eventually today the FCT Minister makes his movement to the APC, he will queue behind the governor as the leader. Being a minister and former governor will not entitle him to assume that position as the leader of the party. He has to queue behind the governor, he has to consult the governor in everything that he wants to do.

It is the governor that will decide whatever issues that will take place in the party as the leader of the party in Rivers State inasmuch as the APC is concerned and this gives more backing to the governor, more clearance to the governor, more support to the governor as the leader of the party, and nothing, I believe, nothing will take away that position from him at the moment.

**How will it impact the impeachment process in the state?**

It will have no impact on the impeachment process though it will be of favour to His Excellency the

still there beating the impeachment process.

Discussions are ongoing, meetings are being called between the assembly members and the governor. So, it will have no negative effect or whatsoever on the impeachment process of His Excellency Siminalayi Fubara. Rather as leader of the party by virtue of the statement by Daniel Bwala, it will only give more support and protection to His Excellency the governor.

**Don't you think this will affect the future of politics in the state with regards to the lawmakers who are bent on impeaching the governor?**

Yes, you are very correct. Before now, I think His Excellency the governor will not want these same lawmakers to come back to the state House of Assembly as lawmakers. Apart from the governor, I also believe that the constituencies they represent, like my constituency in Asari/Toru Local Government Area, I know that the constituents are tired of our assembly member there. The people are also asking these questions in our local parlance, na only you dey? Na only you dey? Let someone else go there.

So the governor, based on this bad blood that was between them, himself and the lawmakers, and seeing that they are very, very faithful and loyal to the FCT Minister who is the architect of the whole problem, will not want these same lawmakers to come back.

Mind you, although not confirmed, but from feelers we got, like one of the agreements, one of the subjects of the agreement, is the governor will allow the lawmakers to return, that is the 27 lawmakers. That the governor will allow of them to return and the FCT Minister will also be nominated as a minister. It is the governor that will certainly nominate who is going to be a minister from the state.

So, if this agreement or arrangement is in place, I think it will be very difficult for these lawmakers to come back, and of a truth, it will also create some political confusion, so to say, in the 2027 general election.

If those lawmakers leave the APC, which they cannot do, whichever party they want to go to, they might also come out as spoilers for the return of His Excellency President Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. But before the 2027 general elections, you know politicians, they know how to agree and disagree. We hope and expect that before the 2027 general elections, all frayed nerves must have calmed down, all egos, all grievances, they must have reconciled their differences.

And I think Mr. President, in his usual manner, will just give a directive, all of you go and work together with the governor, and if the president gives such a directive, I don't think anybody in his right-thinking mind or sense of reasoning will object to that directive of the president. So, the 2027 elections here in Rivers State, hopefully, is going to be peaceful.

The matter of the impeachment process and what have you, the governor will still remain, the election will come and then for some of the lawmakers, as I told you, it will be difficult for some of them to come back for some of them have been there.

For some, they are running their sixth tenure; for some, they are doing their third tenure, some their fourth tenure or thereabouts, so the constituencies they represent, too will get tired of these people and also looking at what they have brought to the constituencies.

**What kind of development have they also brought as lawmakers? What kind of laws have they passed as lawmakers to favour constituents, and their constituency projects, how far and what have you been able to deliver on the promises they made to the good people they have gone to represent?**

Some of them might not return, I am very optimistic about that, some of them will not return to the house.

I also want to use this opportunity to advise the governor of the state, Siminalayi Fubara to know that he has the power with him. He has everything with him as the governor of the state. He should begin to learn how to use power or exert power.

If I were to be the governor of Rivers State, by now I would have changed the leadership of the house. Yes, if I were to be the governor, I would have changed the leadership of the house.

Yes, I have advised His Excellency the governor to go and ask former President Olusegun Obasanjo how he did his while he was the president - what happened at the National Assembly, the removal of the Senate President and even the Speakers of the House of Representatives.

So, Mr. Governor should also go and ask former President Olusegun Obasanjo to advise him on how to use power. I maintain my word, if I were to be Siminalayi Fubara, His Excellency the governor, I would have changed the leadership of the house by bringing another Speaker.

He has the financial capacity to do. Spend some money and you will change the leadership of the house and have peace of mind on this impeachment.

# Politics

## The constitution is ambiguous on gross misconduct - Ex-Wike Special Adviser

Opunabo Inko-Tariah is a civil rights advocate and former special Adviser on Media and Publicity to FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike while he was governor of Rivers State. In this interview with **SAMUEL ESE**, he shared his opinion on the APC leadership question, the ambiguity of the provision of the constitution on the grounds for impeachment and the constitutional power of the House of Assembly on the impeachment process. Excerpts:

**T**he Presidency recently restated the position of Governor Sim Fubara as the leader of the APC in Rivers State. How does this impact the party's leadership question?

Well, that Fubara is the leader of APC in Rivers State is irrefutable. When I say irrefutable, it means indisputable. You cannot dispute that because it is the tradition that the governors, I'm talking of from 1999. In 1979, the reverse was the case. The chairmen of the parties were the leaders of the parties; I'm talking of the time of Shehu Shagari. But, from 1999, the governors and the presidents are now leaders of the parties, heads of the parties in their various states. So, that should not be in contention. But right now, because of some selfish interest and because of the political saga in Rivers State, they want to argue that Fubara, the governor is not the leader of APC in Rivers State. But that is completely infamy, nonsensical.

The leader of a party in a state is the governor and the national leader is the president. Some will argue, why did they refer to Tinubu as the leader of APC when Buhari was the president. But that's a different scenario to start with.

Number one, the APC was more or less formed by a coalition with Tinubu, practically as the head. Number two, it also depends on the president. Probably, he was not even interested in being the leader of the party and was more concerned with being the president of the country. So, the president never argued that with him. There was no contention when Tinubu was referred to as the leader of APC in the country. Probably, Mr. President was at that time, I'm talking of Buhari of blessed memory, if Mr. President had said at that time, no, I don't think Tinubu would have dragged with him. But it is natural right from 1999 to date. The governors are leaders of their parties in their states. And in the absence of a governor from a political party, the chairman becomes the leader of the party.

As a lawyer and concerned indigene of Rivers State, what is your opinion on the House of Assembly impeachment threat against Governor Fubara?

Let us not trivialise the power of the Rivers State House of Assembly or any House of Assembly for that matter. It is within the vires of the House of Assembly to commence impeachment proceedings against a governor and in the place



Opunabo Inko-Tariah

of the National Assembly, it is also within their rights to do so.

But as a right, it is expected to be exercised to do prudently and not recklessly. And that is why the issue of gross misconduct flawed in the interpretation of the laws because it is believed that you have responsible and not irresponsible men as members of the House of Assembly, or let me just say, as legislators because we have fellows of both state and federal as legislators. But unfortunately, in the case of Rivers State, the issue of gross misconduct as expounded by the House of Assembly Speaker does not really amount to gross misconduct. Why am I saying that?

Now, first and foremost, I quarrelled with this ambiguous term of gross misconduct. The drafters of the constitution would have spelt out the grounds for gross misconduct, but they left it to the interpretation of the legislature. So, if a governor gets up in the morning and doesn't say good morning to a legislator it becomes gross misconduct. If the governor is not on terms with the legislative arm, it becomes gross misconduct like what is going on in Rivers State.

**What has the governor done?** In fact, those whose membership should be withdrawn are the legislators. Since they got into office, they've been fighting the governor. They should mention one constituency project they have done; they should mention one law passed in the interest of Rivers persons.

They've even collected N350 million for constituency projects no one executed, they've been given brand new SUVs, they are living

in luxury. What of their constituents?

So, what is that gross conduct allegation levelled against the governor? Simply because you wanted one billion Naira and he refused to give you one billion Naira when you could not even account for the N350 million you have collected.

If you want a supplementary budget, is it not the governor's prerogative to decide if he wants a supplementary budget? But you need that supplementary budget so you will get the extra N650 million.

And, why do they need this money? Because the elections are fast approaching, that is why they need this money so that they will have enough financial war chest to fight re-election of Governor Sim Fubara. This one is not about Rivers persons; they do everything to stymie the governor in the delivery of the dividends of democracy.

But you see, Rivers people cannot be deluded because proceeding the suspense of the declaration of the state of emergency, we saw what the governor was doing. He was in a construction frenzy, working at frenetic pace. The state of emergency suspended that - these six months of hiatus - and nothing really happened; Rivers State regressed within that six months.

The governor came back: just recently, he commenced and finished the commissioning of projects again. Go to the Secretariat, workers are happy. They have the Christmas bonus, there is promotion. For eight years, it was a march of terror, conquest and subjugation under Nyesom Wike as governor

of Rivers State. There was no promotion.

Everything was based on mediocrity and not meritocracy. If you are close to him, yes, he gives you a bit of it, the crumbs from the table.

But this man, there's no way that the governor is stingy, stingy how? Because he does not dole out money? Rather than giving - you know they say teach a man to fish and not to give him fish - he's creating an enabling environment for everybody to thrive, for everybody to succeed, and not just his cronies. He's not giving you money like other governors did. He's not saying come and take one million naira, come and take one billion Naira. No; rather he creates that environment for you to make your own money if you're intelligent enough and if you're useful to yourself and to the society.

That's why now people say he's stingy and that's why the assembly is angry with him because he doesn't dole money.

And I can tell you that the assembly is acting at the behest of the FCT Minister. They're not doing it on their own because their loyalty, their fidelity is to the FCT Minister. And the FCT Minister has himself said this, that the re-election of Governor Sim Fubara will be tantamount to his political nadir.

He said so publicly that if the governor is re-elected ..., so the fight is about you. That alone vitiates any further proof that the fight is personal, it's egocentric that the re-election of a governor is tantamount to your political death. What are you talking about? Are you the owner of Rivers State? Look at all the PDP national chairmen that he produced, from Uche Secondus, all of them. He fell out with them. It's unprincipled. So, if you marry a wife for a man, are you going to sleep with the wife?

I don't understand. Once he disagrees with you, he reasons and targets you, you can go, you're a thief. You're calling everybody thief.

In 1999/2000 that was when you became local government chairman and from then you've been in government till today. How did you get money to buy Rolls Royce? You said this, at least on air, that you bought Rolls Royce, and Seun Okinbajo asked you, with your money? You said yes! Where did he get the money to buy the Rolls Royce from, but you call everybody a thief?

Now, recently we heard he just bought a private jet. Where is the money coming from? Because even if you add all your salaries

from local government chairman to date, you know the salaries of those days, how will you get the money to buy Rolls Royce?

The properties you have scattered all over Nigeria and all over the world, we are talking of the USA own that is still under probe, how did you get money to buy that? You said your wife's father. You should say that to the birds and not to those who know him in Rivers State.

We know the wife very well. Very respectable lady, judge, from a very decent home. Let's not go into those things. So, how did you get the money? But every other person is a thief, but you are the saint, you are Jesus.

Somebody is angry that his wristwatch is missing and he finds it in your house, and you say no, I'm not a thief. How did the wristwatch move to your house? I'm using that as an analogy, I'm not saying that happened.

You are saying you are not a thief, but how did you get all that wealth you got? How come you are drinking 40 years whiskey but you are not a thief? I mean, who are you talking to?

So, it's an egocentric battle and Rivers people are solidly behind the governor. Look, let me be honest with you, notwithstanding the attacks that the governor is accused of being stingy, yet he has the organic support.

What does that tell you? It's a referendum of the people's disapproval of eight years of dictatorship and bad governance. You claim you built bridges, why did you not invest in human capital development?

You know why you built bridges - even in Abuja you saw the riot, the protest - why are you building roads and bridges? That's where money comes from.

Who are you deceiving? That's where the money will come from. So, you build bridges, you build this, what of human capital development? You brought back students who were on scholarship under Amaechi that you cannot send students abroad to study Law, it's a waste of resources, but you sent your son. Some of them committed suicide out of frustration, but you sent your son to study Law and Economics abroad. Is that not duplicity? So, I'm not bothered about - like I said - it's the right of the legislature, but I'm not really bothered about what I see as rhetoric by the Speaker, Martin Amaewhule's sanctimonious frivolity, absolute rubbish.

# Politics

## FCT polls: APC inaugurates 105-member campaign team

SAAWUA TERZUNGWE

The political temperature is rising ahead of the February 21, 2026 Area Council elections in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), as the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and opposition parties step up mobilisation in what analysts view as a strategic test of strength before the 2027 general elections.

In a show of organisational readiness, the APC on Friday inaugurated a 105-member National Campaign Council in Abuja, tasking members with ensuring grassroots penetration across the territory's six area councils.

Party leaders described the polls as more than a local contest, framing them instead as a sym-

bolic political battle for influence in the nation's administrative heart.

Inaugurating the council, Nentawe Yilwatda, APC national chairman, said the election would require unity, coordination and sustained mobilisation if the party hopes to dominate the territory.

He emphasised that Abuja's unique demographic composition makes the contest nationally significant, noting that residents from all geopolitical zones live and vote in the capital.

"This party is your home. We must open the space for inclusive participation and provide leadership that attracts Nigerians from every corner," he said.

Yilwatda added that the party has continued to witness defections from rival parties, which he interpreted as growing confi-

dence in the APC's national leadership.

He also recalled that the party lost a key area council to the Social Democratic Party in the previous electoral cycle, stressing that the forthcoming election presents an opportunity to reclaim lost ground and consolidate influence.

### Govs, other bigwigs to anchor campaign machinery

The campaign council is chaired by AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq, governor of Kwara State and chairman of the Progressive Governors' Forum (NGF), with governors Hope Uzodinma (Imo), Mai Mala Buni (Yobe) and Mohammed Umar Bago (Niger) serving as co-chairmen.

The council also includes top federal figures such as Senate President Godswill Akpabio,

Deputy Senate President, Barau Jibrin, Speaker of the House, Tajuudeen Abbas and Deputy Speaker, Benjamin Kalu, among other party heavyweights.

In his remarks as council secretary, Kalu expressed confidence that the party would secure victory, arguing that the APC's governance record and infrastructure investments in Abuja would resonate with voters.

He cited ongoing projects supervised by FCT Minister Nyesom Wike, as evidence of the administration's commitment to development in the FCT.

Kalu also revealed that the campaign strategy would rely heavily on door-to-door engagement, business outreach and youths mobilisation, a method aimed at converting federal presence into grassroots electoral ad-

vantage.

The Independent National Electoral Commission has fixed February 21 for the elections into chairmanship and councillorship positions across the six councils - Abuja Municipal Area Council, Bwari, Abaji, Gwagwalada, Kuje and Kwali. INEC has already conducted mock accreditation exercises, signalling readiness for the polls.

Recall that the National Publicity Secretary of the African Democratic Congress (ADC), Bolaji Abdullahi, said last week that the party remains fully prepared for the FCT council elections despite its earlier request for a postponement due to the Ramadan period.

He said INEC had explained that shifting the date was not possible because the election timeline was constitutionally prescribed.



L-R: Adu Zoro, Kunle Ajiyi, national commissioners INEC, and Joash Amupitan, chairman INEC, during the 1st quarterly consultative meeting with the Media Executives ahead of FCT, Ekiti and Osun elections held in Abuja. Picture by Tunde Adeniyi

## ADC, LP, PDP not on ballot as 7 parties vie for Rivers' bye-elections

KELECHI NWAUCHA, Port Harcourt

The African Democratic Congress (ADC), Labour Party (LP) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) will not be on ballot on February 21, 2026 when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducts bye-elections for the Ahoada East II and Khana II House of Assembly seats in Rivers State.

This became clear on Thursday as Gabriel Yomere, INEC's Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) for Rivers State, briefed the press on the commission's preparedness for the bye-elections.

Our correspondent gathered that the PDP did not present candidates for the elections, possibly following its Rainbow Coalition with the All Progressives Congress (APC). Labour

Party is enmeshed in a legal tussle over leadership issues, the commission said, while the ADC reportedly did not register its candidates within the stipulated timeframe.

The Action Alliance (AA), All Progressives Congress (APC), All Peoples Movement (APM), Boot Party (BP), New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), Young Progressives Party (YPP) and Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) have presented 12 candidates for the two Assembly seats.

Egor Marvelous (AA), Ukalikpe Napoleon Nyemodumakpo (APC), Godstime Egor (APM), Osaje Amezhi Clifford (BP), Ephraim Raphael Ede (NNPP), Ogide Samson Greatman (YPP) and Okwudu Saturday Prosper (ZLP) are contesting for the Ahoada East II seat.

Nwakpang Meesua Victor (AA), Lolo Bulabari Henrietta (APC), Yormii Justice Barasima

(NNPP), Celestine Taagaloobari Gideon (YPP) and Anthony Meneiyi Ndor (ZLP) will be on the ballot for Khana II.

Bulabari Henrietta Lolo (APC), the only female in the race, has been described by analysts as the favourite for Khana II seat formerly occupied by her late husband, Dinebari Lolo.

Geraldine Ekeleme, INEC's head, Voter Education & Publicity, in a release, however, said that accreditation of voters and actual voting will commence on Saturday, February 21 at all the designated Polling units in the affected constituencies by 8.30am.

"Only registered voters with valid Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) will be allowed to vote, and accreditation will be conducted using the BVAS. Remember, No PVC, No voting."

## 2027: INEC fixes Feb 20 for presidential, N/Assembly polls

SAAWUA TERZUNGWE

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has fixed February 20, 2027, for the conduct of the presidential and National Assembly elections, while governorship and state Houses of Assembly polls will hold on March 6, 2027.

Joash Amupitan, a professor and INEC chairman, announced the timetable during a press conference in Abuja on Friday, stating that the decision was in line with constitutional provisions and the Electoral Act, 2022.

He explained that the elections would cover the offices of President and Vice President, members of the Senate and House of Representatives, as well as Governors, Deputy Governors and State Houses of Assembly, except in Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Kogi, Ondo and Osun states, where off-cycle governorship elections apply.

According to him, the commission has formally set the electoral process in motion and released a detailed timetable and schedule of activities on its official website for political par-

ties and stakeholders.

Amupitan said the early announcement reflects INEC's commitment to transparency, credibility and strict compliance with the law, noting that the notice of election must be published at least 360 days before polling day.

Addressing concerns over delays in the amendment of the Electoral Act, he stressed that the commission would continue to operate within the framework of the existing law while remaining open to reforms that could strengthen the electoral process.

He added that party primaries, submission of nomination forms and campaign periods would be conducted within the statutory timelines, with campaigns ending 24 hours before election day.

The INEC chairman also called on security agencies, political actors, the media, civil society organisations and voters to work collectively to ensure peaceful and credible elections.

"As we commence this national exercise, the commission remains fully prepared and determined to deliver elections that reflect the sovereign will of Nigerians," he said.

# Shock, mixed reactions trail Kwankwaso's name on US 'extremists' list

INIOMBONG IWOK (Lagos) and  
ADEOLA AJAKAIYE (Kano)

Many Nigerians have expressed shock after a bill introduced in the United States Congress identified former governor of Kano State and national leader of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, as among individuals and groups that could face visa bans, asset freezes and other sanctions over alleged violation of religious freedom.

The proposed Nigeria Religious Freedom and Accountability Act of 2026 would direct the U.S. Departments of State and Treasury to consider targeted sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act on individuals or entities responsible for severe religious freedom violations.

In addition to Kwankwaso, the bill named the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria and certain Fulani ethnic militias.

The development, which trended heavily on Wednesday, triggered widespread disbelief among political stakeholders and supporters of the former governor, many of whom questioned the basis of the reported mention and whether it stemmed from misinformation or mistaken identity.

Although opinions have been mixed from Nigerians, there are those who say it was time those responsible or have links to the spate of killings, kidnapping and generally aiding insecurity in Nigeria are punished.

"The mention of his name is surprising, but they should investigate, we have lost too many Nigerians to the terror war and insurgency and it is time those behind this crime are held to account," Olisa Okeha, public affairs commentator, said.

Kwankwaso, a two-term governor of Kano State, former Minister of Defence, senator, and presidential candidate of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) in 2023, has not been formally designated a terrorist sponsor by the U.S. government.

However, the mere suggestion of his inclusion in legislative discussions abroad has stirred intense political debate at home, particularly in Kano and across northern Nigeria.

Other public commentators said the United States under the current administration of Donald Trump could not be taken seriously, arguing that they want to see evidence linking Kwankwaso to terrorism before believing.

"They said they are targeting him because he spoke out; if that is true it is shameful to them. Many of us know that sharia was not implemented in Kano alone. Bring evidence out," a source who did not want his name in print said.

**Confusion over Sharia reference**  
Part of the controversy stems from the allegation by the United States lawmakers that Kwankwaso was de-



Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso

scribed as the "originator" of Sharia law implementation in Nigeria, an assertion many analysts say contradicts historical records.

Nigeria's expansion of Sharia-based criminal law codes in the early 2000s is widely associated with initiatives undertaken in Zamfara State under former governor, Ahmed Sani Yerima, with several northern states subsequently adopting similar frameworks within constitutional provisions.

Kano State, under Kwankwaso as governor, implemented the Islamic legal code, joining other northern states such as Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Yobe, Jigawa and Borno.

Legal experts pointed out that the adoption of Sharia-based systems occurred through state legislative processes and remains subject to Nigeria's constitutional structure, appellate review, and federal oversight.

Against that background, experts say the attempt to single out one individual for broader constitutional developments has raised questions about accuracy and context.

Ekemini Udim, a legal practitioner, expressed shock about allegations linking Kwankwaso to terrorism financing.

Udim noted that he had not heard Kwankwaso's name being linked to terrorism.

"I'm surprised to see Rabiu Kwankwaso's name in that list. I think the US needs to give us more clarifications. I have not really heard his name being bandied around terrorism, but maybe America has better information than Nigeria has not had over the years."

"Maybe, the US is able to monitor activities of the former governor and minister and they now think there's need to make it clearer for all of us in Nigeria to understand."

**Kwankwaso targeted - Kwankwasiya, NNPP kick**  
Since the report broke, the NNPP and Kwankwasiya movement, a political group loyal to Kwankwaso,

have strongly rejected the proposal, describing it as unfair and politically motivated.

Many political ally of the Kano politician have also spoken in his favour, while vowing for his integrity.

Speaking to BusinessDay, Ladipo Johnson, who is the National Publicity Secretary of the NNPP, said the allegation was untrue and misleading.

Johnson, who is a long-term close political associate of Kwankwaso, stated that many Nigerians would not believe what the offence the United States lawmakers are alleging the Kano politicians has committed.

"It is false and misleading; not many people would believe them, we know what Kwankwaso can do. The publicity will only make him more popular," he said.

Similarly, the New Nigeria Peoples Party in a reaction, also expressed shock over a proposed bill before the United States Congress which named its national leader, Kwankwaso, among individuals recommended for targeted sanctions over alleged religious freedom violations in Nigeria.

The party dismissed any suggestion that Kwankwaso was responsible for religious freedom violations.

"We see this development as a contrived action against an innocent man who clearly has no relationship with religious fundamentalism in Nigeria."

"His record is there in the public domain, either in public office or in private life and it is advisable for people to investigate such things properly, before reaching such conclusions," a statement by the NNPP said.

The party noted months before the latest development, Kwankwaso had reacted to the decision by US President Donald Trump to redesignate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern over alleged religious persecution.

According to the party, "The months before the latest development, Kwankwaso had openly reacted when President Donald Trump

redesignated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern over alleged religious persecution.

"In a statement posted on his X handle at the time, Kwankwaso cautioned against what he described as oversimplified characterisations of Nigeria's internal challenges.

"Kwankwaso stated that it was important to emphasise that our country is a sovereign nation whose people face different threats from outlaws across the country."

However, in a post shared on X, Moore had written to Kwankwaso, "Governor, do you care to comment on your own complicity in the death of Christians? You instituted sharia law. You signed the law that makes so-called blasphemy punishable by death."

Further questioning the allegation, the NNPP asked, "But is this enough to accuse Kwankwaso of severe religious freedom violations? Why were the other state governors who introduced Sharia in their states not accused as well?"

#### Kperogi, Galadima, Sanni react

Farooq Kperogi, political analyst and columnist explained why Kwankwaso was singled out in a proposed United States bill seeking visa bans and asset freezes on Nigerian political figures.

In a commentary titled 'Why Kwankwaso Was Singled Out in a US Bill', Kperogi argued that Kwankwaso's inclusion has little to do with religious extremism and more to do with his public criticism of America's designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern.

According to Kperogi, Kwankwaso is an unlikely candidate for accusations of religious fanaticism, noting that as governor of Kano in 2000, he initially resisted the introduction of Sharia law and only declared it after sustained pressure from clerical groups and the public.

Kperogi explained that tensions resurfaced years later when Kwankwaso openly criticised the US position on Nigeria's religious freedom challenges, warning that such labeling oversimplified complex security issues and risked deepening interreligious divisions.

Kperogi suggested the controversy may boost Kwankwaso's national profile, potentially strengthening his appeal among northern voters and elevating him beyond Kano politics — much like former president Muhammadu Buhari once did across the region.

"The explanation is straightforward. Kwankwaso was the only nationally prominent Nigerian politician who openly criticised the United States' designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern," Kperogi said.

Another political commentator, Shehu Sani also called on United States legislators to verify the facts before targeting Kwankwaso, saying there is no record of him supporting or condoning violence or discrimi-

nation.

Buba Galadima, chieftain of the NNPP, described allegations linking former Kano State Kwankwaso to terrorism as politically motivated.

Speaking in an interview, Galadima, who is a close-ally of the Kano politician alleged that the claims are aimed at weakening Kwankwaso's potential presidential or vice-presidential ambition ahead of the 2027 general elections.

"The insinuation that Kwankwaso was a financier of terrorism is baseless. It is an attempt to smear a peaceful Nigerian ahead of the 2027 elections," Galadima said.

He further accused some media organisations and political actors of spreading unverified reports in a bid to tarnish Kwankwaso's reputation.

Galadima also clarified that Kwankwaso did not implement Sharia law in its strictest form, noting that the political fallout from that period contributed to Ibrahim Shekarau's eventual emergence as governor.

Also speaking, Isaac Idahosa, a Christian cleric and Kwankwaso's former running mate, described the U.S. visa ban proposal as a "gross injustice" and said it was based on inaccurate information about Kwankwaso's record of promoting peaceful coexistence.

#### Opinions divided along partisan lines in Kano

In Kano, reactions have been sharply divided along partisan lines. Loyalists within the NNPP and the Kwankwasiya movement dismissed the development as external interference in Nigeria's domestic politics, while some critics urged caution, calling for transparency and clarification from United States authorities.

Political observers say Kano remains a critical electoral bloc heading toward 2027, and any international controversy surrounding one of its dominant political figures is bound to reverberate nationally.

"Whether factual or exaggerated, international scrutiny elevates a politician's profile," said a Kano-based political analyst. "In northern politics, being perceived as targeted externally can sometimes reinforce internal solidarity."

Indeed, some commentators argue that the episode has unintentionally amplified Kwankwaso's visibility beyond regional boundaries.

Once often labeled a primarily Kano-based political heavyweight, the former governor now finds his name circulating in global policy discussions, a development that may reshape perceptions of his influence.

#### Broader political calculations

Beyond the immediate controversy, analysts see strategic implications.

Kwankwaso has remained an influential figure in northern politics, commanding disciplined grassroots following symbolised by the red caps of the Kwankwasiya movement.

# Society

## Valentine in the Digital Age: What has happened to its economy?

...It's more about recognition than gifts - Fatayo

JOHN SALAU

**T**echnology is changing the colour of everything in the country, even to the point of food that people eat these days.

In the past, people used to give out physical cards and flowers during Valentine periods, but these days, love messages are sent through the phones with all the embellishments of 'emojis' on social media platforms to convey the message of love.

While celebration of special moments and every other thing may have shifted from the usual brick and mortar space to virtual spaces - the act of love itself characterised with caring, gifting and emotional support remains what it is.

Today, the internet influences our dating lives, and Valentine's Day is no different. Hence, it is commonplace to receive a curated collection of gift items, especially electronic cards (eCards) conveying different types of messages that speak to individual needs.

"We've curated an elegant set of eCards for Valentine's Day, created just for you to share your wishes with ease and style."

"Browse the collection and choose the one that best reflects what you'd like to convey," 123 Greetings, a digital gifting site wrote in a mail sent out for Valentine.

Similarly, the micro blogging sites have all taken the digital experiences even more pedestrian to the 'likes', 'sharing' and 'following' now used to convey affectionate messages.

So, it is not surprising to see people demand for likes, shares or following, as a way of showing love; away from the physical or eGifts.

A recent survey on Bumble, indicated that matches increased in the U.S. in January 2026 compared to December 2025, suggesting that single people want a Valentine's Day date.

Also, internal data from Tinder indicated that over 298 million more Likes are exchanged, and over 2.1 million more daily messages are sent during Valentine than the rest of the year.

Another data by Hinge revealed that in the two weeks leading to Valentine's Day 2024, Likes sent grew by 28 percent, and matches increased by 17 percent compared to the same period in 2023.

But with the increasing cost of living across Nigeria, it is now commonplace for people - especially millennials to take and keep their Valentine's celebration on the digital space.

And the reasons are easy to come by. The digital spaces only required data - no physical space required, no need for the price gouging.



ing effect that comes with visiting a restaurant.

Literally speaking, the digital space helps in halving if not eliminating the struggle many would have had with choice of location, costs and the search for other cheaper venues.

But the question is; has love gone to bed now that we have taken romance online? Or is love also in search of cheaper alternatives? And, if so, what will our Valentine's Day begin to look like?

"Valentine's season is here again, and for me, it always comes with mixed feelings," Omolabake Fatayo, founder, Stravigo Ventures Limited, a PR and marketing agency, said.

According to her, the world suddenly wants to talk about love, flowers, and grand gestures during Valentine.

But the truth is, people should not necessarily wait for February 14 or any time of the year to show love and affection. "For me, it's a reminder that men, just like women, deserve to feel appreciated.

"Looking at my husband, I see how much he values thoughtfulness, how much he wants to be recognized and not just relied on to provide," Fatayo said.

But a Port-Harcourt-based Youth Corps member disclosed to BusinessDay that she has not had a memorable Valentine's celebration.

"Honestly, I have not experienced Val like that," says Amaka, adding that the first time she received a Valentine-related gift was in 2025, while she was teaching in Owerri, long before she was mobilised for her national youth service.

"It was even last year own I can tell u a copper gifted me. And the copper na Yoruba guy," she added.

### The cost effect of Valentine

"I also have to say, I am glad the money-on-flowers cash bouquet thing has been banned," Fatayo said.

According to her, flowers alone are beautiful, fragrant, and meaningful, but when Naira notes become part of the bouquet, it feels empty.



She added that it turns a personal sentiment into a performance of wealth. "Valentine should feel personal and thoughtful, not like a social media stunt," she says.

Many Nigerians started January with resolutions to build an emergency fund, save consistently, plan trips, or simply try to develop better money habits in 2026.

However, it is believed that these goals should not just disappear because one big celebration is about the corner.

Valentine's Day is just one moment in a year filled with many celebratory seasons. It is one of those seasons where spending feels inevitable.

Gifts are exchanged, love stories are shared, and transfers also move quickly between both sexes.

"What I've noticed is that a lot of people mistake Valentine's for proving love in big, flashy ways. That is not it," Fatayo said.

She said that if someone only reaches out when they need something or only tries to make an individual feel better as a way to make up for a mistake; then the feeling is not real. "Real care is steady and consistent."

According to her, Valentine's is a moment to pause and reflect on the people who show up for us, the people whose presence matters even when nothing is perfect or dramatic.

"Having gone through the dating phase and now being married, I've realised this season is more about recognition than gifts," she says.

She added that in Nigeria, where men are mostly seen as providers,

Valentine's is a chance to remind them they are valued for themselves.

"Men in our lives deserve acknowledgment for who they are, not what they can do or buy. A simple message, a warm gesture, or just being present counts for more than any bouquet or dinner," Fatayo said.

But, Olorunfemi Hanson, head of marketing and communication, PalmPay, said a more practical question people should ask once the Valentine's excitement settles is: "Did you only spend or did you save too?"

'Because, while spending for love is normal, smart money habits are what help you stay balanced until your next pay day,' Hanson said.

### Romance through the screen

With so much of our dating lives influenced by the internet, with dating apps helping to move courtship online on the back of COVID-19 restrictions - many have embraced the remote Valentine's celebrations.

"Online or long-distance dating isn't a new initiative," says Adewale, a Lagos-based entrepreneur, who once dated a lady he met on 2go a few years ago.

He disclosed that after dating each other for some months online, the lady requested to come visit him in Lagos.

"She initiated our first and only visit in 2005; that was after we have known each other for about six months on 2go," he said, indicating celebrating Valentine's Day with his long-distance partner before agreeing to meet physically.

The new frontier of digital intimacy or digital romances are not just for those unable to spend time together due to location, nor limited to Valentine's Day.

Today, couples who stay apart either due to work-related separation or school can invite the digital world into their relationship in various ways.

In today's world, the distinction between digital intimacy and physical, in-person intimacy has become blurred thanks to the use of technology and its advancement in relationships.

Lovers can now bridge long-distance digitally via video calls and other digital means of communication.

Similarly, there is a growing interest in emerging forms of sex tech — sexual technologies that promote emotional connection in addition to (remote) physical closeness.

Engagement with sex tech has risen among American adults, suggesting a noticeable shift in the way Americans view intimacy, as well as weakening stigmatisation of digital intimacy.

Today, people can basically buy a touch bracelet for their loved ones, or have a date night together in the VR world, or FaceTime each other.

Also, lovers can watch movies together on streaming platforms or play video games together to help

deepen their bond.

According to Fatayo, Valentine's season can be meaningful if people pay attention to what matters. She said that Val celebration should be about presence, acknowledgment, and consistency.

"Whether you are dating in Lagos, living in Abuja, or married in Port Harcourt, it's a time to appreciate men and women alike for who they are, not just what they give. It's a reminder that everyone just wants to feel seen and valued," Fatayo said.

### When Valentine spending meets smart saving

From transfers for gifts to payments for dates, Valentine's Day comes with a spike in transactions.

And for many, February can quietly become one of the most expensive months of the year, especially after enduring the longest months of the year - January, considered to be about '40' days.

That's why more people are looking for simple ways to save money in Nigeria without disrupting their lifestyle.

According to Hanson, people do not have to break through the bank to save, because features like PalmPay's Spend & Save make that possible.

He added that instead of waiting for the perfect time to save, money is set alongside everyday spending. "Transfers, gifts, and bill payments will still happen but your savings grow quietly."

According to him, people can tap into the PalmPay initiative to celebrate their love stories on the digital space. "This Valentine season, PalmPay is celebrating authentic love stories through the #LoveWithPalmPay campaign, running from February 9th to 21st across social media platforms.

"Each week, four winners receive N100,000, for two weeks, creating a total prize pool of N800,000," he said.

According to him, users are encouraged to share their love stories while showing PalmPay in action whether it's sending money for a thoughtful gift or making those relatable 'urgent 2k' transfers that's always right on time when it matters most.

"Love evolves, and so do relationships. From dating to parenthood, the small money moments we share every day play a big role in keeping us connected," Hanson said.

He added that beyond facilitating transactions, PalmPay is rewarding users for the everyday ways they show love and support the ones they love.

According to him, PalmPay savings platform offers high interest options that support both short-term and long-term financial goals.

"Because the smartest way to use a savings app in Nigeria isn't to stop spending completely, it's to create a system where spending and saving can happen together," Hanson said.

# From The Parliament

## THE RED CHAMBER

### Senate's budget defence of commotion and zero releases

TOPE OMOGBOLAGUN

If the National Assembly's budget defence week was meant to signal fiscal scrutiny and accountability, it instead exposed a deeper crisis; zero releases, inter-committee clashes, and tempers stretched thin across hearing rooms.

From steel to works and finance, lawmakers sparred not just with ministers, but among themselves, as most Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) disclosed a troubling pattern: allocations on paper, but little or no cash backing.

The week's most dramatic moment unfolded during the Senate Committee session with the Ministry of Steel Development, when Senator Natasha Akpiti-Uduaghan (PDP, Kogi Central) clashed openly with the committee Chairman, Senator Patrick Ndubueze.

After nearly four hours of deliberation, the chairman moved to close proceedings. Akpiti-Uduaghan, however, insisted she still had critical questions to ask.

As Ndubueze attempted to bring down the gavel, she interjected: "No, please, do not interrupt. I still have something to say, and I think you should respect me enough. Please don't do that."

Ignoring her, the chairman struck the gavel and replied, "No, you have spoken enough and I have respected you enough."

"Mr Chairman, thank you. Then that's fine," she responded, before raising her voice further. "I think you have disrespected me more than enough. No, no, no. You can't do this to me. You can't. You spoke enough, allow me to speak I have something very vital to interface with the minister."

"And it doesn't matter if I've spoken once or twice. This is an interactive session. And you agree that we have not met with the minister enough. Only God knows where next we are going to meet with him as a committee."

She later stormed out of the hearing room.

At the heart of her anger was the perennial issue of Ajaokuta Steel Company. Representing the senatorial district that



hosts the long-stalled project, Akpiti-Uduaghan repeatedly questioned the Ministry's transparency over Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed with private partners.

"I did request for a copy of the MOU because I needed to be certain that due diligence was conducted," she said. "But since I was not furnished with the MOU, I had to rely on third-party conversations."

According to her, the structure of the agreement was unclear. "If TPE was to bring the technical expertise, that means ProForce should have brought the finance. Please explain this to me," she demanded.

She accused the ministry of sidelining her despite her dual responsibility as lawmaker and host community representative.

"I am the senator representing Kogi Central, and since I got into the Senate, we've just met only three times. We only seem to meet at budget presentations," she lamented.

"You have prepared this fantastic speech... we just meet, we talk to the media, and then every day we fold our arms and do nothing. Three years into you being a minister, we are still trying to go back and forth on what is the best model to move Ajaokuta. Isn't that funny?"

The steel session was not an isolated case.

At the joint budget defence between the National Assembly Committees on Works and the Ministry of Works, tempers also flared; this time between Senator Adams Oshiomhole and Minister of Works, David Umahi, over the N15 trillion Lagos-Calabar coastal highway project.

Umahi pressed on funding transparency and delays, Umahi bristled.

"Sir, are you judging or asking me questions?" Umahi asked.

"You are not entitled to interrupt me," Oshiomhole shot back.

A visibly furious Umahi responded, "You can't use foul language on me. I'm a distinguished Nigerian. You cannot speak to me in that manner."

Some senators sided openly with Oshiomhole.

One House of Reps member from Edo State quickly sided with Oshiomole telling the minister, "Mind your language. You were in this Senate for how long? Two months. Two-month senator."

The exchange underscored growing unease over funding models for mega projects. Oshiomhole commended President Bola Tinubu for terminating the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) Limited's tax credit model for road funding, describing it as "very difficult to monitor transparency."

Umahi, while defending private sector funding as progressive, blamed delays on the finance ministry's failure to release allocated funds.

He assured lawmakers that the president was unaware of the bottlenecks.

Even within the committee, decorum buckled.

In a separate confrontation during

the same Works session, Deputy Senate Whip Peter Nwaebonyi clashed with Rufai Hanga, who was presiding in the absence of the substantive chairman.

When Hanga asked him to conclude his remarks, Nwaebonyi protested, "You cannot stop me from speaking after allowing Senator Adams Oshiomhole to talk for 15 solid minutes."

"I've barely spent about five minutes and you are telling me to round up. I won't."

"And for your information, as ranking presiding officer, I can take over proceedings of this session from you."

Hanga struck the gavel and ordered him to yield the floor.

"I'm a ranking Senator of the ruling party that cannot be ruled against by a minority senator," Nwaebonyi declared.

Hanga fired back, "The votes that brought me to the Senate in June 2023 were ten times higher than what you got from your Ebonyi North Senatorial District."

It took interventions from senior lawmakers, including Ali Ndume and Adamu Aliero, to restore calm.

On Thursday, in a rare moment of comic relief amid the week's high-wire tension, Akpiti-Uduaghan briefly stepped out of a finance session and neatly pasted a handwritten note on her chair: "Stay clear from my sit, I am coming back."

In a complex where lawmakers constantly shuffle between concurrent committee meetings, marking attendance here, asking questions there, seats are prime real estate. Her improvised "reservation system" drew chuckles from colleagues and offered a lighthearted snapshot of just how crowded, competitive, and combustible the budget defence marathon had become.

Yet beyond the theatre of personality clashes lay a more troubling pattern: zero releases.

Across committee rooms, heads of MDAs disclosed that their 2025 budgets had either not been released at all or had seen negligible cash backing despite being captured in the Appropriation Act.

In several instances, Ministries and agencies admitted they had operated largely on internally generated revenue or carried-over commitments.

Some of the Ministries that lamented includes, Ministry of Trade, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Nigerian Bulk Electricity Trading Company (NBET), The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Defence, Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN).

So far, all the agencies that have appeared before the Senate have had the same complaints. Some could not implement capital projects because funds had not been cash-backed. Others had personnel budgets approved but no operational releases.

The frustration was evident. For lawmakers, the exercise of budget defence increasingly felt ritualistic, agencies presenting ambitious proposals while simultaneously confessing that previous allocations never materialised.

This echoed the tensions in the Finance Committee, where senators had queried agencies that survived entire fiscal cycles on negligible disbursements.

The contradiction was stark: trillions appropriated at the federal level, yet MDAs reporting zero releases.

Within the National Assembly complex itself, the chaos was both logistical and symbolic.

With multiple committees sitting simultaneously, senators moved between rooms to mark attendance, ask questions of interest, and return to preferred sessions. Space constraints meant seats were frequently vacated and reoccupied.

The cumulative effect was a legislature under pressure, grappling with fiscal opacity, executive delays, political rivalry and internal hierarchy battles.

Budget defence, ideally a sober exercise in accountability, instead exposed systemic weaknesses: appropriations without releases, oversight without enforcement, and projects announced without funding clarity.

## THE GREEN CHAMBER

### Scrutiny missing as House of Reps reviews 2026 budget

GODSGIFT ONYEDINEFU, Abuja

The House of Representatives fixed two weeks for the 2026 budget defence sessions, a period meant to test figures, question assumptions and press ministries on performance. But as the days tick by, the process has felt lighter than expected — especially for sectors as sensitive as defence and finance.

Budget defence sessions are usually intense affairs, it is not just a yearly ritual. It is one of the most important moments in the work of the House of Representatives. It is when lawmakers are expected to look closely at how public money will be spent. It is the time to ask why certain projects are included, why others were not completed, and whether previous allocations achieved real results.

Experts believe that budgets matter because they affect everyday life. They determine how much goes to security, healthcare, industry, education and other critical sectors. In a country like Nigeria, where resources are tight and demands are high, every line in the budget carries weight.

Security, in particular, remains a ma-



jor concern. From insurgency in parts of the country to banditry and kidnappings, Nigerians continue to demand better protection. Over the years, the defence sector has received increased funding. The National Assembly itself has repeatedly said security must remain a priority.

During the budget defence session with the Ministry of Defence, Babajimi

Benson, chairman of the House Committee on Defence, acknowledged that the National Assembly has consistently prioritised defence and security in successive budgets.

He did not mince words.

"Increased allocations must be matched with measurable outcomes, value for money and strict adherence to

principles of transparency and accountability," he said. "The era of input-focused budgeting without commensurate impact is no longer acceptable. What Nigerians expect and what this Committee insists upon, are clearly defined outputs and outcomes that reflect operational effectiveness and institutional efficiency."

But when it came time to scrutinise the details of the defence budget, Scrutiny was musing and session ended sooner.

There was no visible deep dive into specific allocations. No extended public grilling over how previous funds were spent. For a sector that receives one of the largest shares of the national budget, the moment felt brief.

The same sense of calm extended to the House Committee on Finance, one of the most important committees in the entire budget process. Finance oversight is crucial because it affects revenue projections and how money flows across government.

The committee scheduled a three-day budget defence session. It was expected to be busy. Yet only about two agencies reportedly appeared for one day. The remaining days passed without much

activity, no lawmakers, no Ministries, Departments or Agencies.

With roughly 1,316 Ministries, Departments and Agencies in the federal system, the scale of work is enormous. Each MDA has its own projects, overheads and capital expenditure. Careful scrutiny takes time and focus.

So far, only a handful of MDAs have appeared publicly. These include the Ministries of Defence, Industry, Trade and Investment, Health, and the Nigeria Correctional Service. Compared to the total number of agencies, that is a small fraction.

Line items were not publicly scrutinised. There was no visible marathon of questions. Instead, the sessions appeared measured and, in some cases, brief.

The two weeks the House fixed for the exercise lapses next Monday. But observers believe that even if committees work at full speed, it is difficult to properly scrutinise such a vast system in just 14 days.

Budget defence is where oversight begins in practical terms, before money is approved.

Without this stage, implementation can become weak. Oversight becomes reactive instead of proactive.

# From Other Lands

## Epstein files trigger global resignations, criminal probes

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN with Agency Report

The repercussions from the Jeffrey Epstein scandal are reverberating far beyond the United States, ensnaring senior figures in politics, business and royalty across several continents.

More than 3 million pages of documents released by the U.S. Justice Department detailing connections to Epstein, the American financier and convicted sex offender who died in jail in 2019, have triggered resignations, investigations and public backlash. With the exception of the former Prince Andrew, none of those named are accused of misconduct. Instead, they have faced consequences for maintaining relationships with Epstein after his conviction.

Below is a look at some of the prominent figures affected:

### Logistics giant replaces chairman

DP World, one of the world's largest port and logistics operators, has replaced its chairman, Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, after newly disclosed emails revealed a long-running friendship with Epstein.

The Dubai-based company operates Jebel Ali port and manages terminals worldwide, serving as a cornerstone of Dubai's economy.

Among the documents are emails between Epstein and bin Sulayem referencing pornography, sexual massages and escorts. In a 2013 message, Epstein wrote: "you are one of my most trusted friends in every sense of the word, you have never let me down." Some



emails, like others in the trove, contain typographical errors.

Bin Sulayem replied in one exchange: "Thank you my friend I am off the sample a fresh 100percent female Russian at my yacht."

### Goldman Sachs' top lawyer to step down

Kathy Ruemmler, chief legal officer at Goldman Sachs, said Thursday she will resign following the release of emails in which she referred to Epstein as an "older brother" and appeared to minimise his crimes.

Though Ruemmler has more recently described Epstein as a "monster," their earlier correspondence paints a different picture. She received high-value gifts from him, including designer handbags and a fur coat.

"So lovely and thoughtful! Thank you to Uncle Jeffrey!!!" Ruemmler wrote in a 2018 message.

Ruemmler, who previously served as White House counsel under President Barack Obama, joined Goldman in 2020. She is set to leave the

bank on June 30.

### Law firm chairman resigns

Brad Karp stepped down on Feb. 4 as chairman of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, citing the fallout from media coverage of his communications with Epstein.

Karp had led the prominent New York law firm since 2008. Newly released emails include a July 22, 2015, message in which Karp thanked Epstein for hosting an evening he described as "once in a lifetime" and one he would "never forget." Epstein responded that Karp was "always welcome," adding, "there are many many nights of unique talents. you will be invited often."

In announcing his resignation, Karp said the attention surrounding the emails had "created a distraction."

### U.K. royal family under renewed scrutiny

Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, formerly Prince Andrew and a brother of King Charles III, remains one of the most prominent figures tied to Epstein.

The scandal previously led the king to strip him of royal titles, including that of prince. He has repeatedly denied wrongdoing.

The latest document release has further detailed the relationship between Mountbatten-Windsor and Epstein, including an allegation that he shared trade reports with Epstein in 2010. He has since vacated the royal estate he had occupied for more than 20 years.

Buckingham Palace has said the king would cooperate with any police inquiry into whether confidential information was shared.

### Political fallout in Britain

The U.K. government has also faced turbulence over Peter Mandelson, a veteran Labour politician whom Prime Minister Keir Starmer appointed as Britain's ambassador to Washington.

Mandelson lost the post in September after emails suggested a closer relationship with Epstein than he had previously acknowledged.

Though Starmer is not named in the files, he has faced

mounting pressure — including from within his own party — over the appointment. He has declined calls to resign.

Mandelson is now under criminal investigation amid suggestions in the documents that he may have shared market-sensitive information with Epstein years ago. He has not commented on the probe but previously apologized for associating with Epstein, saying he was unaware of his crimes.

### Norway's crown princess apologises

Documents show that Norway's Crown Princess Mette-Marit borrowed a Palm Beach, Florida, property owned by Epstein for several days in 2013.

In a 2012 email exchange, Epstein wrote that he was in Paris "on my wife hunt," adding, "I prefer Scandinavians."

Mette-Marit responded that Paris was "good for adultery," but "Scandis" were "better wife material."

She apologized this month, saying she regretted "the situation I have put the royal family in," and adding: "Some of the content of the messages between Epstein and me does not represent the person I want to be."

### Former Norwegian prime minister charged

Thorbjørn Jagland, a former Norwegian prime minister, has been charged with "aggravated corruption," according to the country's economic crime unit, Økokrim.

Authorities are investigating whether gifts, travel or loans were linked to his public positions. Police searched Jagland's residence in Oslo and properties in Risør and Rauland.

The Council of Europe, which Jagland once led, waived his immunity at the request of Norwegian authorities, stating that such immunity protects official duties, not "personal benefit."

Jagland denies the charges, his lawyers said.

### Former Norwegian ambassador resigns

Mona Juul, Norway's former ambassador to Jordan and a diplomat involved in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts, resigned after reports said Epstein left \$10 million to her children in a will drafted shortly before his death.

Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said an investigation into her ties to Epstein will continue, and Juul remains in discussions with officials.

### French cultural figure steps down

Jack Lang, 86, resigned as head of the Arab World Institute in Paris amid scrutiny over alleged financial links to Epstein that prompted a tax investigation.

Lang, a former culture minister under President François Mitterrand, submitted his resignation ahead of a scheduled appearance at the French Foreign Ministry.

He is the most prominent French figure affected by the Justice Department's Jan. 30 release of documents.

### Slovak official resigns

Miroslav Lajčák, Slovakia's national security adviser and a former foreign minister, resigned after disclosures of past messages with Epstein, including references to "gorgeous" girls.

"When I'm reading the messages today, I feel like an idiot," Lajčák told Slovak public radio.

He denied any misconduct, describing the exchanges as superficial.

"Those messages are nothing more than stupid male egos in action," Lajčák said. "Nothing more than words ever came of it."

## Indonesia trains up to 8,000 troops for Gaza peacekeeping force

Indonesia has begun preparing thousands of troops for possible deployment to Gaza as part of an international peacekeeping mission tied to US President Donald Trump's postwar reconstruction proposal, marking the first concrete pledge to a key pillar of the plan.

Military officials say up to 8,000 Indonesian soldiers are now undergoing training for potential service in what Washington calls the International Security Force, or ISF. The force would operate under the proposed Board of Peace, a body championed by Trump to oversee Gaza's future and, more recently, to mediate broader global conflicts.

Indonesia is no stranger to peacekeeping. It ranks among the top 10 contributors to U.N. missions worldwide, including deployments in Lebanon, and has provided significant humanitarian support to Gaza, including funding for a hospital. But Trump's initiative would function outside the United Nations framework — and that distinction has stirred unease at home.

Many Indonesians question President Prabowo Subianto's decision to sign on to Washington's proposal, especially as details remain sparse about how the force would operate, who would finance it, and what its precise mandate would be. Critics also see the move as aligning too closely with Trump while Ja-

karta negotiates a trade deal with the United States.

"We need to be careful to ensure that our military personnel are not supporting the Israeli military forces," said Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhamat, a Middle East expert at Jakarta's Center of Economic and Law Studies. "We need to be careful that our military forces are not fighting against wrong actors."

### Questions over mandate and cost

Unlike U.N. peacekeeping operations, which operate under clearly defined mandates, the ISF's responsibilities remain vague. A ceasefire agreement last year said the force would "provide support to vetted Palestinian police forces in Gaza" and would

work with Israel and Egypt to help secure border areas."

That ambiguity has fueled concerns about funding and oversight. Indonesian troops deployed under U.N. missions are reimbursed by the United Nations. Under the Board of Peace structure, however, Indonesia may be responsible for covering its own costs — in addition to a potential \$1 billion contribution for a permanent seat on the board, according to a draft charter.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, has long supported a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Officials argue that joining the Board of Peace would allow Jakarta to defend Pales-

tinian interests from within, especially since Israel would have representation on the board but Palestinians would not.

"Indonesia sees the importance of the involvement of the parties to the conflict as part of the process towards peace," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yvonne Mewengkang said this week.

She added that Indonesia would use its role to "ensure that the entire process remains oriented towards the interests of Palestine and respects the basic rights of the Palestinian people, as well as encouraging the realization of a two-state solution."

But an editorial in The Jakarta Post sharply criticized that reasoning, warning that

an "independent Palestinian state, if it emerges at all, is likely decades away."

"Indonesia will end up paying \$1 billion long before any meaningful outcome is achieved," Abdul Khaik wrote. "And if Indonesia eventually withdraws in frustration, it will have already spent vast resources; financial, diplomatic and political, for nothing."

### Trump's expanding vision draws scrutiny

The Board of Peace was initially presented as a small group of leaders overseeing Gaza's reconstruction. Trump has since broadened that vision, describing it as a potential global conflict mediator — a role traditionally filled by the United Nations.

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## Policy without people: Why Nigeria's growth isn't reaching citizens

**N**igeria is approaching a sobering threshold: poverty is no longer a condition affecting a marginal segment of society; it is fast becoming the defining experience of the majority. Recent projections suggest that as many as 140 million Nigerians, nearly six in every ten citizens, could be living in abject poverty by 2026.

If this persists, poverty will cease to be a peripheral development challenge and become the country's central economic reality. This is not merely a social concern; it is a structural threat to national stability, productivity, and long-term growth.

Public policy discourse, however, continues to lean heavily on macroeconomic language. We are told about reforms, fiscal consolidation, exchange-rate adjustments, and the need to restore investor confidence. These objectives are important, and Nigeria cannot escape the necessity of stabilising its macroeconomic fundamentals. An economy can show signs of technical improvement while household welfare deteriorates. When growth is discussed in terms that citizens cannot feel in their daily lives, policy credibility erodes. Economic reform that does not translate into improved living conditions risks becoming politically unsustainable, regardless of its theoretical soundness.

Food affordability illustrates the disconnect.

Hunger and food insecurity are no longer episodic or confined to conflict-affected regions; they are increasingly structural and nationwide. Rising food prices have forced households to make

difficult trade-offs between nutrition, education, and healthcare. When families spend a disproportionate share of their income on food and still struggle to meet basic dietary needs, poverty becomes self-reinforcing. Malnutrition undermines learning outcomes, poor health reduces productivity, and fragile human capital constrains future growth. In this sense, food insecurity is not only a humanitarian concern; it is a macroeconomic problem with long-term consequences for Nigeria's development trajectory.

Inflation compounds these pressures. Even when headline inflation moderates, the prices that dominate household budgets—food, transport, and energy—remain persistently high. This gap between statistical stabilisation and lived experience is where public trust in economic management weakens. Stabilisation efforts are most credible when citizens experience tangible relief in their purchasing power. Without that connection, reform narratives sound abstract and disconnected from everyday realities. A constructive policy response would prioritise targeted measures that directly ease the cost of essentials, alongside broader macroeconomic adjustments.

### Employment outcomes form a critical fault line.

Nigeria's economy has struggled to generate sufficient numbers of stable, productive jobs for its rapidly growing youth population. Many young Nigerians navigate a labour market characterised by underemployment, informality, and precarious incomes. Growth that does not create dignified work at scale cannot deliver inclusive prosperity.

Although sectors such as finance, information and communications technology, utilities, and entertainment

are expanding rapidly, they absorb very few workers, employing just 1.5 percent of the workforce, while the least productive sectors employ the most.

This is not just a labour market problem; it is a fundamental development challenge. A more coherent strategy would link education and skills development to clear industrial and sectoral priorities, ensuring that human capital formation aligns with real labour market demand.

At the core of these challenges lies the design and sequencing of policy reforms. Necessary adjustments, such as changes in energy pricing or foreign exchange management, have often been implemented faster than the social and institutional buffers needed to absorb their impact.

Safety nets remain limited in coverage and consistency, and their scale does not yet match the depth of vulnerability in the population. A more constructive approach to reform would embed social protection into policy design from the outset, ensuring that households are supported through transitions rather than exposed to abrupt shocks. Reform sequencing matters: cushioning mechanisms should precede or accompany price and market liberalisation, not follow them as afterthoughts.

Supporters of the current reform movement argue, with some justification, that macroeconomic stabilisation is a prerequisite for sustainable growth and that short-term hardship may be unavoidable in the process. This perspective deserves serious consideration. However, the legitimacy of reform depends not only on its long-term promise but also on its fairness in the present.

When the burden of adjustment falls disproportionately on low-income households, reforms risk losing social consent. A more balanced reform

agenda would pair stabilisation with visible investments in social protection, food systems, and job creation, signalling that economic adjustment and social protection are complementary rather than competing objectives.

The political-economic implications of entrenched poverty should not be underestimated. Societies in which hardship becomes normalised often experience declining trust in institutions and growing scepticism toward public authority. This erosion of trust can weaken social cohesion and complicate governance, even in the absence of an overt crisis. By contrast, visible improvements in household welfare can reinforce the legitimacy of reform and strengthen the social contract between citizens and the state.

Reversing Nigeria's poverty story requires a deliberate pivot toward human-centred economics. Food affordability should be treated as a macroeconomic priority, not merely a welfare concern. Social protection systems should be scaled with the same seriousness as fiscal reforms.

Labour market policies should be integrated with industrial strategy to ensure that growth translates into employment. Most importantly, reform sequencing should be redesigned to protect households during transitions, rather than asking them to absorb the full cost of adjustment.

An economy that records progress while its people struggle is not delivering development in any meaningful sense. A policy that is technically sound but socially detached will always face limits. Nigeria's reform agenda will gain durability not when indicators improve on paper alone but when ordinary citizens can experience economic change as improved access to food, work, and a reasonable sense of security in their daily lives.

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# Perspective



UDOCHIKA EZEOCHA

**N**igeria's long-term economic growth will depend less on natural resources and more on the quality of its human capital. As the country seeks to build a competitive, knowledge-driven economy, education must move beyond rote learning to developing skills that prepare young people for leadership, innovation, and global engagement.

One institution that has consistently aligned academic excellence with global relevance is the University of Sheffield, a United Kingdom-based university recognised among the world's leading higher-education institutions. Sheffield's strong global rankings reflect excellence across engineering, health sciences, law, social sciences, and technology—disciplines that are critical to addressing today's complex economic and societal challenges.

Yet global rankings alone are not what make a university relevant to emerging economies like Nigeria. In-

## Developing Nigeria's human capital through global academic partnerships

creasingly, impact is measured by how institutions engage beyond their campuses and contribute to talent development at earlier stages of education. It is within this context that the University of Sheffield's Public Speaking Competition in Lagos on February 23, 2026 takes on broader significance.

The competition will bring together ten leading secondary schools in Lagos, providing students with a platform to articulate ideas, think critically, and engage constructively with real-world issues. While public speaking is often viewed as an extracurricular activity, its relevance to national development is substantial. Clear communication, persuasion, and confidence are foundational skills in business leadership, governance, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

In modern economies, technical knowledge without communication skills often limits impact. Engineers must explain solutions, entrepreneurs must pitch ideas, lawyers must argue cases, and policymakers must build consensus. By encouraging students to develop these skills early, initiatives like this competition help close the gap between academic knowledge and practical leadership capacity.

The University of Sheffield's engagement also reflects an important evolution in international education partnerships. Rather than focusing solely on student recruitment at tertiary level, forward-looking institutions are increasingly investing in early-stage talent development and capacity building. This approach supports aspiration, raises academic standards, and fosters a culture of excellence long before university admission decisions are made.

For participating schools, the competition offers exposure to global academic expectations and reinforces the importance of holistic education—where intellectual ability is matched with confidence and clarity of expression. For students, it provides an opportunity to test their voices in a competitive but supportive environment, helping them see themselves as future leaders in a global context.

From a national perspective, such initiatives align closely with Nigeria's broader human capital objectives. As businesses demand graduates who can think critically, communicate effectively, and operate across cultures, the education system must evolve to reflect these needs. Partnerships between globally ranked universities and

local institutions can play a catalytic role in accelerating this transformation.

Lagos, as Nigeria's commercial and innovation hub, is a fitting host for this engagement. Hosting a globally connected academic competition in the city underscores the role Lagos plays in shaping the country's future workforce and leadership pipeline.

Ultimately, the significance of the University of Sheffield's public speaking competition lies not only in the event itself, but in what it represents. It signals a commitment to investing in Nigeria's youth, valuing their voices, and recognising that leadership development must start early.

On February 23, 2026, Lagos will host more than a student competition. It will host a meaningful exchange between global academic excellence and local talent—an exchange that speaks directly to Nigeria's long-term economic and human capital aspirations.

*. Ezeocha, the author, is the regional representative, Africa Global Engagement, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom*

## Love in a hard country: What Valentine's Day means in Nigeria

### EBUKA UKOH

**V**alentine's Day arrives each year, wrapped in red. Roses. Chocolates. Candlelit dinners. Carefully curated photos. Public displays of affection. The scripts are familiar.

This year, however, many Nigerians are too tired for scripts. By Valentine's Day, many are already emotionally exhausted from simply trying to survive January.

You see it in the faces at bus stops...in the silence of people staring into their phones...and the patience people must summon to get through a normal day. As many now say quietly, "ebi n pa wa" has become a buzzword across Nigeria. The cost of food. The cost of transport. The cost of simply existing. Life in Nigeria already demands emotional strength before romance even enters the picture.

In a country where survival feels like a daily negotiation, love must mean more than gifts. It must mean gentleness, which itself has become rare.

We live in a society where everyone is carrying something heavy.

The trader worried about tomorrow's prices. The father is calculating children's school fees against the rent. The mother is managing a home under quite stressful conditions. The graduate is navigating unemployment with a forced smile. The civil servant stretching a salary that no longer stretches.

Yet, we move through each other carelessly. Sharp words. Impatience. Insensitivity.

Harshness. We add to burdens we cannot see. This Valentine's Day asks a different question. Not who you are loving, but how you are loving?

#### Love in a hard country

Love looks like patience in traffic when tempers rise. It's like fairness in business when you could exploit it. It's like courtesy in public spaces where rudeness has become normal. It looks like an emotional presence in families where everyone is tired, but nobody says it out loud.

It looks like choosing not to make someone else's life hard. It's like the quiet virtues we often overlook because they are not dramatic. Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. These are not soft ideas. They are survival tools in a society under pressure.

Love becomes the choice to care when you are tired.

Joy becomes the refusal to let hardship steal your light.

Peace becomes the discipline of not passing your frustration to the next person.

Patience becomes the grace you extend in queues, traffic, and conversations.

Kindness becomes the language you speak when the world is already harsh.

Goodness becomes honesty when dishonesty is easier.

Faithfulness becomes showing up for people when you could withdraw.

Gentleness becomes strength in a place where aggression is commonplace. Self-control becomes the decision not to add to the emotional weight others are already carrying.

We have been trained to think of love as romance. But in Nigeria today, love must become a responsibility. Love is how you speak kindly to the cashier who has been standing all day. Love is how you treat the police officer at a checkpoint who is also battling the same difficult system you are. Love is how you listen to a friend who is quietly struggling. Love is how you give someone the dignity of being seen.

**This is not sentimental. It is necessary.** A society does not collapse only from big failures. It collapses from small daily cruelties that accumulate. And it heals from small daily kindnesses that multiply.

If you look closely, you will see Nigerians already practising this kind of love. The neighbour who shares fuel during scarcity. The stranger who helps push a stalled car. The woman who feeds a child not hers. I saw these moments many times growing up in Lagos. These are not romantic gestures. They are acts of social love. They are what keep the country breathing.

#### A chance to make loving acts deliberate

To slow down. To notice people. To remember that everyone you meet is fighting something you cannot see. To choose softness where hardness would be easier, because gentleness in a harsh environment is not a weakness. It is resistance.

It is how we protect one another from the emotional erosion that daily life brings.

In homes, this matters even more. Many families are carrying stress without a language for it. Children feel tension. Spouses feel

distant. Everyone is trying to hold things together without admitting how tired they are. Love, this Valentine's Day, might simply mean sitting down and asking, "Are you okay?" and waiting patiently for the real answer, not the politically correct one.

In workplaces, love might mean mentoring instead of mocking. In markets, it might mean honesty in measurement. On the roads, it might mean giving way instead of competing.

These things sound small. They are not. They shape the emotional climate of a nation.

We often ask what is wrong with Nigeria.

We point to policy, leadership, corruption, and insecurity. Those things matter, but there is another layer: How Nigerians treat Nigerians every day. A country where people are kind to one another is harder to break.

This Valentine's Day, the most meaningful gift may not be what you buy. It may be how you behave, because in a country where life is already difficult, the greatest act of love is choosing not to make it harder for anyone else.

Love, this year, is not performance. It is posture. If enough of us choose that posture, we may discover that the healing Nigeria needs will not start in government offices. It will begin with how we treat the person standing next to us. And on this note, may you find the courage to love gently in a hard country. Happy Valentine's Day!

*. Uko, an alumnus of the American University of Nigeria, Yola, and PhD student at Columbia University, writes from New York.*

# Perspective



IFEDOLAPO OJUADE

**A** shop owner in Ibadan wants to replace his store signage. He knows professional printing companies that would deliver excellent work, but he still calls his sister's husband first. The brother-in-law is not the cheapest. He is not the fastest. His quality fluctuates. Yet the job goes to him.

In Nigeria, this pattern can be seen in shops, agencies, construction sites, weddings, offices, and neighbourhood projects. People hire relatives, in-laws, family friends, church brothers, and neighbours. They choose relationship over efficiency, kinship over credentials, and familiarity over randomness.

I call this pattern The Brother-in-Law Choice. It is the instinct to reduce uncertainty by selecting someone already woven into your social fabric.

#### The Logic Beneath the Loyalty

The Brother-in-Law Choice is not sentimentality. It is risk management. In Nigeria, contracts can fail you, guarantees can disappear, and consumer protection is weak, so people fall back on social ties as a form of insurance.

A 2022 Heinrich Böll Foundation report on Nigeria's informal economy noted that over 70% of micro and small businesses rely on family-based labour and networks because they trust relationships more than formal systems. The decision is emotional, but it is also practical. Hiring a stranger introduces uncertainty. Hiring kin provides some level of

## The brother-in-law choice

leverage.

If the brother-in-law disappoints, you can call a family meeting. If he cheats you, you can involve elders. Accountability is not outsourced to institutions; it is embedded in bloodlines.

#### Trust as Currency

In behavioural science, this falls under the idea of relational contracting. People create psychological agreements grounded in long-term ties rather than legal documents. The agreement is less about the job and more about the relationship.

Nigerians place high value on relational trust. A study in the Journal of Modern African Studies (2021) found that Nigerians consistently rate family networks as their most reliable source of economic and social security. When the environment feels uncertain, trust becomes a stabilising currency.

The Brother-in-Law Choice is part of this system. It replaces risk with familiarity.

#### Cost is Not the Real Cost

On the surface, hiring relatives seems expensive or inefficient. Work may be slower. Deliverables may need supervision. Prices may be inconsistent. Yet the psychological cost of dealing with a stranger often feels higher.

Negotiating with a stranger takes emotional effort. Enforcing agreements takes energy. Conflict with unknown vendors feels stressful. By contrast, a family-linked transaction contains built-in buffers.

These buffers matter. A Lagos Business School study on trust in informal markets found that conflict resolution is smoother when a prior relationship exists. It reduces escalation and preserves dignity. Nigerians prefer these soft protections over formal guarantees.

#### Social Debt and Reciprocity

The Brother-in-Law Choice also strengthens social debt. Every job given to an in-law or neighbour creates a future obligation. This structure is not transactional in the Western sense. It is reciprocal. You extend opportunity today because you may need support tomorrow.

Anthropologists refer to this as moral economy. It is a system where community stability depends on the exchange of favours, labour, and goodwill.

Nigeria's cultural fabric is woven with this reciprocity. A job given to a relative becomes part of a long chain of obligations, helping preserve family cohesion and social stability.

#### When Obligation Overpowers Merit

There is a tension inside the Brother-in-Law Choice. It reinforces community but can reduce quality. Bad work is often tolerated to protect harmony. Many small businesses struggle because they cannot fire employees they are related to.

Yet even here, Nigerians often choose harmony over optimisation. The trade-off is emotional stability. The work may be imperfect, but the relationship remains intact.

In interviews conducted during a UNILAG Department of Sociology study (2022), entrepreneurs confessed to maintaining underperforming relatives because the social consequences of disengaging them felt heavier than the economic consequences of keeping them.

#### This is the cost of communal cohesion.

#### Businesses Run on Hidden Networks

The Brother-in-Law Choice reveals how Nigerian businesses truly operate. Formal processes exist, but beneath them lie networks of loyalty. An office administrator chooses a caterer whose younger brother attends her church. A procurement officer calls his cousin's printing press. A manager assigns

part of a project to her in-law's SME.

These networks determine hiring, procurement, referrals, and vendor selection. Understanding them allows businesses to design strategies that respect social dynamics rather than fight them.

#### Business Implications

1. Acknowledge relational ecosystems. Nigerian decision making often flows through kinship networks, not only through corporate evaluation. Sellers should understand the emotional map around a buyer.

2. Build pseudo-kinship. Brands that create community through loyalty programmes, personal service, and relationship-led communication can mirror the feeling of family reliability.

3. Reduce fear of failure. Clear guarantees, transparent processes, and dependable after-sales service lower the psychological stakes of hiring strangers.

4. Offer hybrid trust. Combine formal professionalism with warmth, familiarity, and human touch so buyers feel emotionally safe.

5. Respect social reciprocity. Never underestimate the power of gifts, check-ins, and long-term goodwill. They integrate brands into the user's relational circle.

#### Conclusion

The Brother-in-Law Choice is not a flaw in Nigerian consumer behaviour. It is a rational response to an unpredictable environment. When institutions feel unreliable, relationships become infrastructure. When guarantees feel weak, kinship becomes insurance.

People trust people they can call during emergencies. People hire familiarity because familiarity carries accountability.

The Brother-in-Law Choice is how Nigerians create a sense of reliability in a system that rarely guarantees it.



OMOTARA ADEDIRAN

**A**s Nigeria's Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) marks 35 years of existence, the anniversary offers more than a ceremonial opportunity. It is an important moment for reflection and an opportunity to examine how far the institution has come in improving the ease of doing business, while also confronting the gaps that continue to prevent many Nigerians, especially young entrepreneurs, from fully benefiting from business formalization.

Established in 1990 to provide legal identity for businesses and incorporated organizations, the CAC occupies a central place in Nigeria's economic architecture. Without legal identity, markets cannot function efficiently. Contracts cannot be enforced, private ownership cannot be protected, and businesses cannot grow beyond personal networks. In this sense, the CAC is not merely a registry; it is a gatekeeper to opportunity, credibility, and economic inclusion.

Over the past three and a half decades, the Commission has made significant strides. One of the most important reforms was the enactment of the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020. This law modernized Nigeria's corporate framework, simplified business structures, expanded access to incorporation, and aligned the country more closely with global best practices. Provisions such as single-shareholder companies, electronic filings, and reduced compliance burdens for small enterprises were long overdue.

Digitization has also further transformed the registration process. Today, entrepreneurs can register a business online, submit documents electronically, and complete processes that once took weeks in a matter of days. For many Nigerians, especially those outside major cities, this shift has reduced both cost and distance as barriers to entry. These are not small achievements. They reflect an institution that has

## Corporate Affairs Commission at 35: The strides made and the work still ahead

adapted to Nigeria's changing economic realities and embraced reform.

Yet progress on paper does not always translate into impact on the ground.

A clear illustration of this gap can be found among student entrepreneurs. Across Nigeria's universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, students are building real businesses. They sell products online, offer digital services, run logistics operations, manage fashion brands, and develop tech solutions. Some employ fellow students, others generate income that supports their education. In every sense, these are functioning enterprises.

Despite this activity, our recent policy research publication shows that over 90 percent of student-owned businesses remain unregistered. This is not because the law excludes them. Under CAMA 2020, students are fully eligible to register sole proprietorships and small enterprises. The problem lies elsewhere.

Persistent misconceptions continue to shape behavior. Many students believe business registration is unreasonably expensive. Others assume the process is excessively bureaucratic or fear that registration automatically attracts taxation, audits, or penalties. Some see registration as something to postpone until after graduation or until a business becomes "big enough." These beliefs, rather than legal restrictions, keep young entrepreneurs locked out of the formal economy.

The consequences of this informality are far-reaching. Informal businesses struggle to access finance, protect their business names, build customer trust, or enter formal supply chains. They cannot easily open business bank accounts, apply for grants, or participate in procurement opportunities. Intellectual property remains vulnerable. Growth becomes difficult, not because the ideas lack merit, but because the businesses lack legal identity.

Our research further shows a revealing contradiction. While most student entrepreneurs

acknowledge that business registration improves credibility and access to opportunities, cost and perceived complexity remain powerful deterrents. Yet when asked whether they would formalize if costs were lower and processes clearer, an overwhelming majority answered yes. This suggests that resistance to formalization is not ideological; it is informational and psychological. There is a strong demand for formality that policy has not yet fully unlocked.

To be fair, this challenge is not a failure unique to the Corporate Affairs Commission. It reflects a broader coordination gap between regulators, universities, and youth-focused entrepreneurship programs. Nigeria has invested heavily in entrepreneurship education over the past decade. Business plan competitions, pitching, innovation hubs, and skills training. However, much of this focuses on ideation, pitching, and funding readiness, with little emphasis on regulatory literacy.

Students are taught how to innovate, but rarely how to formalize. As a result, many encounter the CAC for the first time only after graduation, often when their early ventures have already collapsed or been abandoned. This disconnect weakens the entrepreneurship pipeline and undermines the long-term impact of reforms intended to support small businesses.

This is where the next phase of the CAC's reform journey must focus, bridging the gap between reform and understanding.

At 35, the Commission has the credibility and institutional maturity to go beyond digitization and into targeted engagement. Student entrepreneurs represent Nigeria's future business class. Bringing them into the formal economy early strengthens compliance over time, expands the future tax base, and builds a culture of lawful enterprise. It also normalizes formalization as a starting point, not a finish line.

But doing so requires more than an online portal. Accessibility is not only about technology;

it is about relevance and trust. Practical steps can make a difference. Student-focused guidance that explains registration in clear, simple terms. Campus-based outreach in partnership with universities and credible organizations. Clear communication around taxation thresholds to dispel unnecessary fear. Innovative approaches, such as temporary or reduced-cost student registration categories, could significantly lower barriers without undermining regulatory integrity.

Encouragingly, small-scale interventions like our your business your identity advocacy project already show what is possible. When students are guided through the process, formalization follows. When myths are replaced with accurate information, fear gives way to confidence. When the CAC is seen not as a distant authority but as an enabler, compliance becomes voluntary rather than coerced.

As the Corporate Affairs Commission celebrates its 35th anniversary, its legacy should not be measured solely by the number of businesses registered or the speed of digital processes. It should also be measured by who is being reached. The strides made in reform and digitization deserve recognition. The challenge now is inclusion, ensuring that young entrepreneurs, students, and first-time founders are not left behind.

Nigeria's economic future depends on converting entrepreneurial energy into sustainable, formal enterprises. The CAC has laid much of the groundwork. The task ahead is to meet citizens, especially young ones, where they are, and help them see formalization not as a burden, but as a pathway to growth. At 35, that is both the Commission's challenge and its opportunity.

**Adediran** is the Project and Advocacy Lead at the Institute for Free Market and Entrepreneurship West Africa (IFREME). She is a young entrepreneur that is passionate about entrepreneurship and market-driven development across Africa.

# Perspective



OJO EMMANUEL ADEMOLA

**A** visionary institution for a New Nigerian Future. The emergence of the University of Fortune in Igbotako stands as one of the most compelling and visionary educational developments in contemporary Nigeria. Its establishment is far from a stroke of chance; it is the culmination of painstaking labour, strategic foresight, and the kind of arithmetic precision that only a mind disciplined by excellence can conceive. It bears the unmistakable imprint of its founder, Senator (Dr.) Ambassador-Designate Jimoh Folorunso Ibrahim — a man whose global reputation is anchored in intellectual audacity, entrepreneurial mastery, and an unwavering devotion to the advancement of nationhood. His life's work consistently demonstrates that greatness is not an aspiration but a disciplined architecture.

Having spent decades at the forefront of cybersecurity, digital governance, and the evolving knowledge-economy landscape across Africa and the wider world, I have learnt to distinguish between institutions that merely occupy space and those that are deliberately crafted to shape the future. The University of Fortune belongs firmly in the latter category. It is not an institution conceived to add to the numerical count of universities in Nigeria; it is an institution designed to redefine the very meaning of higher education, to recalibrate intellectual ambition, and to serve as a crucible for the next generation of thinkers, innovators, and nation-builders.

Its vision is bold, its foundations are deliberate, and its promise is unmistakably transformative.

## A University built on scale, precision, and purpose

The University of Fortune is conceived upon an expansive and carefully curated stretch of land in Igbotako, Ondo

## Endorsement of the University of Fortune, Nigeria

State — a location now destined to become one of the most intellectually significant sites in Nigeria's educational history. Everything about this institution speaks of ambition on a scale rarely witnessed in private higher education. Its physical and academic aspirations mirror the standards associated with the world's most prestigious Ivy League universities, yet it remains deeply rooted in the Nigerian soil that inspired its creation.



Verified reports highlight the sheer magnitude of its infrastructure: a 127-metre Faculty of Law complex, celebrated as the longest of its kind in Nigeria; two hundred elegantly designed twin-bedroom apartments for academic staff; and twelve purpose-built hostel blocks to ensure student comfort and community life. These are not the casual constructions of an institution seeking to merely join the ranks. These are the deliberate, imposing, and future-oriented structures of a university determined to lead.

This is not the architecture of mediocrity.

## This is the architecture of destiny.

The Federal Government's issuance of an operating licence on 30 April 2025 stands as a formal affirmation of the university's readiness, credibility, and compliance with the highest regulatory expectations. It is a testament to the meticulous preparation and unwavering commitment that underpin the entire project.

With programmes set to commence in law, management studies, medical sciences, and other strategically selected disciplines essential for Nigeria's developmental trajectory, the University of For-

tune is positioned to become a premier centre of excellence. It is poised to nurture a generation of professionals, innovators, and leaders equipped to contribute meaningfully to national transformation and global competitiveness.

## Why I endorse the University of Fortune

The story of the University of Fortune cannot be told without recognising the extraordinary stature of its

ty of Fortune is deliberately structured to serve as such a crucible—a place where intellectual rigour converges with visionary leadership, and where the next generation of transformative minds will be shaped.

Its location in the Ondo South Senatorial District further underscores its strategic significance. This is not merely a geographical choice; it is a deliberate intervention in regional development. The presence of a university of this magnitude promises to stimulate economic growth, attract global partnerships, and provide a beacon of hope for thousands of young Nigerians in search of quality education. It stands poised to become a catalyst for both regional upliftment and national transformation.

Moreover, the University of Fortune represents a refreshing model of private-sector driven educational renaissance in Nigeria. At a time when the nation's educational landscape is in dire need of institutions that are not driven by profit but by purpose, this university stands out as a bold and exemplary initiative. It is not an institution built for prestige or applause; it is an institution built for posterity. Its foundations are anchored in vision, its aspirations are noble, and its commitment to excellence is unmistakable.

## A Prophetic and intellectual affirmation

In my capacity as a scholar, a national transformation advocate, and a Renewal-Pentecostal leader committed to generational mobilisation, I affirm without hesitation that the University of Fortune is both divinely timed and strategically positioned for this moment in Nigeria's unfolding story. Its emergence is not merely an academic development; it is a providential intervention, arriving at a time when the nation urgently requires institutions capable of inspiring excellence, cultivating integrity, and shaping a new cadre of visionary leaders.

The University of Fortune carries within its foundations the unmistakable imprint of excellence. Every aspect of its conception and execution reflects a commitment to standards that transcend the ordi-

nary. It stands as a testament to what is possible when vision, discipline, and purpose converge in a single project.

It is also an institution that embodies the future. Its architecture, its academic aspirations, and its philosophical underpinnings all point towards a new horizon for Nigerian higher education—one in which innovation, global competitiveness, and ethical leadership are not optional ideals but defining characteristics.

Above all, it is a university destined to shape leaders, innovators, and nation-builders for generations to come. Its influence will not be confined to the boundaries of Ondo State or even Nigeria; it will radiate across Africa and into the global arena, producing men and women equipped to engage the complexities of the modern world with wisdom, courage, and transformative insight.

## Conclusion

I offer my unequivocal and wholehearted endorsement of the University of Fortune, Igbotako, as a monumental and historic gift to Nigeria and to the African continent at large. This institution stands not merely as another addition to the nation's academic landscape, but as a bold declaration of what is possible when vision, intellect, and disciplined execution converge. Its foundation is unshakably strong, its vision is unmistakably clear, and its leadership is nothing short of exceptional.

The University of Fortune is destined to rise as a citadel of wisdom, innovation, and national rebirth. It carries within its very architecture the promise of a new educational order—one capable of shaping minds, transforming communities, and contributing profoundly to the renaissance of our nation. I assert with confidence that its impact will echo far beyond the boundaries of Ondo State, influencing the trajectory of higher education across Africa for generations to come.

*. Ademola, Africa's First Professor of Cybersecurity and Information Technology Management, Chartered Manager, UK Digital Journalist, Strategic Advisor & Prophetic Mobiliser for National Transformation, and General Evangelist of CAC Nigeria and Overseas.*

# Perspective

## Viewpoint

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AFOLABI ABIODUN

**T**he Yoruba has this profound adage: "Bí iró bá ló lógún ódún, ojó kan ni óótó yóò ba." Loosely translated, it means truth has an uncanny ability to unravel a lie, no matter how long the lie has persisted. Ógún ódún (20 years) is a metaphor for length of time while ojó kan (1 day), signifies how truth can suddenly expose a lie irrespective of how long it has been spreading.

This adage played out recently with the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd), formerly the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the hydra headed entity that manages the country's oil and gas assets.

### NNPCL and its moribund refineries

Last week, the current Group Chief Executive Officer of the company, Bayo Ojulari, pulled out all the stops when he punctured a lie that has persisted for so long concerning the state of our refineries. Our governments have repeatedly tried so hard to convince us, for decades, that our refineries are fine even when the realities on ground show otherwise. In 2024, for instance, the current government celebrated the resumption of refining operations at the Warri Refinery. The reality is that the refineries have long been derelict yet the managers kept lying to us about rehabilitation and TAM. The refineries are simply a cesspit of financial wastefulness and drain, and unmitigated graft. The NNPCL, thankfully, took the decision last year to shut them down.

Ojulari was unusually blunt and brave for a public officer. "We were just wasting money," Ojulari said of the trillions of naira spent over the years on turnaround maintenance of the country's four government-owned refineries. "The refineries were leaking value, and there was no clear line of sight on how those losses would ever turn into profits."

**Confirming what Nigerians already know**  
To be sure, Ojulari's revelation is nothing new. Nigerians have long wondered how a country blessed with so much oil and gas reserves and with four refineries continues to depend on oil importation to run the economy. The country's four refineries in Port Harcourt (2), Rivers State, Kaduna, and Warri, Delta State, with a combined installed capacity of 445,000 barrels per day, have been largely moribund, producing almost nothing for decades. In spite of their sorry state, successive governments have continued to budget billions of dollars for TAM of the refineries. As recent as 2021, the government of the late Muhammadu Buhari committed about \$3 billion on what it called rehabilitation of the refineries. Over the administration's 8-year reign, an

## As govt admits its refineries are money wasters... what next?

**Government finally admits what we've all known for years. But admission isn't enough. Nigerians would like to know how government intends to stop the hemorrhage and strengthen the downstream sector.**

estimated \$19 billion was said to have been used to revive the refineries yet there was zero production.

The National Assembly claimed that between 2010 and 2023, N11 trillion was spent on the refineries for TAM or rehabilitation yet the country still imports all of its refined petroleum products before Dangote Refinery came on board. It is clear that the refineries were merely conduits to siphon our commonwealth; they were no more than channels for rent-seeking and grafts. For decades prior to 2023, the NNPC accounts were never audited making it difficult to put a figure to earnings from and expenditure on the country's oil and gas assets.

Many of government's assets, past and present, in real estate, entertainment, telecommunications, manufacturing, aviation, power, and other sectors followed similar patterns with NNPC. Poor management, inadequate investments, and deliberate and

argue against. The financial value includes revenue generation from rent payment and taxes, capital gain, as assets appreciate, and removal of or reduction in subsidies, where required.

The economic value that the refineries can bring to the country if well run and managed include job creation, attraction of further investments, and most importantly industrial growth. A functional refinery will lead to establishment and growth of other industries that directly feeds off a refinery such as petrochemicals and plastics industry, which relies on naphtha and other feedstocks from refining activities to produce construction pipes, synthetic rubber, fibres, solvents and industrial chemicals; construction industry, which gets bitumen (asphalt); healthcare and pharmaceuticals for medical plastics like syringes and tubing, and many other related industries. Other benefits of unlocking value include affordable services, inclusive growth and

A sector that contributed less than 1% to the GDP before the liberalisation now accounts for about 15% GDP. The sector, for instance, generated circa 4.4 trillion in real GDP in the third quarter of 2025.

Government has also sought to unlock value in its power assets. But, unlike in the telecommunications sector, the liberalisation efforts in power have been halfhearted and, understandably, it has not had the same success as telecommunications.

### The era of wastage is over

The broader implication of Ojulari's revelation is that government may finally be ready to offload the refineries to private sector players. The ongoing audit and valuation of national assets, including the NNPCL, by the ministry of finance also underscore this thinking. The traditional ownership model has been shown to lead to value destruction as assets are poorly managed.

According to the NNPCL boss, the three components of running an efficient and successful refinery – financing, competent engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contractors, and world-class operational capacity – have always not been available in the right mix in the nation's refineries. Government has always provided the financing and engages the EPC contractors but the operational capacity has been the missing ingredient. And this is where the private sector comes in.

### Options for unlocking value

There are several options open to the government in optimising these assets. Outright sale of the refineries would be most desirable. The challenge with that though is that years of neglect have put the technical condition of the refineries into question. Interested investors may also be wary of political liabilities as the country's oil and gas assets have tended to be used as political tools. There is the security risk, the Niger Delta militants, to consider, as well as supply risks. The Dangote Refinery has struggled to get adequate supply of crude from NNPCL. The public private partnerships model, including Build-Operate-Transfer, and joint ventures, has not brought the expected success over the years. Experts suggest asset recycling, where the government sells its mature assets and utilise the proceeds to build new infrastructure.

Ojulari's revelation has effectively untied the country from repeated circles of billions of dollars poured down the refineries' TAM and rehabilitation drains. "We are ending that era," the NNPCL boss said. This has also tied the government's hands as it can no longer justify any spending on the refineries, and the only way forward is to dispose of the assets. However, if government truly desire a robust downstream sector, one not driven by only Dangote Refinery, then it must avoid the temptation to concession or sell the refineries to political cronies, who often do not add value to such assets.



constant fleecing of government assets left many wondering why should the government run a business.

Instances of government's poor management of assets abound: Nigeria Airways, an airline that was once the pride of Africa, was run aground, so was the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), which has since metamorphosed into the Power Holding Company of Nigeria/DISCOs/GENCOS. Then there was NITEL (Nigerian Telecommunications Limited), the Railways, and the National Stadium in Surulere, which continues to rot away.

### Unlocking the value of refineries and other national assets

Stakeholders have long called on the government to unlock the value of the refineries and other national assets to optimise their benefits as government seeks to diversify its revenue source and hedge its fiscal balance. Unlocking asset values comes with numerous benefits that are hard to

infrastructure resilience.

### Telecoms as poster boy of unlocked value

The telecommunications industry remains the beacon of value optimisation. Before the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector, government was the sole provider of the service through the infamous Nigerian Telecommunications Limited, as it was considered critical to national security. NITEL's infirmities were legendary: premium grade mismanagement and corruption, poor service quality, inefficiency and bureaucracy leading to endless wait time to get a phone line, and deliberate sabotage.

Then the government liberalised the sector and allowed private sector participation, ushering in GSM operators like MTN, Airtel, Globacom, and 9Mobile. That decision has created so much value for the government in revenue generation through taxes, regular spectrum sales, and licence renewal, job creation, infrastructure development, foreign investments, and more.

# Tribute

HALIMA ABDULAZEEZ

The story of journalism in Nigeria can not be told without mentioning a patriot like Sir Ayo Oyoze Baje, whose 73rd birthday today marks another milestone in a life dedicated to intellectual rigor, creative innovation, and selfless service. As President of the Guild of Public Affairs Analysts of Nigeria (GPAAN) and Chairman/CEO of Oyoze Creative Concept, Sir Oyoze continues to exemplify how sharp analysis and boundless creativity can transform public discourse and nation-building.

For over a decade, Sir Oyoze captivated national audiences as a regular panellist on Galaxy Television's prestigious Editors' Forum, delivering incisive insights every Saturday that resonated far beyond the studio. His thoughtful contributions to MiTV's weekly The SUMMIT and LTV's morning show further amplified his voice, inspiring him to establish GPAAN, a registered entity as a non-governmental organization with the Corporate Affairs Commission on November 2, 2017. This platform has since nurtured a thriving community of public affairs analysts committed to elevating Nigeria's intellectual conversation.

Born in Oboroke-Ihima, Kogi State, to Elder Sadiku Umeche Jatto, a celebrated farmer and philosopher, and Madam Awawau Ormeyi Sadiku, a resourceful cloth-weaver and food trader, Sir Oyoze inherited values that define his character. Married to the late Princess Ahuoyiza Medinat Baje, he is father to four accomplished children: Jimmy, Oiza, Joy, and Sunday. In a poignant reflection during his 70th birthday interview, he shared:

"My heart swells with gratitude when I speak of my parents, now resting in peace. They embodied discipline, resourcefulness, creativity, unwavering diligence, and absolute honesty. Their home was a haven of hospitality, open to all regardless of tribe or creed. They taught me true manhood: self-discovery, treating others with respect, embracing humility amid success, and becoming a force for good. Impact on lives matters more than self-promotion."

These parental lessons propelled his journey from secondary school teaching across Bendel, Kwara, and Kogi states, where he nurtured young minds with passion, to pioneering journalism. As the first Nigerian Food Technologist to practice fully as a journalist. He illuminated

# Ayo Oyoze Baje, media icon @73



the food and beverage sector, bridging science and storytelling.

Since 1978, just after his NYSC, Sir Oyoze has pioneered columns with prolific contributions to newspapers and magazines, beginning with "Nigerian Herald" "Poem of the Week". He holds the unique distinction as the only Nigerian journalist with two weekly columns: "Drumbeats" dissecting politics, economy, and global trends; and Food and Beverages, running unbroken for 25 years since debuting in "Business Times" in 2001 and now "BusinessDay" every Sunday. At "Daily Times". Nigeria's oldest surviving newspaper, he ascended to Editorial Page Editor, authoring nearly 1,000 articles.

His versatility extends to literature across novels, plays, poems, and "Drumbeats of

Democracy", a four-decade anthology of essays hailed by Folu Agoi, former president of PEN International Nigeria, as "a colourful parade of lucid prose spiced with fine poetry." Awards like the Vanguard

“

**They taught me true manhood: self-discovery, treating others with respect, embracing humility amid success, and becoming a force for good**

”

Poetry Award and Golden Pen First Prize from Friesland WAMCO/Campina affirm his literary prowess. Passionate about nurturing talent, he urges the Ministry of Education to recommend young authors' books, decrying policymakers' bias toward established names.

Sir Oyoze's commitment to education shines through extensive lecturing in Nigeria and Ghana. Highlights include 10 addresses to SACTAC (Maritime Union's arm), earning him "Comrade" honours in 2018; Gate of Education, Ota, on school security; Bells University of Technology students on creative writing essentials; birthday motivational talks to final-year pupils at Victory College (Ikeja), New Era College (Jankara, Ijaiye), and Airforce Primary School, Ikeja; and the Nigeria Peace

Group (NPG) on panaceas for peaceful elections.

As Media Consultant to Bells University of Technology, Ota, for a decade, and current Media Ambassador to XtraLarge Farms and Resorts, he seamlessly connects media, academia, and enterprise. Membership in the Nigeria Institute of Food Science and Technology (NIFST), Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA Lagos Branch), and PEN International Nigeria Centre, underscores his stature. His eclectic pursuits, from fine arts and creative writing to inventing Oyoze Mathematical Games, reveal a Renaissance spirit.

Olori Lizzy Akinsolotu (née Nyamida), a former student, vividly recalls: "Sir Ayo was of rare versatility, teaching Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Fine Arts, Mathematics, and English effortlessly. Students wondered about his official subject amid his depth. He founded transformative clubs: Writing and Creativity, Quiz and Debating Society, Fine Art, and Dramatic Club. A disciplinarian blending warmth and firmness, he instilled lasting values. Ever since, I have never seen your match."

His enduring influence and legacies have kept rising. He hails from Ihima in Okehi LGA, Kogi State, Sir Oyoze has carried his upbringing's ethos into a pioneering media career championing equity, justice, and ethical journalism. His panellist roles sparked GPAAN's birth, while columns in "The Punch" and others sustain public enlightenment. Despite creative losses to negligent publishers, his enthusiasm endures, fueling advocacy for emerging writers and intellectual discourse.

On this 73rd birthday, we honour not just achievements but a character forged in humility and impact. His late wife's inspiration lives through his children, as does his parents' legacy. Sir Oyoze Baje remains a thought leader wielding the pen for truth, justice, and nation-building—a beacon whose light guides generations.

Happy Birthday, Sir! May joy, purpose, and admiration surround you always.

*Abdulazeez is a poet and a writer of the poetry collection "Soul Rants" A Journey from Within. She is the treasurer of PEN International, Nigerian Centre, Committee Chair for Young Writers Committee of PEN Nigeria, and resides in Lagos.*

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# Tribute

## Remembering Biodun Jeyifo and my NYSC days

MAX AMUCHIE

**W**hen news filtered in on Wednesday, February 11, about the passing of Professor Biodun Jeyifo, I found myself journeying back 35 years, to my National Youth Service days at Teachers' College, Kagoro, in the southern part of Kaduna State.

It was 1991. We were young, idealistic, and argumentative in the best sense of that word. We believed ideas mattered. We believed debates could shape society. Kagoro, quiet and reflective, became for us a space of intellectual exchange.

It was there that I first heard the name Biodun Jeyifo. I was speaking with my fellow corps member, Adekola Adebayo, who had studied English at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. As corps members often do, we compared our campuses and the intellectual giants who shaped them.

I told him about the University of Calabar, about Eskor Toyo, the formidable Marxist economist whose lectures drew students from every faculty, and about Dr. Innocent Ukeje, the political scientist, whose ideological position differed sharply from Toyo's. On that campus - whether you're a Malabite or Malabress (as Unical students are called) - your intellectual leaning often aligned you with one or the other. I told Kola that my sympathies leaned toward Eskor Toyo's Marxist clarity and structural critique.

Years later, Ukeje would rise to become a professor at the University of Abuja. Eskor Toyo would retire as a respected professor of economics before his passing on Monday, December 7, 2015 at 86. But 1991, their debates still animated our conversations.

Kola then smiled and said, "Let me tell you about BJ." That was my first introduction to Biodun Jeyifo. At Ile-Ife, he said, students and lecturers affectionately called him "BJ." He described him as



a brilliant literary scholar and a committed Marxist intellectual. He also mentioned Ropo Sekoni, another respected literary scholar and close associate of BJ. Years later, I would come to appreciate how deep and enduring that friendship was.

What I did not know at the time, and what I only came to understand much later, was the depth of the connection between BJ and the Madunagus. As a student in Calabar, I encountered Professor (then Dr) Bene Madunagu a few times. I knew her as a lecturer in the Botany Department and as a passionate promoter of the Girl Power Movement. She was visible, energetic, and deeply committed to social advocacy. Yet, I did not then grasp the broader ideological network of which she was part.

It was only years later that I learned that Biadun Jeyifo, Edwin Madunagu, and Bene Madunagu were bound together not merely by friendship but by shared ideological commitment, as the trio that formed the Nigerian Socialist Movement, the nucleus of what became widely known as the Nigerian Left.

That knowledge reframed my memories.

The intellectual currents I

experienced in Calabar and the ones Kola described in Ile-Ife were not isolated phenomena. They were interconnected streams flowing from a larger river of radical thought and organised socialist engagement in Nigeria. BJ stood alongside Dr. Edwin Madunagu and Professor Bene Madunagu in shaping socialist thought and activism in the country. They were not armchair theorists. They were organisers, teachers, writers, and public intellectuals committed to building a socialist consciousness rooted in justice, equality, and human dignity.

Today, of that historic trio, only Dr. Edwin Madunagu remains. Professor Bene Madunagu, a formidable intellectual and activist in her own right, passed away on Tuesday, November 26, 2024, at the age of 77. (Interestingly, her death was jointly announced by Dr. Edwin Madunagu and BJ). With the death of Biadun Jeyifo, another pillar of that generation has fallen.

Yet, even in BJ's final years, the bonds of friendship and shared struggle endured and were publicly celebrated. This the world saw on Monday, January 5, just last month, when an international symposium was held in Lagos to

mark his 80th birthday. The event took place at the Agip Recital Hall, MUSON Centre, Onikan, and was organised by the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ). Aptly titled 'Who Is Afraid of Decolonisation? Pedagogy, Curriculum and Decolonisation: Then and Now,' the gathering reflected the lifelong concerns of BJ's scholarship namely decolonisation, pedagogy, intellectual responsibility, and the politics of knowledge production.

The symposium was moderated by no other person than Ropo Sekoni, a powerful testament to a life-long friendship forged in scholarship and ideological conviction. That moment, Sekoni anchoring a global intellectual celebration in honour of BJ, symbolised not only enduring comradeship but also the magnitude of BJ's influence. Scholars, activists, students, and admirers gathered across generations and geographies to honour a man whose ideas travelled far beyond Nigeria's shores.

Looking back now, I realise that the ideological conversations in Kagoro in 1991 were part of something much larger, a coordinated intellectual and political project aimed at transforming Nigerian society. BJ was central to that

story.

He was a bridge - between literature and politics, between Nigeria and the diaspora, between the classroom and the public square. His scholarship travelled across continents, yet remained rooted in Africa's realities and struggles.

His passing signals more than the loss of a distinguished professor. It marks the gradual closing of a chapter in Nigeria's radical intellectual history, a generation that believed scholarship must confront injustice; that intellectual labour is a form of public service; that socialism was not a slogan but an ethical commitment.

For me, the news of his death reawakens memories of Kagoro, of long evenings of debate, of believing that arguments about Marxism, class, and culture were urgent and transformative.

We may not all have sat in his classroom. Some of us encountered him through students he inspired, through movements he helped shape, through ideas that travelled beyond campus walls. Yet, even at a distance, he influenced us.

Professor Biadun Jeyifo has taken his final bow. But like all true teachers, he leaves behind not silence — but echoes.

And somewhere in those echoes is a young corps member in Kagoro, in 1991, hearing the name "BJ" for the first time, unaware that he was listening to the story of one of the architects of Nigeria's socialist movement.

May his legacy endure.



•Dr. Amuchie, a member of the Nigerian Guild of Editors, is CEO, Sundiata Post Media Ltd.

# Tribute

## Success Akagburoonye: From Scaling Life's Summit to Building the Next Peak

KUNLE SOMORIN

When the clock struck midnight on 22 February 1966, the quiet township of Ogoro Uvuru in Imo State awoke to a sound far louder than any drumbeat or church bell - an echo of history itself, reverberating through the streets of a man who, at sixty, stands poised on the cusp of a second, more profound ascent. Chief Obioma Success Akagburoonye - known to many simply as "OSA" or, more reverently, Akaraogu, the one who brings wealth back home - has arrived at an age that, in many cultures, is both a marker of survival and a herald of legacy. Yet his arrival is less a moment of reflection on the years that have passed and more an invitation to contemplate the interplay of fate, faith, and the relentless pursuit of communal uplift.

In the modest rural setting of Ogoro Uvuru, where the rhythm of life is set by the rise of the sun over farm works and the low murmur of the nearby river, a child was born into a family whose means were modest but whose values were unassailable. As schoolmates later recalled, the young Obioma was never content to accept the world as it was presented. "Why do we go to school?" he would ask. "How could it be better?" he pressed further. That relentless curiosity, a trait that would later become the lodestar of his endeavours, was not merely the chatter of a precocious child - it was the seed of a philosophical inquiry that would later be echoed by the great thinkers of antiquity. Socrates, after all, taught that "the unexamined life is not worth living." In the dusty classrooms of Ogoro, a nascent version of that maxim was already being rehearsed.

While many of his peers pursued a single avenue of study, Success charted a dual course that set him apart from the very beginning of his adult life. He first earned degrees in civil engineering, a field that demands exactitude, an eye for structure, and a respect for the immutable laws of physics. Yet he did not stop there. Recognising that the construction of bridges and buildings could be rendered meaningless without a robust legal framework, he pursued law degrees, immersing himself in statutes, jurisprudence, and the art of advocacy.

The convergence of these two disciplines fashioned a man who could, as one observer put it, "build a city and defend it in a courtroom with equal aplomb." It is a rare combination; it recalls the Renaissance polymaths who refused to be siloed, insisting that interdisciplinary insight is the engine of true progress. In his own words, Success often remarked, "Concrete may hold a roof, but the law holds the people beneath it." This synthesis later became the backbone of his enterprise, Praco Limited, and the philosophical foundation upon which his philanthropic enterprises would stand.

The early 1990s were a period of rapid urbanisation across Nigeria. As Lagos, Abuja, and a host of secondary cities scrambled to accommodate a swelling population, land - once a static commodity - was transformed into a dynamic canvas for ambition. Where most saw parcels of dirt awaiting purchase, Success perceived potentiality. His Praco Limited, a real-estate venture soon re-



Akagburoonye

define the skylines of the nation's capital city and beyond.

Praco's inaugural project was a modest housing estate on the outskirts. Even in those early phases, the company's ethos was unmistakable: every unit was designed not merely for occupancy but for community. Communal courts, shared green spaces, and affordable pricing were woven into the blueprint. The project received praise from leaders who noted, "It is the first development that truly cares for the people who will live there, rather than merely for the profit it will bring."

As the portfolio expanded - encompassing commercial hubs, mixed-use complexes, and infrastructural upgrades - Success's reputation grew in tandem with his empire. Yet, with prominence came scrutiny.

No success story is immune to turbulence. In the early-2000s, Success's involvement in a contentious land acquisition in Abuja attracted the attention of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The investigation, which led to a protracted legal battle, threatened to erode public confidence in his ventures. Nonetheless, Success addressed the episode not with denial but with a candid acknowledgment of the lessons it offered. "You cannot lead without being tested," he told a gathering of journalists as he received The Sun Humanitarian Service Awards on 31 January. "The test refines you; it does not define you."

The philosophical resonance of his response mirrors Nietzsche's observation that "What does not kill us makes us stronger." For many observers, the EFCC episode proved not a blemish but a crucible that hardened his commitment to transparency. He won all matters that were raised in court up to the Supreme Court, even when he suffered a two-years and two months detention in the process of contrived investigations.

Political entanglements also peppered his journey. Plots to assassinate him were exposed for which by a former governor of his home state, Senator Rochas Okorocha, was mentioned. That added another layer of complexity. Rather than retreat into partisan alignment, Success anchored himself in the Imo Charter of Equity, a manifesto advocating a fair rotation of political power among Orlu, Okigwe, and Owerri. With

Owerri's turn slated for 2027, his candidacy is framed not as personal ambition but as an embodiment of collective justice, a stance that has earned both staunch allies and formidable opponents.

If engineering gave him the tools to shape the physical world and law gave him the language to safeguard his creations, faith supplied the compass. From the earliest days in his family's modest home, a devotion to God was woven into the fabric of his being. He frequently recounts and on the 400-page biography, *Me and My God*, written on his life and times, he states that: "When the world doubted me, I leaned on God, and He became my strength."

His spirituality is not cloistered; it is manifest in concrete projects. The Noah's Ark Church, an ultra-modern edifice that rises like a beacon over Ogoro, stands as a testament to his belief that faith and development are mutually reinforcing. At its inauguration, he declared, "A house built without a heart is but a shell; a church built without a purpose is but a building." The church auditorium was commissioned last year by former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo.

Philosophically, his conviction echoes St. Augustine's assertion that "Faith is the light that guides the soul through the darkness of uncertainty." For Success, that light has illuminated decisions ranging from the allocation of resources for a new water factory to the sponsorship of scholarships that carry bright minds out of rural obscurity into global arenas. To date, over 300,000 Imolites have benefited from the philanthropic gesture from his Hope Rising for Imolites, a non-government organization that has etched into his native region. In recent years, his foundation has orchestrated a series of community-centric projects that intertwine infrastructure with social welfare:

Road Networks: The previously impassable stretches linking Uvuru to neighboring markets have been paved, slashing travel time and invigorating local trade.

Educational Scholarships: Over a hundred bright youths have been funded to pursue tertiary education, many of whom have returned to serve as teachers, doctors, and engineers in Imo.

Housing Initiatives: Families rendered homeless by floods or economic

hardship have been provided with durable, dignified dwellings.

Rural Telephony: He brought the Ministry of Communication to Aboh Mbaise in 2002 to deliver wireless telecommunication facilities to his people

Youth Empowerment: Trained a legion of Imolites on security to stave off crimes and more on solar technology to enable access to electricity and jobs.

Water Factory: A state-of-the-art water purification plant now supplies clean drinking water to more than 20,000 residents, curbing water-borne diseases.

The effect of these interventions is amplified by the personal stories that accompany them. A farmer from Uvuru, who recently received a new roof, told a reporter, "When the rains came, my house collapsed. Chief Success rebuilt it, but more than that, he gave us hope that we are not forgotten." In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." Success's life illustrates precisely that tenet.

From 19 to 22 February, Imo State will host an unprecedented four-day festival commemorating OSA's sixtieth birthday. The itinerary, though extensive, flows with the rhythm of a living narrative, each event threading into the next like chapters in a novel.

The opening day will feature a leadership conference, where Senator C. Anthony Muse and representatives of the Imo Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria will explore the role of Christian ethics in contemporary governance. Their deliberations will echo the timeless concerns of Aristotle, who argued that "the purpose of the state is to enable its citizens to lead a good life."

An adjoining exhibition will showcase his journey - photographs, newspaper clippings, and personal artifacts arranged to portray a man whose ambition was never self-serving but communal. The centerpiece of the festival is the novelty football match coordinated by former Super Eagles legend Segun Odegbami. The former captain will don the striker's jersey against a "Friends of Akagburoonye" XI - a friendly contest that fuses sport, camaraderie, and the raising of funds for the new water factory. The match, set against a backdrop of drums and chants, will symbolise the unity his projects have fostered.

Other scheduled activities include the commissioning of a new football pitch, the inauguration of a freshly built church, the handing over of a family home, and the rehabilitation of a critical road. As part of the birthday celebrations, Chief Success is overseeing the rehabilitation of a 19-kilometre road leading to his village, Ogoro Uvuru. The road work will be formally flagged off by the visiting Ghanaian leader, underscoring the cross-border significance of the occasion.

In addition, he is commissioning terrace buildings inside his family compound to house all six of his father's sons, as well as commissioning both an Anglican and a Catholic church - structures that reflect his abiding faith in God and his commitment to religious harmony.

Culminating the celebrations is the grand book launch of *Me and My God*. The ceremony will be chaired by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, while Ghanaian President John Mahama will attend as a special guest, underscoring the pan-African significance of Success's

story. Dr Reuben Abati, a distinguished journalist and broadcast personality, will lead a critical review of the autobiography, dissecting its themes of grace, resilience, and purpose. The governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma, will serve as chief host, delivering opening remarks that situate OSA's achievements within the broader narrative of Imo's development.

The term "second mountain", popularised by author David Brooks, refers to the phase of life wherein one's pursuits shift from personal achievement to meaningful service. In this context, Success's sixtieth birthday marks not a climax but a transition. He has already scaled the first mountain - amassing wealth, reputation, and influence. The second mountain beckons him toward mentorship, equitable governance, and the deepening of his spiritual practice.

His reflections on this shift resonate with Seneca's observation that "Life is long if you know how to use it." By allocating his resources toward infrastructure, education, and health, he demonstrates an acute awareness that time gains value when spent on the betterment of others.

Moreover, the interplay of fate and agency - two twin forces that have long occupied philosophers - finds practical expression in his life. The circumstances of his birth in a humble village could be deemed fate, yet the relentless curiosity that drove him to ask "why?" and "how?" is a testament to personal agency. In his own words, "God places the seed; we water it." This synthesis mirrors the ancient Stoic belief that while external events lie beyond our control, our responses to them are wholly within our power.

When the final fireworks burst over Ogoro on the night of his birthday, the light will not merely celebrate the passage of sixty years; it will illuminate a living legacy that continues to expand. The roads now smooth, the homes newly built, the children now studying - each represents an ongoing ripple that will reverberate long after the applause subsides.

The testimony that the community offers provides perhaps the most compelling evidence of his impact. A former mentee, now a civil engineer based in Lagos, confided, "Chief Success taught me that success is not about what you take, but about what you give. His mentorship changed my life." Another community elder noted, "He is not just a benefactor; he is a father to many. His impact cannot be measured in money but in lives transformed." These voices echo the timeless Biblical proverb: "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed."

In sum, Chief Obioma Success Akagburoonye's sixtieth birthday is a cultural milestone as much as it is a personal one - a moment where personal ambition, divine faith, and communal responsibility coalesce into a singular, resonant narrative. As Imo State and the nation at large bear witness, the tale that unfolds will serve not only as a chronicle of an extraordinary individual but also as a template for how success, when anchored in purpose, can become a conduit for enduring transformation.

**Somorin, former chief press secretary to Governor Dapo Abiodun and a media scholar, writes from Crescent University, Abeokuta**

# Life Journey

## From personal adversity to international influence: The Parveen Smith story

LEILAH ZAHARADEEN

Parveen Smith is a globally recognised transformative leader, coach, and keynote speaker whose work in emotional well-being, leadership, and personal development has inspired audiences across continents for over two decades. She has built a reputation not just as a mentor and trainer, but as a changemaker whose own life story mirrors the transformation she teaches.

Based in Cheshire, United Kingdom, Smith is the founder and CEO of Soul 2 Soul Wellbeing, a platform committed to empowering individuals and organisations to prioritise mental, emotional, and holistic wellness. Her philosophy centers on the belief that true leadership begins with inner mastery, the ability to regulate emotions, overcome adversity, and respond to life with clarity and resilience.

Her personal journey fuels her work. Through multiple life-altering health challenges, including periods of paralysis and disability, Smith developed a deep understanding of the mind-body connection and emotional resilience. She not only reclaimed her own independence but channeled her insights into tools that have helped thousands worldwide overcome stress, anxiety, trauma, and emotional suffering.

Smith's teachings have made her a sought-after voice on the global stage. She has been featured on major media outlets including PBS, BBC News, ITV, and Sky



TV, and has appeared on radio platforms such as BBC Radio, amplifying her message of transformation to international audiences.

Her influence extends beyond individual coaching: Parveen regularly speaks

at international conferences, corporate events, and leadership summits, where she delivers workshops on emotional mastery, mental wellness, and high-performance leadership. Her work emphasizes practical strategies rooted in

neuroscience, emotional intelligence, and mindfulness that support sustainable success and wellbeing, not just surface-level motivation.

Smith's contributions have been recognized with numerous awards and honors. She has received multiple prestigious accolades, including the United Nations Global Peace Council Award, the Global Power Leader Award at the UK Houses of Parliament, and listings in international recognition lists as one of Microsoft Magazine's Top 10 Entrepreneurs to Watch and Top 10 Inspiring Speakers to Follow in 2025.

Her work touches both personal and organizational transformation. Through Soul 2 Soul Wellbeing's Mind Mastery Program and other frameworks such as AOT the Golden Key, Smith encourages leaders to lead from within, asserting that emotional regulation and cultural agility are foundational to effective leadership in a fast-changing world.

Parveen also supports humanitarian causes, including wellness initiatives in disaster-affected areas and community well-being programs, reinforcing her belief that emotional health and resilience are critical for both individuals and societies.

Today, Smith continues to expand her reach, mentoring leaders, facilitating cross-cultural workshops, and delivering keynote talks aimed at helping people thrive rather than merely survive. Her message is clear: transformation begins within, and when courage meets compassion, individuals can unlock profound personal and collective impact.

## AXA Mansard reinforces customer bond on Valentine's Day

MODESTUS ANAESORONYE

AXA Mansard has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening relationships with customers through thoughtful Valentine's Day initiatives designed to celebrate loyalty, appreciation, and trust.

The company leveraged the season of love to deepen engagement with clients, highlighting its customer-centric approach while reinforcing its dedication to delivering value-driven insurance and financial solutions.

In this vein, AXA Mansard, has teamed up with Nollywood sensation Uzor Arukwe for its 2026 Valentine's Day campaign themed #PartnerForLife, reinforcing its commitment to building lasting relationships with customers beyond transac-



tions.

The collaboration underscores the company's strategic shift from being perceived solely as a claims payer to becoming a dependable life partner to its customers.

Speaking on the initiative, Tope Adeniyi, CEO of AXA Mansard Health Limited, described the campaign as a clear demonstration of the company's unwavering promise to move from "payer to partner." Valentine's Day offers us the perfect op-

"The theme #PartnerForLife is deliberate," Adeniyi said. "We are not a transactional organisation. We are passionate about building meaningful and enduring relationships. Valentine's Day offers us the perfect op-

portunity to put our words into action — reassuring our customers that we will stand by them through life's milestones, challenges, and moments that truly matter."

Also speaking, Adeola Surakat, chief marketing officer of AXA Mansard, explained that the choice of Uzor Arukwe was intentional and value-driven.

"Uzor is not just a symbolic figure for this season; he embodies love, empathy, and care. More importantly, he reflects a customer-first mindset. He consistently gives his best to entertain and inspire his audience, placing them at the centre of his craft. That alignment with our own customer-first philosophy made him a natural partner for this campaign," Surakat said.

As part of the Valentine's activation, AXA Mansard

is launching a social media challenge that invites customers to tag their 'safe space' the people who make life meaningful simply by being present. Entries with the highest engagement stand a chance to win exclusive health insurance packages.

Over the past three years, AXA Mansard has engaged thousands of Nigerians in reshaping the narrative around insurance and protection, positioning it not as a one-off transaction but as a long-term commitment designed to deliver tangible value and peace of mind.

With #PartnerForLife, the insurer deepens that message, reminding customers that true partnership goes beyond promises, it is about showing up, consistently and compassionately.

# High Flyer

## Otunba Gbenga Daniel at 70: Enduring leadership, lasting legacy

DR. IFETAYO ADENIYI

**O**n April 6, 2026, dignitaries from across Nigeria and beyond will converge to celebrate a man whose life has been defined by vision, enterprise, courage and uncommon commitment to public service.

Politicians across party lines, captains of industry, traditional rulers, diplomats and long-time associates are expected to gather in honour of Otunba Engr. Justus Olugbenga Daniel, FNSE, FAEng, as he marks his 70th birthday, a milestone that offers not just an occasion for celebration, but a moment for reflection on a legacy of impact.

For seven decades, Otunba Gbenga Daniel has embodied the rare fusion of technocratic excellence, political sagacity and philanthropic compassion.

Engineer, entrepreneur, governor, senator and community leader, he stands today as one of Nigeria's most influential and respected public figures, an enigma whose quiet strength and strategic mind have shaped institutions and transformed lives.

### The engineer who built more than structures

Long before he ventured into politics, Daniel had already carved a niche in Nigeria's engineering and business landscape. A graduate of Engineering from the University of Lagos, where he also earned an MBA, he combined technical expertise with managerial acumen early in his career.

He began his professional journey at Metal Construction (West Africa) Limited and later joined H. F. Schroeder (West Africa) Limited. There, through diligence and brilliance, he rose to become Deputy Managing Director, the first African to occupy that position in the company's history. It was an early testament to his capacity to break barriers.

Driven by entrepreneurial vision, he founded Kresta Laurel Limited in Lagos, a company specialising in elevators, power systems and industrial equipment.

Under his leadership, the firm became Nigeria's first ISO 9001 certified lift company, setting standards in quality assurance and corporate governance.

In 1993, he was recognised as one of Nigeria's 100 most successful businessmen, affirming his status as a formidable force in the private sector. Yet, for Daniel, business success was only a prelude to



broader service.

### The governor who signed 'A contract with the people'

In 2003, he was elected governor of Ogun State, ushering in an era that many still describe as transformative. Upon assuming office, he unveiled a development blueprint titled "A Contract with the People," a bold pledge to improve living standards and reposition the Gateway State for sustainable growth.

Over two terms that spanned eight years, Daniel's administration left indelible footprints across sectors.

In education, he founded Nigeria's first University of Education, reinforcing Ogun State's reputation as a knowledge hub. He established four ICT Polytechnics across the state, recognising early the importance of digital literacy and technology-driven development.

Infrastructure witnessed unprecedented expansion. His government rehabilitated over 2,000 kilometres of roads, connecting rural communities to urban centres and stimulating commerce.

Three world-class stadiums were constructed, while another was upgraded to FIFA standards, investments that not only promoted sports but also youth engagement and

economic activity.

Under his watch, Ogun State emerged as a business destination of choice in West Africa. Through strategic public private partnerships, he attracted significant local and foreign investments, laying the groundwork for industrial clusters and economic diversification. Investors found in him a leader who understood both policy and enterprise.

Beyond physical projects, Daniel's governance philosophy emphasised institutional strengthening and long-term planning principles that continue to influence the state's development trajectory.

### The senator with a developmental agenda

Today, as the senator

representing Ogun East Senatorial District, Daniel continues to redefine public service. His transition from executive governance to legislative advocacy has been marked by energy and purpose.

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on the Navy, he plays a critical role in matters of national security and maritime development.

His legislative portfolio reflects a deep engagement with issues of regional and national importance.

Notably, he sponsored

the South West Development Commission Establishment Bill, which has since received Presidential Assent, a landmark intervention aimed at accelerating infrastructural and economic growth in the region.

His bills and motions span healthcare, education, infrastructure and social welfare, underscoring a commitment to inclusive development.

At the grassroots level, his interventions have been equally impactful. He launched a Zero Interest Micro Credit Scheme to empower petty traders and small-scale entrepreneurs.

Thousands have benefited from his free eye care programmes, restoring sight and hope to the elderly and vulnerable.

He has facilitated borehole projects in underserved communities, renovated schools, improved educational infrastructure and supported farmers through rice value chain training and fertilizer distribution initiatives.

These projects reflect a leader who understands that governance is ultimately about people.

### Philanthropy rooted in community

Through the Gateway Front Foundation (GFF), Daniel has institutionalised his

philanthropic impulses. The foundation undertakes humanitarian and charitable initiatives that cut across healthcare, education, youth empowerment and agriculture.

The Political Leadership Academy (POLA), one of his notable initiatives, nurtures future leaders by identifying and strengthening capacities required for effective governance. In a country where leadership succession often lacks structure, POLA stands as a forward-looking investment in Nigeria's democratic future.

As Asiwaju of Remo Christians and the Losi of Ikenne, Daniel's traditional titles reflect the trust and esteem he commands within his community.

They also echo his affinity with the progressive ideals of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a legacy of disciplined leadership and people-centred development.

### Laurels and global recognition

Otunba Gbenga Daniel's contributions have earned him numerous awards at home and abroad. Among them are the MKO Abiola Leadership Prize (2004), the Zik Leadership Award (2006), and the Africa Leadership Prize for Best Performed Governor and Megastar Man of the Decade

Award.

These honours recognise not merely political accomplishment, but a consistent dedication to excellence.

He is a Fellow of the Nigerian Society of Engineers (FNSE); a Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Engineering (FAEng), and holds fellowships in other professional bodies, including the Institute of Directors, distinctions that underscore his professional depth.

### A 70th birthday beyond partisanship

As he turns 70, the celebration planned in his honour is expected to transcend political affiliations. Friends and well-wishers from across party divides, business leaders, traditional rulers and international associates will gather to celebrate a life that has touched multiple constituencies.

The event being put together promises to be more than a birthday party; it will be a convergence of testimonies, including the launching of four books, projects executed, lives transformed and institutions strengthened.

For many, Daniel represents a rare breed of public servant who moves seamlessly between the boardroom and the Senate chamber, between grassroots mobilisation and global engagement.

### An enduring legacy

At 70, Otunba Gbenga Daniel remains active, reflective and forward-looking. His journey from engineering prodigy to political icon illustrates what is possible when competence meets conviction.

His imprint on Ogun State is visible in roads, schools, stadiums and industries. His influence in the National Assembly is evident in legislation and constituency projects.

His generosity is felt in homes, markets and farms across his senatorial district.

Indeed, his story is one of resilience, innovation and service, a reminder that leadership, at its best, is about building structures that outlive the builder and empowering people to dream beyond their circumstances.

As Nigeria celebrates Otunba Gbenga Daniel at 70, it honours not just the passage of time, but the enduring impact of a man whose life continues to inspire generations.

•Dr. Adeniyi is a media consultant and public affair analyst.

# Imo inclusion in Gas Master plan, strategic to its industrial, economic growth

GODFREY OFURUM, Aba

The Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) Limited, on January 30, 2026, announced Assa North, in Ohaji Egbema Local Government Area and Izombe, in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State, as hubs in the 2026 Gas Master Plan.

This is the first time Imo State has been included in the Nigerian Gas Master Plan.

Imo State and the broader South-East region were initially excluded from the core central infrastructure planning of the original 2008 Nigeria Gas Master Plan.

Emeka Mgbudem, state's commissioner for Petroleum and Natural Gas Development, in an interview, said that the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in October 2008 constituted a committee, which included the then governor Ikedi Ohakim to review the plan and address the marginalisation concerns of the South East, as the initial 2008 plan focused on three main Processing Facilities in the Western Delta, Obiafu (north of Port Harcourt), Akwa Ibom/Calabar and major transmission lines, like the Western Delta (Escravos- Lagos) and South-North lines (Ajaokuta-Kaduna- Kano).

He said that subsequent revisions aimed to include Imo State failed. But thanked God for the Assa-North/ Ohaji South (ANOH)/Izombe projects, the visionary leadership and strategic foresight of Governor Hope Uzodimma that Imo State which sits on vast gas reserves is now a critical gas hub that will also support the broader Aba- Owerri- Nnewi- Onitsha pipeline project.

"It is my firm and strong opinion that Imo is blessed to have Governor Hope Uzodimma, as our Governor during this period as he keeps securing numerous advantages not just for our state, but for our region.

He called on the entire South East to key into Governor Uzodimma's alignment with the federal government and support his leadership, as a bridge to national integration.

On the benefits of the inclusion of Imo State in the gas masterplan,



Mgbudem, said that Assa North feeds the OB3 pipeline, while Izombe focuses on using associated gas to power industries.

"Consequently, these hubs are strategic to Imo industrial and economic growth, as they would boost domestic supply and attract anchor tenants to the Orashi Special Energy Zone.

"The Orashi Special Energy Zone is resource- anchored and being positioned as an international gas hub. The State can achieve being the cheapest industrial power in Africa, as the Zone gives us an edge in agro

processing, heavy industries like fertilizer, methanol, refinery, LNG at the lowest tariff per kilowatt hour.

"With the significant inclusion of Imo in the Nigeria Gas Master Plan 2026, the state government, would unleash our energy advantage by unlocking our gas potentials to power our homes, light up our cities and digital economies within our State and beyond our borders.

"For us in Imo, natural gas is now not just a resource, it has become a beacon of possibilities. It is the energy that will drive our dreams. Our gas to power projects, would



deliver the cheapest cost of living for Imo citizens.

On the safety of the host communities, he affirmed that they will benefit immensely from the Gas Flare Commercialisation Programme.

He said that the ANOH gas plant (which has delivered its first gas) was specifically designed to operate with zero routine flare, noting that the facility integrates an advanced technology to process gas that was previously flared in the Ohaji South field aligning with sustainability goals to reduce carbon intensity.

"For the Izombe hub, Seplat is committed to its "onshore End of Routine Flaring" programme. Antan Producing is also advancing its Routine Flare Reduction initiatives to ensure end of gas flaring. The gas flare reduction project also covers fields in Imo like Ameshi, Akri, Jisike, Agu, Egbema Main/ West, Oguali, Assa, Ibigwe, Ukpichi etc.

"Nigeria is actively implementing the Nigerian Gas Flare Commercialization Programme (NGFCP) to capture and monetize flared gas.

"NUPRC has granted 28 companies permits to access 49 flare sites primarily in the Niger Delta. We are actively transitioning from treating flare gas as an environmental liability to an economic asset fostering sustainable development and cleaner energy use.

"Nigeria aims to eliminate routine flare, by 2030 and reach net zero emissions, by 2060. The current

flare capture programme is expected to cut 6 million tonnes of CO2 annually, attract roughly \$2bn in investments, create over 100,000 jobs (directly and indirectly) capture 250- 300mmscf of gas daily and unlock nearly 3 gigawatts of potential power generation capacity helping to address our energy poverty

In terms of revenue accruals, the commissioner said that the internally generated revenue of the State is expected to increase significantly competing with the top 3 States in Nigeria, when gas- based industries and the Orashi Special Energy Zone become operational.

He said that the 2 ANOH projects alone when fully operational, would appreciably contribute to the State's IGR.

"As a major gas hub, leveraging the 24-hour power supply will attract manufacturing firms boosting tax sources like PAYE.

"The establishment of Gas City Gates, Collection Centres, Pipelines, Processing Plants, CNG and value chain outfits will attract foreign direct investment and create thousands of job thereby enhancing the economic viability of the state.

"Imo State is now properly positioned in the Global Decade of Gas Map and recognised, as a strategic international gas hub courtesy of the transformational leadership of Governor Hope Uzodimma. It can only be better. Imo has risen," he said.

**For the Izombe hub, Seplat is committed to its "onshore End of Routine Flaring" programme. Antan Producing is also advancing its Routine Flare Reduction initiatives to ensure end of gas flaring. The gas flare reduction project also covers fields in Imo like Ameshi, Akri, Jisike, Agu, Egbema Main/ West, Oguali, Assa, Ibigwe, Ukpichi**

# Controversy



COLLINS OKEKE



GUKONGZI UGWUEZI

For weeks, Nigerians have protested outside the National Assembly over proposed amendments to the Electoral Act 2022. At the centre of this controversy is a technical but crucial question: how should election results be transmitted from polling units to collation centres? The answer to this question will determine the credibility of Nigeria's 2027 general elections and potentially every election thereafter.

#### The current legal framework

The Electoral Act 2022 governs how elections are conducted in Nigeria, but its provisions on result transmission are notably vague. Section 60(5) of the Act states that "the presiding officer shall transfer the results including total number of accredited voters and the results of the ballot in a manner as prescribed by the Commission." This language gives the Independent National Electoral Commission complete discretion over how results move from polling units to collation centres.

The law uses the word "transfer" rather than any specific method of transmission. It makes no mention of electronic systems, the internet, or INEC's Result Viewing Portal known as IRev. Most significantly, it leaves the entire process to INEC's operational guidelines rather than creating statutory requirements. Section 50(2) reinforces this discretion by stating that "voting at an election and transmission of results under this Act shall be in accordance with the procedure determined by the Commission."

During the 2023 general elections, INEC deployed electronic transmission technology and uploaded many polling unit results to the IRev portal. Citizens could watch results appear in real time on their phones. But when disputes arose and cases reached the

## Understanding the electronic transmission controversy: A legal analysis of the Electoral Act Amendment Bill

Supreme Court, justices ruled that electronic transmission was unknown to law. Because the Electoral Act did not mandate electronic transmission, INEC had discretion to use it or not, and courts could not compel the commission to rely on electronically transmitted results over manual paper forms.

This created a fundamental problem. Nigeria had invested in technology and raised citizens' expectations about transparency, but the legal framework made electronic transmission optional rather than mandatory. The law permitted INEC to use modern methods but did not require it, leaving electoral outcomes vulnerable to the same manipulation tactics that had plagued Nigerian democracy for decades.

#### The proposed reform

After the 2023 elections exposed these gaps, the National Assembly Committees on Electoral Matters examined the issue and recommended amendments. The committee's initial proposal for a new Section 60(3) contained three key elements: mandatory electronic transmission of results, explicit reference to the IRev portal, and a requirement for real-time upload whilst witnesses remained present at polling units.

This proposal represented a fundamental shift from discretionary to mandatory electronic transmission. The phrase "shall electronically transmit" made it obligatory rather than optional. The specific mention of "IREV portal" identified the exact platform by name in the statute. Most critically, the inclusion of "in real time" required immediate upload whilst witnesses remained present at the polling unit, before anyone could alter results during transportation to collation centres.

Under this proposal, presiding officers would have had no choice about whether to use electronic transmission. They would have been legally required to upload results immediately after counting and signing forms. The narrow window for compliance would have closed whilst polling agents, party representatives, and citizens were still present to verify that uploaded results matched what had been announced.

This version makes three critical changes from the committees' recommendation. First, it removes the phrase "in real time," meaning presiding officers must electronically transmit results but not necessarily immediately whilst witnesses are present. Second, it creates an exception for "communication failure" without defining what constitutes such failure or what proof is required. Third, it designates manual Form EC8A as "the primary source" when electronic transmission allegedly fails, effectively creating a hierarchy where paper results can override electronic records.

**Legal implications of the Senate's position**  
The removal of "in real time" from the Senate's version fundamentally weakens the provision's effectiveness. Without a time requirement, presiding officers can leave polling units with paper forms, and nothing in the law compels them to upload results within any specific timeframe. A presiding officer could theoretically wait hours or even days before transmitting results electronically. During this delay window, opportunities



Senate President Godswill Akpabio



Speaker Tajudeen Abbas



INEC Chairman, Joash Amupitan.

arise for external pressure, bribery, or coercion to alter results before they are uploaded.

The phrase creates ambiguity about when compliance has occurred. If a presiding officer uploads results six hours after counting concluded, has he fulfilled his legal obligation to "electronically transmit" results? Under the Senate's language, arguably yes, because there's no temporal requirement. This stands in sharp contrast to the original proposal

where "real time" would have required upload within minutes whilst witnesses could verify accuracy.

The communication failure exception presents even more serious legal problems. The provision states that if electronic transmission "fails as a result of communication failure," manual results become primary, but it nowhere defines what constitutes communication failure. Does it mean complete absence of network coverage? Weak signal strength? Server congestion? Equipment malfunction? Human

error in operating devices? Deliberate network sabotage? The statute is silent.

This definitional gap creates significant evidentiary challenges. When disputes arise over whether electronic or manual results should prevail, tribunals will face questions the law doesn't answer. What standard of proof applies to claims of communication failure? Must presiding officers provide contemporaneous documentation? Are witness statements sufficient? Should independent technical verification be required? Without statutory

guidance, different tribunals may apply inconsistent standards, creating legal uncertainty and unpredictability.

The provision also fails to specify who determines whether communication failure occurred. Is it the presiding officer's subjective assessment at the polling unit? Must the ward collation officer verify the claim? Should INEC's technical staff investigate? Can collation officers reject claimed failures and demand electronic transmission? The law provides no procedural framework for resolving these questions, leaving critical decisions to individual discretion rather than clear legal standards.

By designating manual Form EC8A as "the primary source" when communication failure is claimed, the Senate's provision creates a troubling hierarchy between electronic and manual results. This language suggests that paper forms carry greater legal weight than electronic records when technology allegedly fails. But this hierarchy contradicts the entire purpose of electronic transmission, which is to create a tamper-proof record that prevents the kind of result manipulation possible with paper forms.

Consider a scenario where electronic results from IRev show one outcome, but a presiding officer arrives at a collation centre with a manual Form EC8A showing different numbers and claims communication failure prevented upload. Under the Senate's provision, the manual result is designated as primary. Even if server logs show that a partial transmission occurred, or if citizens have photographic evidence of different numbers being announced at the polling unit, the law says the manual form shall be the primary source for collation and declaration.

The House version does not include the Senate's sweeping communication failure exception. Whilst it presumably recognises that technology can fail, it doesn't create a blanket provision making manual results primary whenever failure is claimed. This places greater responsibility on INEC to ensure technology works and to provide backup systems, rather than creating an easy escape route from electronic transmission requirements.

Contrast this with a statute that includes real-time requirements and clear communication failure protocols. Such legislation would reduce litigation by making compliance standards clear and making violations easier to prove. When the law mandates immediate upload and provides specific procedures for documenting genuine technical failures, disputes become more straightforward to resolve. The Senate's current version achieves the opposite effect.

#### Conclusion

The controversy over electronic transmission reveals a fundamental tension in Nigerian electoral reform. The country has invested in technology capable of making elections transparent and results verifiable in real time. But technology alone cannot reform elections if the legal framework remains weak. The Senate's current position represents partial progress by explicitly recognising electronic transmission and naming the IRev portal in statute, but it falls short of creating the robust legal requirements necessary to prevent manipulation.

The critical deficiencies are the absence of "in real time" language, the undefined communication failure exception, and the designation of manual results as primary when communication failure exceptions, or craft entirely new language attempting to balance both approaches. Whatever emerges will then face up-or-down votes in both chambers.

From a legal perspective, the harmonisation process represents the critical juncture where statutory language will be finalised. The conference committee's choices about whether to include "in real time," how to define communication failure, whether to make manual results primary, and what verification procedures to require will determine whether Nigeria's Electoral Act provides a robust framework for electronic transmission or a weak framework full of exploitable loopholes.

As the conference committee begins its work harmonising the Senate and House versions, the central legal question is whether Nigeria will adopt clear, mandatory, enforceable standards for electronic transmission or settle for ambiguous language that creates the appearance of reform whilst preserving opportunities for manipulation. The answer will determine not just the technical process of result transmission but the fundamental credibility of Nigerian democracy.

**Implications for Electoral litigation**  
The Senate's current language creates conditions for extensive post-election litigation. If the provision becomes law in its current form, expect election tribunals to be inundated with cases disputing whether communication failures were genuine, whether manual results should override electronic records, and whether collation officers properly verified claimed failures. These cases will require tribunals to make factual findings about technical matters the statute doesn't adequately address. Different tribunals may reach different conclusions about similar fact patterns, creating inconsistent jurisprudence. Appellate courts will

# Issue

## Real-time or nothing: Why Nigeria must reinvent its electoral technology now

OJO EMMANUEL ADEMOLA

Nigeria stands at a decisive crossroads, and the luxury of debating whether technology should anchor electoral transparency is long gone. The real question is how quickly the nation can build an electoral infrastructure capable of delivering real-time, tamper-proof results that command public and judicial confidence. Today's legal ambiguities, infrastructural fragilities, cybersecurity exposure, operational inconsistencies, and the still-evolving culture of trust in result management mean Nigeria is realistically eight to twelve years—three electoral cycles—away from nationwide, real-time transmission that can stand as an authoritative system of record. This is not pessimism but a clear-eyed assessment of the structural milestones that must be met before aspiration becomes credible democratic practice.

Nigeria enters this debate with urgency, not curiosity. The nation stands at a defining threshold where the credibility of its democracy hinges on how quickly it can build an electoral system capable of delivering real-time, tamper-proof results that command unquestioned public and judicial trust. The evidence is stark: given today's legal gaps, infrastructural weaknesses, cybersecurity exposure, operational inconsistencies, and the still-maturing culture of transparency, Nigeria is plausibly three election cycles away from nationwide real-time transmission becoming a dependable system of record. My thesis begins from this sober reality and argues for the structural reforms required to close that gap with deliberate speed as detailed on:

### The legal and governance constraints (why today's law doesn't yet sustain 'real-time or bust')

The first limiting factor is jurisprudence. In the aftermath of the 2023 general election, Nigeria's Supreme Court and the Presidential Election Petition Tribunal held that failures or delays in uploading polling unit results to the INEC Results Viewing (IREV) portal did not invalidate the election, and that IREV is not a legal collation system under the 2022 Electoral Act. That position reduces the legal incentive to treat IREV and BVAS as mission-critical infrastructure whose failure carries determinative consequences.

Parliamentary clarity is in transition. In December 2025, the House of Representatives voted to mandate real-time electronic transmission in the ongoing amendments to the Electoral Act, while subsequent Senate deliberations in February 2026 reflected a cautious compromise—accepting electronic transmission but re-entrenching manual collation as the fallback where network failure



occurs, and in some drafts reverting to the vaguer language of 'transfer'. Until a harmonised and assented statute unambiguously defines the status of real-time uploads and the handling of failures, the Commission will continue to treat uploads primarily as a transparency device rather than the definitive legal record.

Compounding this, INEC's own post-election report attributes the presidential-result upload failure in 2023 to an internal configuration defect that produced server errors, even while results for the National Assembly uploaded successfully. The episode damaged public expectations that 'real-time' was guaranteed and underscores why law, technology, and operations must be tightened together before uploads can be treated as dispositive.

### The data protection & privacy posture (a necessary—but recent—foundation)

Nigeria now has a comprehensive federal privacy law—the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023—which establishes the Nigeria Data Protection Commission, strengthens the rights of data subjects, and introduces obligations for data controllers and processors, including those of major importance. Translating those principles into election-grade practice—data protection impact assessments, strict purpose limitation, data minimisation, cross-border transfer safeguards for cloud redundancy, and robust breach reporting—requires guidance, vendor contracts and sustained oversight before the courts and public will treat digital trails as authoritative.

Election systems and their vendors are, by any reasonable reading, controllers and processors of major importance under the Act. That carries heightened registration and compliance duties, and it implies formal controller-processor arrangements between INEC, mobile network operators, cloud providers and device suppliers—alongside tested incident-response simulations—before nationwide,

real-time handling of sensitive personal data and election artefacts can be trusted without reservation.

### Connectivity and power realities (can every polling unit upload reliably in real time?)

Broadband availability is improving, but the urban-rural divide persists. NCC's public performance reports show national broadband penetration only recently crossing the 50 per cent mark in late 2025, below the National Broadband Plan's 70 per cent target for 2025. Median speeds and availability remain markedly better in cities than in rural local government areas—the very places where polling units are most dispersed and hardest to reach at the same moment on election day.

Fourth-generation mobile networks are the backbone of Nigeria's data experience and are steadily improving, but fifth-generation coverage gaps remain large, even in Lagos and Abuja. Quality-of-experience assessments also show that performance along major roads and rural corridors still lags. Operators are investing—adding new sites and fibre—but outages, vandalism, right-of-way costs and insecurity continue to constrain rollout. These

realities matter when thousands of polling units attempt to upload results in the same narrow window.

Government has launched the National Broadband Alliance for Nigeria to accelerate penetration in priority sectors and locations, yet official and independent analyses concede that the 70 per cent target for 2025 was missed due to structural obstacles including device affordability and right-of-way challenges. The result is that connectivity remains uneven, and 'real-time everywhere' demands redundancy, latency and jitter service levels, and pre-provisioned priority quality of service for election traffic at every ward—a bar we have not yet reached.

There is promise in satellite broadband and direct-to-device initiatives. The NCC plans to subsidise satellite solutions through the Universal Service Provision Fund to reach some 23 million offline Nigerians, complementing terrestrial networks. Turning that policy into affordable, protected bandwidth for thousands of election uploads will require pilots, spectrum policies and robust contracts—another multi-year effort.

### Power and field operations (can devices stay up and push data on

#### time?)

Power reliability is a fundamental constraint. Even strong mobile coverage cannot overcome a dead device. Nigeria's grid volatility means polling officials must assume intermittent power and rely on battery packs and solar trickle charging to keep BVAS units and smartphones alive. Without standardised power kits and 'offline-first' application designs with robust store-and-forward and retry policies, devices will miss the real-time window in precisely the hardest-to-serve locations.

Identity coverage is a bright spot with work to do. More than 121 million Nigerians had obtained a National Identification Number by mid-2025, with ward-level enrolment using NYSC corps members to reach children and rural communities. That progress supports cleaner registers and better deduplication, but synchronising NIN, the voter roll and BVAS data pipelines nationwide is still a work in progress that must be proven in the field.

Cybersecurity, integrity and information disorder (why 'real-time' must be resilient to be trusted) These systems are high-value targets. INEC reported attempts to breach its systems ahead of the 2023 vote, and independent experts warned that cyberattacks, defacements and disinformation campaigns could undermine confidence even where the tally itself is untouched. The architecture must therefore assume sustained hostile load and perception attacks, not simply routine traffic.

INEC's own technical explanation of the 2023 upload failure points to a configuration mapping bug that returned server errors for presidential results, while National Assembly uploads succeeded. In the absence of transparent, real-time observability and cryptographic proofs, that vacuum was quickly filled by claims of hacking and manipulation. A hardened design with public, tamper-evident receipts at the point of upload would have narrowed that space considerably.

Disinformation ecosystems also matured during the cycle, with manipulated media and AI-generated content amplifying doubt. Any future glitch will be weaponised unless the system provides public, tamper-evident proofs and independent verifiability through mirrored repositories and third-party checks.

### Why 'three cycles' is a reasonable horizon

Bringing these strands together, several preconditions must mature in sequence. First, the Electoral Act must unequivocally define real-time uploads as part of the legal record with clear failure windows and fallbacks that will stand on appeal. Achieving

passage, harmonisation and the first nationwide shakedown before 2027 is possible but tight. Second, infrastructure needs to move from roughly half the population on effective broadband to something closer to three-quarters or more, with satellite and multi-operator redundancy at the ward level.

Third, security and privacy need to move from policy to disciplined practice—audits, breach drills, and a live election SOC. Finally, the operational craft—training hundreds of thousands of presiding officials, standardising device kits and batteries, perfecting offline-first flows—usually stabilises over two national cycles even in mature democracies.

### A practical, staged roadmap (with election-cycle milestones)

In the first cycle (2026–2027), the priority is to codify, harden and prove at scale. The amended Electoral Act should be passed well before mid-2027, making real-time transmission mandatory with explicit fallbacks and penalties for wilful non-compliance, while anchoring evidence rules for digital signatures and logs. INEC should issue binding result-management regulations aligned to the Act, register as a Data Controller of Major Importance, publish a data protection impact assessment, and execute controller-processor contracts with mobile operators and cloud providers. On the network side, multi-operator APNs with SIM bonding and priority quality of service for election traffic should be contracted, with satellite terminals pre-positioned at ward collation centres as backhaul fallback, and direct-to-device pilots pursued where feasible. Security measures must include device-bound keys, time-stamped signatures and append-only receipts, overseen by a joint election security operations centre with red-team drills against denial-of-service and phishing.

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# Other News

## 39th AU Summit: Ndayishimiye, Burundi's president, takes over as new chairman

TONY AILEMEN, Abuja

President Evariste Ndayishimiye of the Republic of Burundi, on Saturday, took over as new Chairman of the African Union for 2026, succeeding the outgoing Chairman, President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço of Angola.

Vice President Kashim Shettima had joined other leaders across Africa and beyond at the opening of the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to witness the change of AU leadership.

Stanley Nkwocha, senior special assistant to the President on Media and Communications, office of the Vice President, in a statement, said no fewer than 49 heads of state and government, leaders of global and regional bodies and development partners attended the opening session, including the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres; Heads of State and Government of member States, and the Prime Minister of Italy, Giorgia Meloni, among



others.

In his welcome address at the summit with the theme, "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063," Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed

Ali, emphasised the need for African leaders to be unanimous in their resolve to champion the socio-economic transformation of the continent.

He said Ethiopia, under his leadership, is making giant strides through its investments

in smart agriculture, climate friendly energy projects and is on track in providing a sustainable future for its rapidly growing population currently put at over 130 million people.

Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, in

his remarks, applauded the partnership between the AU and the UN. He noted that the relationship is defined by the "shared struggle for justice and equality."

"Your solidarity has not only strengthened our efforts; it has moved me deeply, and I will never forget it. From day one of my mandate, we forged a UN partnership with the African Union rooted in respect, constant dialogue, and unwavering solidarity. Over the last decade, our cooperation has reached new height," he added.

The UN scribe, who spoke on a wide range of issues, urged African leaders to strengthen their commitments to the ideals of the United Nations.

He assured that under his watch, the global body will continue to prioritise Africa's progress towards peace, security and sustainable development.

Also, the outgoing Chairperson of the African Union, President Lourenço of Angola, gave a scorecard of his stewardship as Chairman of the continental body.

He spoke about the agenda for the gathering, identifying water and sanitation, climate change, peace and security as key priorities for leaders and other stakeholders at the summit.

He said the AU, under his leadership and the cooperation of member states, has made significant progress in enhancing inclusive growth, provision of critical infrastructure, and human capital development, among others.

In resource mobilisation for Africa's economic and social transformation in line with the agenda 2063, the Chairperson said, the African Union, through several interventions and initiatives has shown and will continue to demonstrate its commitment towards mobilising resources to finance critical development projects across the continent.

He added that issues relating to the promotion of security and peace across Africa has been at the heart of the leaders' activities and programmes over the past one year, assuring that the AU will continue to undertake actions targeted at improving peace and security in conflict zones across the continent.

President Lourenço also stressed the need for the AU to strengthen its mechanism for security and conflict resolution in Africa in order to effectively tackle emerging challenges that are threatening peace and security of lives and livelihoods in parts of the continent.

## Nigeria market powers Jumia's momentum as e-commerce platform demand accelerates

EMMANUEL SALAWU

Nigeria powered Jumia Technologies AG's strongest growth in 2025, cementing its position as the company's most important market as rising consumer demand, SME activity and logistics expansion boosted performance across the e-commerce platform.

Beyond sales growth, Jumia said its Nigeria operations are delivering wider economic impact. The platform supports thousands of local SMEs, enabling them to reach customers nationwide, while continued investment in fulfilment centres and last-mile delivery is creating income opportunities for logistics partners and sales agents.

Efficiency gains were also

evident. Fulfilment costs per order declined 12 percent year-on-year, contributing to a 39 percent reduction in operating losses and a 47 percent drop in adjusted EBITDA losses in the fourth quarter. Cash used in operating activities fell sharply to \$1.7 million, compared with \$26.5 million a year earlier, while liquidity stood at \$77.8 million at year-end.

Temidayo Ojo, chief executive officer of Jumia Nigeria, said the results reflect growing trust from consumers and businesses.

"Nigeria is central to Jumia's growth," Ojo said. "Each order supports local sellers, delivery partners and jobs, while improving access to affordable products for consumers."

For the full year, Jumia reported 14 percent GMV growth and 13 percent revenue growth, with losses narrowing significantly. Looking ahead, the company expects Nigeria to remain a key growth driver as it targets 27-32 percent GMV growth in 2026 and aims to reach adjusted EBITDA breakeven by the fourth quarter of 2026.



## Global investors to set agenda for industrial transformation at West Africa IMT 2026

The West Africa Industrialisation, Manufacturing & Trade Summit & Exhibition will convene regional and international investors, policymakers, development finance institutions, and industrial leaders at the Landmark Centre, Lagos, from March 3-5, 2026. The summit comes at a pivotal moment as West African governments move from macroeconomic stabilisation and trade reform toward execution-focused industrial growth, manufacturing investment and job creation.

Themed 'Accelerating West Africa's Sustainable Industrial Revolution for Economic Prosperity,' West Africa IMT 2026 is positioned as a policy-to-project platform focused on converting regional trade opportunities into factory-level investment, resilient value chains and measurable industrial capacity within the next 12-18 months.

Recent changes to national industrial and trade policies across the region have sharpened the urgency.

In Nigeria, the National Industrial Policy (NIP), unveiled in January 2026 has reinforced the shift toward manufacturing competitiveness, value addition and industrial execution.



At the continental level, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has transitioned from policy negotiation to implementation, with emphasis on digital trade, industrialisation and practical delivery.

Together, the shifts have moved the conversation decisively from access to outcomes.

Confirmed participants include: John Enoh, Minister of State for Industry, alongside industry ministers from Benin Republic, Senegal and Ghana. The summit will also host key stakeholders from Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Austria, China, India, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Canada, and over 15 additional countries, reflecting growing international

interest in West Africa as an emerging industrial and manufacturing hub.

Also, the West Africa IMT 2026 arrives at a decisive policy inflection point. AfCFTA implementation timelines, persistent energy and logistics bottlenecks, and constrained availability of medium-term industrial capital mean the next 12-18 months are critical for translating regional trade integration into on-the-ground production capacity. The summit is structured to confront the constraints directly through a combination of ministerial leadership panels, country spotlights, investor roundtables and technical workshops focused on regulatory clarity, risk mitigation and financing structures.

# City File

## Establishment of POWA School in Bogoro creates job opportunities for women, youths - LG Chairman

AYUBA MAFFI, Bauchi

**Y**akubu Lawi Sumi, chairman of Bogoro Local Government Area of Bauchi State, has said that the establishment of POWA Model Children School in Sum, has created more job opportunities for women and youths.

The chairman said this during the 2026 Cultural Day celebration, held at the school premises. He also said that the school really reduced the rate of unemploy-



LG Chairman (l) and others at the school



POWA Model Children School

## Mobihealth raises N1bn equity investment to push telehealth expansion in Nigeria

REMI FEYISIPO

**I**n a bid to bridge healthcare access gaps through technology-enabled care delivery, Mobihealth International has raised a N1 billion equity investment from SCM Capital.

The investment marks a significant milestone in Mobihealth's mission to accelerate the expansion of its technology-enabled healthcare services across Nigeria.

The company said that the capital would be deployed to strengthen Mobihealth's telehealth platforms, accelerate the nationwide rollout of solar- and satellite-powered telehealth clinics, expand AI-enabled healthcare services, strengthen health system capacity, and improve access to quality care for millions of Nigerians, particularly in underserved communities.

The Managing Director, Investment Banking, United Capital Plc, transaction advisor, Gbadebo Adenrele, stated that they were proud to have advised and facilitated the landmark investment.

The founder and CEO of Mobihealth International, Funmi Adewara, a medical doctor, said that the investment from SCM Capital was a strong validation of Mobihealth's vision to democratise access to quality healthcare through innovative technology.

Adewara added that with the funding, the company would accelerate its expansion across Nigeria.

he said.

Adenrele further said the funding will also support continued innovation across Mobihealth's integrated digital health ecosystem, including virtual specialist consultations, remote patient monitoring, digital diagnostics, electronic medical records integration, and health workforce capacity support through telemedicine.

He said that the investment reflected growing confidence in scalable digital health models that improve healthcare access, strengthen health systems, and deliver measurable health outcomes. The partnership is expected to unlock new opportunities for innovation, sustainable healthcare financing, and expanded access to quality care for millions of Nigerians.

Adenrele added that the investment comes at a time of increasing demand for digital healthcare services across Nigeria, driven by healthcare workforce shortages, infrastructure gaps, and rising demand for affordable specialist care. Mobihealth remains committed to working with government, healthcare providers, insurers, development partners, and private sector stakeholders to improve healthcare access at scale.

The command said further investigation and interrogation of the suspect yielded positive results, as the suspect confessed to the crime and led operatives to the arrest of two other members of the kidnapping syndicate, namely Gure Wadi, male, aged 60 years, and Ibrahim Yobo, male, aged 35 years, both of Komu Village.

Consequently, a search conducted at the residence of one of the suspects led to the recovery of one single-barrel gun and one dane gun, both alleged to have been used in the commission of the kidnapping.

ment among the people.

He commended the federal government for the intervention.

He also described the intervention as a major achievement for the people of the area, noting that it will significantly promote education and provide a brighter future for the children.

The council boss also expressed his appreciation on behalf of the local government to the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbedokun and his wife for their roles in bringing the remarkable development to the next level.

"MasterChef Nigeria is a major Nigerian television milestone that will celebrate the country's exquisite cuisine, innovative food culture and vibrant culinary traditions as never before," Tamara van Eekhoven, managing director, Primedia Africa, said in a statement.

He stated that the project has created employment opportunities and will ensure that children have access to quality education.

The Bogoro Local Government chairman, Yakubu Lawi Sumi also donated a sum of Five Hundred Thousand Naira (N500,000) to support the event and the overall growth of the school.

Elizabeth Patrick, leader of the school, expressed their appreciation to the chairman for his support.

Patrick promised that the management would make good use of the money for the development of the school, Bogoro Local Government, Bauchi State and Nigeria at large.

## MasterChef bet N73m on promoting home cooking among Nigerians

JOHN SALAU

**I**n an attempt to strengthen home cooking for healthy living, Primedia, the promoters of MasterChef Nigeria, is betting N73 million in prize money for its maiden homemade cooking competition in Nigeria.

The initiative is the local adaptation of the world's reality television cooking show, aimed at transforming the Nigerian culinary landscape and the lives of passionate home cooks who dream of taking their creative flair in the kitchen to the next level.

"We encourage all home cooks who want to make a name for themselves in the dynamic Nigerian food industry to enter this profound competition," Omoshoso stated.

MasterChef Nigeria, which will be screened on DSTV's Africa Magic Showcase and Africa Magic Family, forms part of the global MasterChef television franchise, represented internationally by Banijay Entertainment.

The deal for the new version was negotiated by Banijay Rights, the global distribution arm of Banijay Entertainment. "We are incredibly proud this world-beating culinary format continues to expand its global footprint.

According to Eekhoven, the initiative will also help in unearthing, mentoring and nurturing talent with the potential to become Nigeria's next generation of distinguished chefs. "The winner of MasterChef Nigeria will scoop a staggering N73 million and make history as the world's first-ever Nigerian MasterChef."

In MasterChef Nigeria, diverse

home cooks from across the country will compete in a series of food-making challenges designed to test originality, technique, flavour mastery and presentation. Entries are now open for this life-changing opportunity, with the closing date on 27 February 2026," Eekhoven stated.

Kemi Omotosho, CEO, Africa Magic, stated that MasterChef Nigeria reflects the continued commitment to the network to invest in premium local content that showcases the richness of Nigerian culture and creativity to audiences across Africa and the world.

The late Patrick and his brother, Destiny, were handed over to the police unit, Operation Restore Hope, also popularly known as Operation Puff Adder, on January 15 this year, and according to the latter's account, he left his brother briefly in the police cell to write his statement.

Destiny said he returned to the cell, he did not find his brother and when he asked, he was told the police took him and he would be returned; so, he waited.

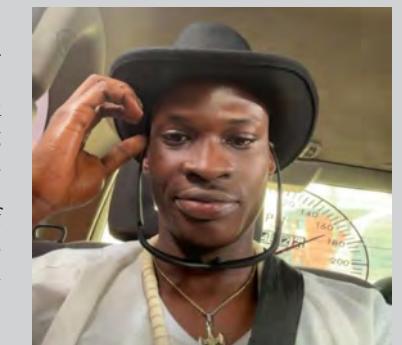
A police patrol van later drove in and Patrick was dumped; the deceased who was healthy in spite of the earlier beatings he had received, could no longer move his body or speak.

Destiny called an uncle and Patrick was rushed to several hospitals in Bayelsa State including the Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa, but they could not treat him until he died while on the way to Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

It all began with a social media post by Patrick which did not go down well with one Bodmas Kemepadei who drove to their house at Amassoma in Southern Ijaw Local Govern-

## Extrajudicial killing: Bayelsans seek justice in youth's death following alleged police brutality

SAMUEL ESE, Yenagoa



and brutality as Governor Douye Diri directed the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Biriayi Dambo to leave no stone unturned in investigating into the unfortunate incident and prosecuting those found wanting.

The Bayelsa State Police Command also spoke out in the wake of youths' protest and called for a thorough investigation into the death.

The spokesman, Musa Mohamed has begun interrogating the NSCDC officers who accompanied Kemepadei as well as the men of Operation Puff Adder.

"Please note that the Government of Bayelsa State continues to extend its heartfelt condolences to the family, friends, and community of the deceased and assures them that the state will take all necessary legal steps to ensure that anyone found culpable is held accountable through due process and brought to justice.

"Further to the directive of His Excellency, Senator Douye Diri, governor of Bayelsa State, the Bayelsa State Ministry of Justice, under the leadership of the Honourable Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice of the state, has taken a keen and special interest in the matter and is working closely with the Nigeria Police Force (the Bayelsa State Police Command) and other relevant security agencies to ensure a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation into the circumstances leading to the death of the deceased.

"All suspects who are alleged to have been involved in the incident will be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted in accordance with the law if found culpable. Meanwhile, the Command has activated its intelligence network to locate and arrest the prime suspect, Bodmas Kemepadei, who is at large."

Mohammed said the Police Commissioner, Iyam Daniel has called on those with useful information to assist the police while appealing to the public for support and understanding.

Meanwhile, Governor Diri has directed the police to expedite investigation into the incident and prosecution of all the culprits.

Diri gave the directive during the State Executive Council meeting in the Government House, Yenagoa, on Wednesday, February 4 saying the state government got involved in the matter immediately it happened, and stressed that any case of murder was between the state and the culprit.

According to a statement by the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Daniel Alabrah, Diri condemned the murder and implored Amassoma people and youths to support the police and the state government with useful information to enable Peresudei's family get justice.

Diri's words: "Patrick Peresudei's death is another issue we have on our hands and I have been briefed by my Commissioner for Youth. I have also directed my Commissioner for Justice to take over the matter.

"It is a case of murder and we want a diligent investigation to unravel those that carried out the act. The process must be expedited so that all those culpable will face the law."

## Oyo Police nab suspected kidnappers, recover firearms

...Confirm kidnap of 12-year-old female student of private secondary school

REMI FEYISIPO, Ibadan

**T**he Oyo State Police Command has arrested three suspected kidnappers and recovered firearms following intelligence-driven and coordinated security operations.

The command said that the move was a significant breakthrough in its sustained fight against kidnapping and other violent crimes by acting on credible intelligence and in collaboration with other non-state security operations.

He said that the investment reflected growing confidence in scalable digital health models that improve healthcare access, strengthen health systems, and deliver measurable health outcomes. The partnership is expected to unlock new opportunities for innovation, sustainable healthcare financing, and expanded access to quality care for millions of Nigerians, particularly in underserved communities.

The command said further investigation and interrogation of the suspect yielded positive results, as the suspect confessed to the crime and led operatives to the arrest of two other members of the kidnapping syndicate, namely Gure Wadi, male, aged 60 years, and Ibrahim Yobo, male, aged 35 years, both of Komu Village.



Consequently, a search conducted at the residence of one of the suspects led to the recovery of one single-barrel gun and one dane gun, both alleged to have been used in the commission of the kidnapping.

Meanwhile, the Commissioner of Police, CP Femi Haruna, has directed that no stone should be left unturned in ensuring that all fleeing members of the syndicate are arrested and diligently prosecuted in accordance with the law. He further commended the professionalism, courage, and operational effectiveness of the officers involved in the operation.

The Commissioner of Police also appreciated the Inspector-General of Police, IGP Kayode Adeolu Egbedokun, for his sustained leadership, strategic guidance, and unwavering support, which continue to enhance operational efficiency across the Command.

Additionally, the CP lauded the collaborative efforts of members of the public and the Command's progressive partners, particularly non-state actors, whose timely information and cooperation contributed significantly to the success of the operation.

Investigation is ongoing to apprehend other fleeing members of the gang, after which all suspects will be charged to court accordingly. The Oyo State Police Command reassures the public of its unwavering commitment to safeguarding lives and property and urges continued cooperation through the provision of credible and timely information.

Also, the Oyo State Police Command confirmed an incident of suspected kidnapping in the Challenge area of Ibadan in the early hours of Wednesday.

Preliminary information indicates that at about 7:20 a.m., a 12-year-old female stu-

dent of a private secondary school in the area was allegedly abducted by unknown armed men at a junction leading to the school premises as she was alighting from a vehicle that conveyed her to school.

The incident was promptly reported to the Police, and detectives were immediately deployed to the scene for preliminary assessment and fact-finding. Eyewitnesses at the scene were identified and questioned, and their accounts are providing valuable leads to assist ongoing investigations.

The parents of the victim have been contacted and are in close contact with the Police as efforts continue to ensure the safe rescue of the child.

The Commissioner of Police has directed a comprehensive and intelligence-driven investigation, assuring that all possibilities and options are being explored to unravel the circumstances surrounding the incident and bring those responsible to justice.

There have been suspicions that Patrick's neck and backbone were broken which made him immobile until his eventual death, which is akin to a case of extrajudicial killing.

The incident has drawn the attention of the state government and rights groups over police violence

# Food & Beverages

## Food & Beverages

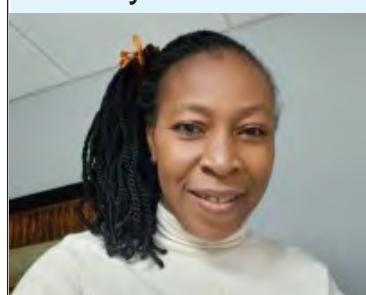
With  
Ayo Oyoze Baje



**T**he key success factors in the competitive baking industry according to seasoned professionals require high-quality, consistent products, strong branding, and of course, smart financial management. Precisely, using premium ingredients, maintaining strict quality control, utilising digital marketing (social media/WhatsApp) for visibility, and offering excellent customer service

## Gourmet Guide

with  
Lydia Eke



**B**itter leaf is botanically known as *Vernonia amygdalina*.

The green bitter leaf is a member of the daisy family and a small shrub that grows in tropical Africa, and, of course, Nigeria is home to bitter leaf.

This vegetable is ubiquitous and grows virtually everywhere.

From every simple garden to the front yard, and across farms as well as by the roadside, bitter leaf is a common phenomenon in the most populous black nation on earth.

The business of bitter leaf and the ubiquitous presence of bitter leaf lovers have greatly helped to boost the economic empowerment of Nigerians, at home and abroad.

Little wonder that many small-scale and medium-scale businesses have gained traction through the

## Alabi Faith: Breaking barriers with baking business

are also vital ingredients to make a headway.

Incidentally, Alabi Damilola Faith Oluwatamilore, CEO of Lolacakes.ng, who hails from Okitipupa LGA in Ondo State, has built her brand with these nuggets and hereby shares her: "I am a baker and entrepreneur, and a proud graduate of Ambrose Alli University. My academic background strengthened my discipline and business mindset, while my professional journey in baking has been driven by passion, creativity, and continuous learning."

On what inspired her to go into the food business, when and where, she has this to state: "My love for baking started as a hobby and gradually became a business after university. I was inspired by the joy my creations brought to people and decided to turn that passion into a career."

And what were her initial challenges and how she overcame them Faith explained that "Limited capital, sourcing quality ingredients, and attracting customers were major challenges. I overcame them through persistence, reinvesting profits, improving my skills, and leveraging social media for visibility."

In terms of her training programmes, she explains that; "I train aspiring bakers in practical baking, cake decoration, and the



Alabi Damilola Faith

business side of baking, including branding and pricing, to help them

build sustainable businesses." For her marketing strategies and

how effective they are her response is that: "I use social media, referrals, and partnerships with event vendors. Customer satisfaction has been my strongest marketing tool, and it has helped me grow steadily."

So, what partnerships is she into? "I collaborate with event planners, decorators, and other vendors in the hospitality industry to provide complete event solutions."

How are you coping with the harsh economic situation? Her answer: "I manage costs carefully, buy in bulk, when possible, minimise waste, and adjust pricing strategically while maintaining quality."

On what she wants the government to do for her response: "I would appreciate better support for small businesses through low-interest loans, stable power supply, and policies that reduce production costs."

To the question: What advice do you have for youths who want to venture into food business?

"Learn the skill properly, stay consistent, be patient, and focus on quality. Passion and resilience are key."

What are your future plans and how do you relax? "I plan to expand my brand and establish a baking studio. I relax by spending time with loved ones and exploring new baking ideas."

## Nigeria is home to Bitter leaf

bitter leaf venture and enterprise, especially the buying, selling and even exporting of the vegetables.

No wonder, most African stores across the US, UK, Australia and others play host to fresh and dry bitter leaf.

Apart from easily growing in the tropics, it is seen as a very homely plant, since it flourishes effortlessly.

Commonly called bitter leaf in English because of its bitter taste, other Nigerian and African common names include Congo Bololo (Democratic Republic of Congo), grawa (Amharic), ewuro (Yoruba), etidot (Efik), onugbu (Igbo), ityuna (Tiv), oriwo (Edo), Awonwono (Akan), chusar-doki or shuwaka (Hausa), mululuza (Luganda), labwori (Acholi), olusia (Luo), ndoleh (Cameroon) and olubirizi (Lusoga).

Bitter leaf is very good for consumption, even though very bitter.

The most distinctive part of the bitter plant is its bitterness but when used in making local, cultural, and traditional soups and sauces or added as vegetable garnishings to other meals and local delicacies, the beauty of the bitter leaf is clearly revealed.

### Fact file

Looking at the culinary uses of the leaves, there are common methods that are prevalent amongst bitter leaf lovers. Even from the markets, the veggies are usually washed multiple times to reduce the bitter-

ness before being used in soups or stews.

As for the medicinal uses, natural bitter leaves are most times, traditionally used to treat snake bites, fever, stomach aches, and infections.

Squeezed separately and sieved; the bitter juice is usually taken alongside some sugar or honey, like that or sometimes consumed directly or as a tea.

The cultivation of bitter leaf is quite unique in Africa and Nigeria.

The vegetable is hardy, well known as a 2-5m shrub that thrives in direct sunlight and well-drained soil. It is often found near water sources and even cultivated across gardens.

The nutritional value of this tropical vegetable is unique. It is rich in iron, calcium, and potassium, even as the leaves contribute to

the overall health and immunity of the body.

### In summary...

- Bitter leaf has been used as food and medicine for centuries in Africa.

- It has been used in the management and treatment of several health conditions.

- These include malaria, diabetes, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, fatigue and cough.

- Bitter leaf is consumed at least once a day by most people in the southeastern part of Nigeria as a cultural and traditional soup.

- Traditional soups made from bitter leaf are used for culinary and medicinal purposes.

- Bitter leaf juice is usually extracted from the leaves, and this serves also as a very good healthy juice, but it must be taken with caution, because it is highly anti-biotic, and too much intake can cause anaemia.

- This is because a new study warns that high consumption of bitter leaf by humans can lead to anaemia, especially in menstruating and pregnant women.

- Meanwhile, log on to the YouTube Channel, Gourmet Guide234 Kitchen and the food blog [gourmetguide234.com](http://gourmetguide234.com) to read more about food, nutrition, and all you need to know about food journalism. Feel free to send a mail to [gourmetguide234@gmail.com](mailto:gourmetguide234@gmail.com)



# Interview

## How digital media is shaping democracy, public health, by Akerele

Oluwakemi Elizabeth Akerele is a lecturer at the department of political science, international relations, and mass communication, Landmark University. She recently earned her PhD in mass communication from the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, and has developed a strong and internationally visible research profile in media, health, and political communication. She is a recipient of the University award of Research Excellence in 2025 for her publications in high-ranking Q1 and Q2 journals, as well as the Best Publication by Citation in the College of Business and Social Sciences. Oluwakemi has consistently demonstrated how research can extend beyond academia to influence public awareness, policy, and civic engagement. In this interview with INIOBONG IWOK, she shared her academic journey, her passion for using digital media to drive societal change, and her ongoing research on how online platforms empower women, shape public opinion, and challenge cultural norms. Excerpts:

### C an you tell us about your research interests and what drives your work?

My research focuses on digital communication, political participation, and public health communication. I am particularly interested in how digital communication, especially social media, influences behaviour and democratic outcomes in contemporary societies. With the continuous advancement of digital communication technologies and their growing acceptance among media audiences, particularly the youth, social media has become a powerful platform that significantly shapes opinions, decisions, attitudes, and behaviours, including lifestyle choices.

What drives my research is the need to understand this influence more deeply and to explore how these digital tools can be responsibly leveraged for individual and societal well-being. I am interested in how digital communication can be used to promote public health, strengthen democratic participation, and support good governance. My work, therefore, sits at the intersection of media studies, political communication, and health communication, with a strong emphasis on societal impact.

### Congratulations on recently earning your PhD! What inspired you to study Mass Communication and pursue a doctorate?

My decision to study Mass Communication was influenced by my father, who loved watching the 7 pm news. Although he was not formally educated, he loves education and was deeply interested in national events and believed that staying informed was important.

Whenever he watched the news, he would ask me to sit with him. At that time, I did not fully understand what the broadcaster was saying, but my father would explain the stories and often speak about how respected and important news broadcasters were in keeping people informed.

Those moments shaped my early interest in communication and influenced my choice of course at the university. I initially entered the field with the intention of becoming a newscaster.

However, as I progressed through my undergraduate and masters studies, my interests evolved. I became more drawn to public relations and advertising, and gradually developed a deeper interest in how communication shapes public perception, behaviour, and social outcomes.

That intellectual curiosity eventually motivated me to pursue a doctorate degree, where I could engage more rigorously with theory and research and contribute more meaningfully to scholarly and societal conversations about media, democracy, and public health.

### How did your PhD experience influence your current research trajectory?

My PhD experience significantly shaped

my research direction, shifting me from a general interest in social media communication to a more structured, theory-driven, and practice-oriented approach to understanding media influence in society. Although my engagement with social media research began much earlier, the doctoral training gave it a clearer direction and depth.

I started conducting social media research in my second year as an undergraduate, where I carried out a mini research project on the Arab Spring Revolution, focusing on the impact of Facebook on the dethronement of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in 2011. I built on this interest during my undergraduate thesis, examining the influence of social media on Nigerians' participation in the 2012 fuel subsidy removal protest. During my master's programme, I further explored digital communication by investigating the privacy paradox among Nigerian youth, particularly their perception of privacy and patterns of self-disclosure on Facebook. My doctoral training helped me become more intentional in linking communication practices to measurable social and political outcomes, particularly in relation to broader development goals. It strengthened my capacity to think critically about research design, methodological rigour, and the importance of grounding studies within established theoretical frameworks.

The PhD process also broadened my interdisciplinary outlook. I began to see more clearly how digital communication intersects with political participation, public health behaviour, and governance. This shift influenced the direction of my subsequent research, including my publications in international journals and my ongoing work on social media peer-driven communication and health behaviour among young people.

PhD positioned me to contribute more meaningfully to international scholarly conversations while maintaining a strong focus on societal relevance. It also clarified my long-term research trajectory, which centres on examining how digital communication can be harnessed to improve democratic engagement and public health outcomes.

### Your recent publications appeared in international journals. What are the key findings from your latest research?

Thank you. My recent publications have appeared in high-ranking international journals, including Taylor Francis, Elsevier, and Springer Nature.

The most recently published in Springer Nature in 2026 examined social media peer-driven communication and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine uptake among young women in Nigeria. The findings demonstrated that beyond low awareness or cost barriers, stigma and sociocultural expectations strongly inhibit preventive behaviour (vaccine uptake) among the targeted population.

Many female youths in Kwara State perceive the HPV vaccine as relevant only for sexually active individuals, which discourages discussion and uptake.



Public cases, such as a popular Nigerian gospel artist who recently died from cervical cancer, highlight how stigma around sexuality suppresses open conversation about reproductive health and prevents young women from seeking help or vaccination. The study also revealed that platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram are particularly effective for public health campaigns.

Harnessing these platforms for peer-driven health communication can help break the silence around cervical cancer, reduce stigma, and encourage young women to take preventive action.

The other work published in Taylor; Francis in 2025 focused on domestic violence against women in Nigeria. Our findings highlight the powerful role of

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**Ultimately, my goal is to produce research that not only adds to academic knowledge but also provides practical guidance for policymakers, health practitioners, and civil society organisations — both in Nigeria and in other emerging democracies**

“

social media in unifying public opinion and supporting victims.

For instance, the public case of Osinachi, who died from domestic violence in 2021, demonstrated how social media encouraged many Nigerian women experiencing abuse to share their stories, speak out, and take critical steps to protect themselves. Social media helped reduce the fear of isolation and rejection, shaped public attitudes toward survivors, and challenged the stigma around women who are divorced or single mothers.

The research also addressed cultural and religious perspectives, particularly the pervasive culture of “familism,” which often protects abusers and silences victims. It challenges societal norms that tie a woman’s value to her marital status or ability to endure abuse. The findings underline the need to sensitise communities about the worth of girls and women beyond marriage.

Both studies illustrate how digital communication can shape public opinion, support vulnerable populations, and address cultural barriers. They demonstrate the societal relevance and impact of my research, highlighting my ongoing commitment to using communication to promote public health, democratic engagement, and social well-being.

### Why is digital communication so important in emerging democracies like Nigeria?

Digital communication is essential in emerging democracies like Nigeria because of its widespread use, especially among younger generations often referred to as Gen Z. This generation was born in the era of evolving digital technologies, and much of what they know and do is tied to digital media.

While family and religion remain important socialisation agents, today's youth are also socialised by digital platforms, which significantly shape their access to information, opinions, and civic awareness.

Many young citizens show limited interest in traditional politics and governance and rarely engage with traditional news media, even online.

Digital communication, however, provides opportunities to build their interest, enhance their political knowledge, and increase their efficacy. By leveraging social media, these platforms can equip young people with the understanding and motivation to participate actively in governance, thereby supporting democratic processes and fostering a more engaged citizenry.

### Congratulations! You recently received an Award of Excellence from Landmark University. What does this recognition mean to you?

Thank you very much. Yes, I recently received the University Award of Research Excellence from Landmark University, and this recognition means a great deal to me. I am grateful to the management of Landmark University for this honour, to my mentor, Professor Adesina Lukman Azeez of the University of Ilorin, for his invaluable counsel, and to all my co-authors who have collaborated with me

on research publications.

This award signifies that my research is making an impact beyond local contexts and motivates me to continue advancing societal development through high-quality research published in international journals. It reflects my early-career contributions and consistency in producing work in high-ranking Q1 and Q2 journals.

Additionally, it recognises the social relevance of my research, as evidenced by receiving the best article by citation in the College of Business and Social Sciences.

### How do you see your research contributing beyond academia?

Beyond academia, my research is really about making a difference in people's lives. For instance, my study on domestic violence in Nigeria showed how social media can bring women together, help them speak out, and challenge cultural norms that often silence victims.

Seeing how these platforms reduce fear and give women a voice has made me realise that research can directly inform awareness campaigns and community initiatives.

Similarly, my work on social media communication and HPV vaccine uptake shows how platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube can be used to tackle stigma and encourage young women to take preventive health measures. These insights can guide health educators, NGOs, and policymakers on how to reach young people effectively and address barriers that go beyond just knowledge or cost.

For me, the most exciting part is seeing how research can move from papers to real-world impact, whether it is helping communities understand the value of speaking out, supporting democratic participation, or improving public health strategies. I hope my work continues to provide practical guidance on how digital communication can be harnessed for social good, not just in Nigeria but in emerging democracies more broadly.

### What are your future research directions?

My future research builds on the insights I gained during my PhD. I plan to expand my work on digital communication to explore how misinformation, political engagement, and technology influence the health and civic behaviour of young adults.

I am particularly interested in understanding how algorithms shape what people see online, how this affects their knowledge and decision-making, and how it influences their confidence in engaging with civic or health issues.

I also want to study how peer-driven communication on social media can be used to improve public health outcomes, encourage democratic participation, and address societal inequalities.

Ultimately, my goal is to produce research that not only adds to academic knowledge but also provides practical guidance for policymakers, health practitioners, and civil society organisations — both in Nigeria and in other emerging democracies.

# Interview

## Minimising corruption and building credibility attracts capital, stabilises economies, and strengthens growth - Owodunmi

Ayo Owodunmi is a management consultant and culture transformation expert with over a decade of experience, shaping leaders and organisations. He has worked with global brands including Microsoft, Spotify, Canada Life, and CIBC, helping them thrive in diverse and dynamic environments. A published author and professor at Conestoga College, Owodunmi is passionate about empowering immigrants and leaders. His bold approach to innovation, inclusion, and organizational transformation has made him a sought-after speaker, trainer, and advisor. In this interview with KENNETH ATHEKAME, he spoke on how Nigeria's social and economic environment has shaped his leadership style. He examined the current leadership culture in the country, and offered insights on how inclusive, ethical, and innovation-driven leadership can unlock Nigeria's economic potential. Excerpts:

**H**ow did growing up in Lagos shape your understanding of leadership and resilience?

Growing up in Lagos grounded me. Nigeria teaches resilience early on how to adapt, persevere, and keep going even when systems are imperfect. I learned the power of culture, family, community, and faith. Leadership isn't about title; it's about responsibility, service, and showing up for people. Those early lessons have shaped how I lead today.

**Which aspects of Nigeria's social and economic environment influenced your leadership style?**

Nigeria teaches resourcefulness. You learn to do more with less, navigate complex systems, and negotiate effectively. Empathy is key because everyone is facing challenges. These experiences shaped a leadership style that is people-centered, practical, and solution-driven rather than purely theoretical.

**Having worked in both Nigeria and Canada, what leadership gaps does Nigeria need to address urgently?**

Every country has gaps, but Nigeria needs more relatability and psychological safety. Many leaders overlook frontline staff who often see problems first and have the best solutions. Mid-level managers bridge staff and leadership perspectives. When people don't feel safe to speak up, feedback is lost, innovation suffers. I've seen ideas from frontline staff in Toronto generate over \$200 million simply because leaders listened and created a safe space for input. That's the power of psychological safety.

**How has your immigrant experience shaped your view on opportunity and economic systems in Nigeria?**

Being an immigrant shows you which systems work and which block potential. Talent exists everywhere, but opportunity does not. Fair systems unlock potential faster than individual brilliance. Nigeria has immense talent we need systems that let people contribute fully without unnecessary barriers.

**What leadership and culture lessons can Nigeria learn from global best practices?**

Leadership development must be intentional, not accidental. Strong cultures are built through clarity, consistency, and accountability. Leaders must be trained in behavior, communication, and decision-making.



sion-making, not just strategy. Culture is shaped daily by what leaders tolerate and reinforce. Compliance alone is not enough we must push excellence from the top down.

**How would you describe Nigeria's current leadership culture in public and private sectors?**

There are strong leaders doing great work, but many organizations operate with high hierarchy, fear-based authority, and limited feedback loops. This slows decision-making and stifles innovation. The opportunity lies in trust-based leadership and clearer accountability. Culture committees can help embed these practices.

**Which leadership behaviors most limit Nigeria's economic growth?**

Poor delegation, fear of dissent, weak accountability, micromanagement, and top-down control slow progress. When everything flows to one person, decisions are delayed and innovation is stifled.

**How can Nigerian organiza-**

**tions move toward inclusive and innovative leadership?**

It starts with mindset. Leaders must be enablers, not gatekeepers. Empowerment drives speed, ownership, and innovation. Practical steps include giving teams real decision-making authority, creating safe feedback channels, rewarding initiative, and training managers in inclusive leadership. When people feel trusted, they perform better and care more.

**When people feel valued, they contribute ideas, energy, and commitment. Exclusion creates silence, which kills innovation. Nigeria has talent across regions, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds**

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**You co-created the Ring Framework for culture transformation. How could it apply to Nigeria?**

The Ring Framework focuses on alignment leadership behavior, systems, values, and daily practices reinforcing each other. In many Nigerian organizations, culture is too dependent on one leader. When that leader leaves, everything collapses. The framework shifts organizations from personality-driven to system-driven leadership, ensuring clarity, consistency, and sustainable growth.

**How does leadership quality affect Nigeria's economic performance?**

Leadership directly impacts productivity, investor confidence, job creation, and service delivery. Poor leadership breeds delays, waste, and mistrust. Strong leadership creates focus, accountability, and momentum. Leadership-driven reforms around talent, performance, and accountability could unlock significant growth.

**What leadership systems are missing in Nigerian businesses?**

Most lack succession planning, governance, and intentional leadership pipelines. Everything flows through the founder, limiting scale and increasing risk. Leadership development clarifies roles, builds capable teams, and prepares businesses to thrive beyond the founder.

**How should leaders harness Nigeria's young population?**

By taking young people seriously investing in skills, mentorship, and meaningful responsibility. Give them real problems to solve, involve them in decisions, and support them with coaching and accountability. When trusted, they contribute powerfully to economic growth.

**What role does inclusion play in unlocking Nigeria's economic potential?**

Inclusion is an economic strategy. When people feel valued, they contribute ideas, energy, and commitment. Exclusion creates silence, which kills innovation. Nigeria has talent across regions, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Inclusion ensures that talent shows up fully, boosting productivity, collaboration, and trust.

**How can leaders better integrate women and young people into decision-making?**

Inclusion must be intentional. Systems should create access, represen-

tation, mentorship, and leadership pipelines. Women and young people should be trusted with responsibility and accountability. Designed into systems, inclusion becomes sustainable, not symbolic.

**From your experience as a Canadian City Councillor, what governance practices could Nigeria adopt?**

Transparency, clear roles, citizen engagement, data-informed decision-making, and strong accountability mechanisms. When people trust the system and believe their voices matter, local governance drives meaningful impact.

**How does ethical leadership influence investor confidence?**

Ethical leadership reduces uncertainty. Investors seek clear rules, fair processes, and predictable decisions. Minimising corruption and building credibility attracts capital, stabilises economies, and strengthens growth.

**What traits are most important for public office holders in Nigeria?**

Integrity, competence, humility, courage, and the ability to listen. Public office is stewardship, not status it requires leaders who care for public trust.

**How can local government drive grassroots economic development?**

By empowering small businesses, simplifying regulations, investing in infrastructure, and partnering with community leaders. Responsive local leadership makes development visible where it matters most.

**How important is education to Nigeria's long-term growth?**

Education is foundational. It must go beyond technical knowledge to develop critical thinking, leadership, collaboration, creativity, and innovation. Universities should build leadership capacity alongside academics, preparing graduates to solve problems and create value.

**How can innovation-driven leadership help Nigeria compete globally? What role should the diaspora play?**

Innovation-driven leadership allows Nigeria to leapfrog challenges and adapt quickly. The diaspora brings global exposure, systems thinking, and networks. Aligned with local realities, this knowledge can strengthen leadership and accelerate competitiveness.

# Health and Living

## 'Life feels like climbing a mountain daily for Lupus patients'

Lupus is a condition in which the body's immune system attacks its own tissues and organs, and it is classified as an autoimmune condition. Staying physically active for patients is quite challenging. To raise both awareness for the Summit for Lupus Initiative, Tobi Yusuf, a business and communications professional and also a partner and executive director at Veritasi Homes would be climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, a dormant volcanic mountain in Tanzania and one of the highest peaks in the world. Saffinat Emengo is a Lupus patient and the founder of Mablevi Foundation. In this interview with JOSEPHINE OKOJIE-OKEIYI, they discussed their shared motivation and desire to raise awareness and improve care through a Lupus Wellness Center in Nigeria.

**W**hat inspired you to focus on lupus awareness and the ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro to join the Summit for Lupus advocacy and fundraising initiative?

**Tobi:** You see someone who is talented, capable, driven, but some days they are fighting pain and exhaustion that nobody else can see. Yet they still show up, still perform, still carry responsibilities. That level of quiet strength stays with you.

What struck me most was how often they had to explain themselves. How often were they misunderstood? How often people assumed they were exaggerating because they did not "look sick".

The Kilimanjaro climb under the summit for lupus initiative is symbolic. For many lupus warriors, life already feels like climbing a mountain every single day. This climb is about turning that invisible struggle into something visible. It is about dignity. It is about building something lasting, not just creating noise for a moment.

**Saffinat:** My inspiration is rooted in my personal experience as a lupus patient and my understanding of the challenges involved in obtaining timely diagnosis, treatment, and support. After nearly three years to receive an accurate diagnosis, I recognize the difficulties many patients face in accessing proper care. When Tobi Yusuf and his

The team approached me with the vision for the summit for lupus initiative. I saw a valuable opportunity to help turn the hopes of many lupus patients into reality, with the ultimate goal of establishing a dedicated lupus center to address our healthcare needs.

**What gaps do you aim to address in Nigeria?**

**Tobi:** There are two major gaps. The first is awareness. The second is the technical capacity within the healthcare system to diagnose and manage lupus effectively. Lupus is complex to diagnose and manage.

It requires specialised knowledge, early recognition of symptoms, and coordinated long-term care. In many cases, patients move between different doctors for years before getting the right diagnosis or treatment plan. This gap creates ripple effects across the entire patient journey. In families, in workplaces, and even in early medical encounters, symptoms



are often misinterpreted or treated in isolation rather than as part of a systemic autoimmune condition. Summit for lupus aims to raise awareness and improve care through a lupus wellness center.

**Saffinat:** Lupus in Nigeria is severely affected by delays in diagnosis, limited specialist availability, and widespread misdiagnosis due to low awareness among non-rheumatology healthcare providers. Most patients experience prolonged diagnostic journeys, often exceeding six months, with symptoms frequently mistaken for infectious diseases.

Treatment is constrained by high costs, poor access to essential and advanced medications, and inadequate health insurance, forcing many patients to rely on harmful long-term steroid use.

Financial barriers are severe given widespread poverty. There are major research and data gaps, including a lack of population-based epidemiological data, underrepresentation in global research, and limited studies on genetic and environmental factors influencing disease severity in Nigerian patients.

Sociocultural challenges further worsen outcomes, as stigma, misconceptions about spiritual causes, and limited

patient support networks delay care and reduce adherence.

Pediatric SLE is particularly under-recognised due to the scarcity of trained pediatric rheumatologists and training centers, especially outside major cities.

Together, these systemic, financial, research, and sociocultural gaps contribute to delayed care, higher disease morbidity, and rapid progression to complications such as lupus nephritis and end-stage kidney failure in Nigerian patients.

Imagine a colleague living with lupus who is experiencing fatigue, joint pain, or flare ups. If the diagnosis is delayed or unclear, the individual may struggle to explain what they are going through. But when there is an accurate and timely diagnosis, it gives patients language, legitimacy, and access to proper care, which allows them to remain productive and supported.

**How do you plan to raise awareness about lupus and reduce diagnosis delays in Nigeria?**

**Tobi:** Climbing Africa's highest peak and the world's tallest free-standing mountain, rising 5,895 meters above sea level, I'm sure will cause some heads to turn. However, Awareness has

to move into everyday life, not just hospitals.

We are using storytelling, social media, partnerships, and visibility-driven campaigns like Summit for Lupus to make lupus part of the public conversation. When people understand symptoms earlier, they are more likely to seek the right medical attention sooner.

Working with organisations like Mablevi Lupus Foundation is very important because they are already deeply connected to the community. They understand the lived reality of lupus in Nigeria, not just the medical definition.

**Saffinat:** Reducing lupus diagnostic delays requires public awareness, healthcare provider training, and advocacy. Awareness campaigns should highlight key symptoms through initiatives like

Training primary care providers to recognise early warning signs, use simple checklists, and refer patients through fast-track pathways can speed up diagnosis. Community engagement via hospitals, pharmacies, support groups, and advocacy organisations reinforces education and access to care.

Visibility efforts such as wearing purple, lighting landmarks, and hosting educational events help sustain

public attention, ultimately enabling earlier diagnosis and better long-term outcomes.

**How would you measure the success of your awareness campaigns?**

**Tobi:** Success is not just digital numbers. It is when someone recognises symptoms earlier and seeks help sooner. It is when families respond with support instead of doubt. It is when workplaces respond with understanding instead of suspicion.

And it is when we build sustainable systems like the Lupus Wellness Centre that support people long-term.

If fewer Nigerians have to suffer in silence before getting answers, then we have made real progress.

**Saffinat:** One of the key objectives of this campaign is to increase awareness of lupus and to establish a lupus center. A facility where patients can access timely and adequate care at an affordable cost.

Achieving the fundraising goal for the center will be a significant indicator of the campaign's success. Furthermore, expanding global awareness of lupus and reaching a wider international audience will further demonstrate the overall impact of this initiative.

**What challenges do you anticipate in lupus awareness efforts in Nigeria, and how**

**do you think they can be addressed?**

**Tobi:** One major challenge is that lupus is invisible. In a society where illness is often expected to be physically obvious, many people living with lupus are misunderstood or dismissed.

Another challenge is competing health priorities. There are many urgent health issues in Nigeria, and autoimmune diseases often receive less attention.

The solution is consistency. Sustained education. Strong partnerships. And building institutions and systems that continue the work long after campaigns end.

**Saffinat:** Lupus awareness efforts in Nigeria face challenges such as low public awareness, widespread misconceptions, limited specialist care, high costs of diagnosis and treatment, and weak healthcare infrastructure.

These challenges can be addressed through sustained public education campaigns, improved training for healthcare professionals, better access to affordable diagnostic and treatment services, and stronger government and policy support to integrate lupus care into the national health system.

**Anything else you want to share?**

**Tobi:** I think about the emotional side of lupus a lot. Imagine waking up already exhausted. Imagine being in pain and still having to explain yourself to people who do not understand what you are going through. Imagine being strong because you have no choice.

This is not just about a mountain. This is about people. It is about making sure people living with lupus feel seen, believed, and supported.

No one should have to fight an illness and fight to be understood at the same time. If the summit for lupus this campaign can make even one person feel less alone, then it is already worth it.

**Saffinat:** As a lupus patient myself, I would like to emphasise the importance of kindness toward everyone we encounter, as we may never know the challenges they are facing.

Lupus is an autoimmune disease where the body mistakenly attacks itself. It is not contagious. While it currently has no cure, it can be life-threatening if not properly managed.

The condition predominantly affects women and children; however, with appropriate treatment, care, and support, patients can live healthier and more fulfilling lives.

# Health and Living



## Deafness is a choice: Listening without ears and redefining human communication

NNEAMAKA FAITH MOKWE-IJKI

**W**hat if the ability to communicate was less about hearing and more about seeing, observing, and connecting? Sign language may hold the key to a more inclusive future.

As a child, I once watched a young woman signing rapidly to an audience that laughed, nodded, paused, and occasionally showed disapproval. Her hands moved almost faster than my eyelids blinked, and in that moment, I realized something profound: it was I who was deaf, by choice.

Visual language plays a central role in cognitive adaptation within the Deaf community. Through sign language, individuals rely on heightened visual attention, spatial awareness, facial recognition, and pattern detection to interpret

meaning and emotion. Over time, this strengthens memory, concentration, and the ability to notice subtle environmental changes. Rather than a limitation, deafness demonstrates the brain's remarkable flexibility: when one sensory channel is reduced, others expand to support learning, connection, and effective communication.

Living in a country without my familiar language reinforced the lesson that, we are only as deaf as the languages we refuse to learn. So, we smile sheepishly while facilitating sessions, hoping to be applauded rather than misunderstood, struggling to comprehend what is being communicated because we refuse to go beyond the boundaries of our inherited tongue.

Sign language should not be optional. It should be a default form of communication.

Consider the thousands of preschoolers with receptive and expressive language delays or older adults losing comprehension due to dementia, stroke, or trauma. Why are we not adopting a form of communication available to nearly anyone with limbs and forearms? Learning to "listen" with your eyes and speak with your hands could be a revolutionary step toward richer human connection.

Communication is multimodal, and children who learn sign language from an early age benefit in countless ways: patience, improved cognitive skills, attentive listening, turn-taking, and heightened focus. Imagine a generation of Africans mastering visual attention and enjoying deep, meaningful interactions, free from the endless noise of alerts, alarms, and constant chatter. A recent television commercial depicted a whole

community communicating through sign language for an entire day. The only young man with hearing difficulties in that community initially mistook the first person he saw signing as another individual with hearing impairment, only to realize the entire village was signing just to make him feel accepted and loved. He wept upon realizing that the community could meet him halfway through determination, purpose, and love. Around the world, religious spaces, public events, and media outlets are adopting sign language for audiences often relegated to a corner of the screen for those who hear, yet serving as the heart of accessibility for the community of those with hearing impairment.

The goal is to reframe hearing as a choice of effort rather than a biological default. We can shift the conversation from disability

to language barrier, which the hearing world has a responsibility to bridge. In sign language, tone and emotion are expressed visually: facial expressions, movement speed, and use of space communicate nuance and feeling just as effectively as pitch and volume do in spoken language. Many content creators now use Pidgin Signed English (PSE) to convey emotion in the music videos they lipsync, proving that visual cues are powerful and expressive.

To create an inclusive society, sign language must become a language for all. Schools should not be labeled as "for the Deaf" everyone should learn to sign and implement it daily. Reducing labels and removing barriers gradually normalizes belonging in societies. While government inclusion policies are a step forward, a truly African society would enforce sign

language education and integration at every level. After all, in a world where everyone signs, no one is truly deaf.

Communication is far more than sound. It is attention, presence, observation and connection. Perhaps the future will belong not to those who hear the loudest, but to those who learn to listen without words.



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# Health and living

## Over 5,000 benefit from Renaissance Africa Energy's medical outreach in Bayelsa

SAMUEL ESE,

Over 5,000 residents of Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area and Okordia/Zarama Communities in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State have benefited from a weeklong medical outreach.

The Vision First Plus programme was organised by Renaissance Africa Energy Company Limited in collaboration with Bayelsa State Ministry of Health and Kolmarg Eyesight Foundation to bring succour to people suffering from vision impairment.

Other Joint Venture partners, including Nigeria National Petroleum Company Limited, TotalEnergies and Agip Energy and Natural Resources.

The programme, which was flagged off at the Community Health Centre, Ofonibiri in Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area on Thursday, included treatment and screening for breast and cervical cancer, dental diseases and malaria amongst others.

Addressing the residents of the Host Community Development Trust at Ofonibiri, the Vice President Relations and Sustainable Development, Igo Weli, said the health outreach was to enhance healthcare services for the people.



Weli who was represented by the General Manager Government and Community Relations, Evans Krukrubo said: "This is a seven-day community-focused initiative that provides comprehensive eye care services to the people of the communities that house projects of Renaissance Africa Energy Company Limited.

"The Vision First Plus programme is a flagship offering under our health-in-motion initiative, which takes healthcare

beyond traditional facilities and into the heart of our communities where people live, learn, and raise their families.

"Among many dimensions of health, vision stands out as both essential and often overlooked, clear vision affects how we learn, earn a living, participate in society and experience the world. Our goal is not only to prevent avoidable blindness, but to preserve the dignity, confidence and independence that come

with the gifts of clear vision."

According to him, about 2.2 billion people globally out of which Nigerians make up about 24 million, live with some form of visual impairment, particularly cataracts and uncorrected refractive errors, nearly half of which cases are preventable or treatable.

He noted that, insight from the 30,000 screenings conducted under health-in-motion in the last five years showed that over

60 percent of individuals had one form of visual disorder, which informed Renaissance Africa Energy's decision to continue to invest in preventive healthcare and access to quality services in underserved areas.

Giving statistics, he said over 20,000 people have benefited from vision first programmes and encouraged everyone to participate fully, get screened and know their status, as according to him, preventive care remained

one of the strongest ways to protect the lives and future of the people.

In his address, the Bayelsa State Commissioner for Health, Seiyefa Brisibe said under the present administration in the state, primary healthcare service delivery has been strengthened with the objective of ensuring functional services across all the wards in the state in order to consolidate on the gains of disease prevention.

Represented by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Jones Stowe, he urged the beneficiaries to take full advantage of the services provided saying early screening saves lives while prevention reduces cost and treatment improves longevity and productivity.

He commended the healthcare professionals and volunteers for their dedication saying, "programmes such as this require precision, compassion, and professionals. I trust that all services rendered will meet the highest clinical and ethical standards.

"As we continue the commissioning of new facilities across the state in the coming weeks, let us remember that the true measure of success is not the ribbon we cut, but the lives we transform, not the buildings we inaugurate, but the outcomes we improve.

## Carter Center, Ebonyi Govt treat over 1.5 million residents for neglected tropical diseases

NKECHINYERE OGINYI

The Ebonyi State Government, in collaboration with the Carter Center, has treated more than 1.5 million residents for Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) within the past year, marking a significant stride in the state's public health campaign.

Moses Ekuma, commissioner for Health, disclosed this in Abakaliki Friday during a press briefing to commemorate the 2026 World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day.

Although the global health awareness day is observed annually on January 30, Ebonyi marked the event on February 13 to highlight ongoing interventions and progress in combating the diseases.

World NTD Day, serves as a global platform to mobilize action against a group of preventable and treatable diseases that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations in rural and underserved

communities.

Ekuma said the administration of Governor Francis Nwifuru has prioritised healthcare under its People's Charter of Needs agenda, stressing that no Ebonyi resident should suffer from diseases that can be prevented or treated.

He listed the prevalent NTDs in the state to include lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), onchocerciasis (river blindness), schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminths (intestinal worms), noting that Ebonyi's agrarian setting and proximity to water bodies previously made it endemic for many of the conditions.

"In the last year alone, we successfully treated over 1.5 million Ebonyians through school-based and community-based deworming and other NTD interventions," Ekuma said.

He explained that Nigeria has recorded a 49 per cent reduction in soil-transmitted helminths and a 75 per cent reduction in schistosomiasis in several survey areas,

adding that Ebonyi has contributed to the national progress through sustained Mass Administration of Medicines (MAM).

Beyond preventive treatment, the commissioner noted that the ministry has expanded morbidity management services for persons already living with NTD-related disabilities. According to him, hydrocele surgeries have been intensified, while caregivers are receiving training on lymphedema management to improve patients' quality of life.

To address the root causes of transmission, Ekuma said the Ministry of Health is working closely with the Ministry of Water Resources to strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions, including the prioritisation of borehole projects in identified hot-spot local government areas.

As part of activities to mark the day, officials of the ministry and representatives of The Carter Center embarked on a sensitisation

campaign across major streets in Abakaliki, educating residents on preventive measures and encouraging uptake of free medications.

The commissioner urged residents to cooperate with health workers by accepting free NTD medicines and promptly reporting symptoms such as unusual limb swelling or persistent skin irritation at the nearest healthcare facility.

"By tackling neglected tropical diseases, we are investing in the future of our children and the prosperity of our state," he said.

Representative of The Carter Center, reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to supporting Ebonyi State until the diseases are eliminated. She noted that the non-profit organisation, founded by former United States President, focuses on NTD control in Nigeria alongside other humanitarian programmes across the globe.

She pledged continued support for hydrocele surgeries, lymphedema management and mass drug

distribution, while emphasising the importance of sustained political will and community participation.

Also speaking, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Ezeogo Lawrence, and the State NTD Coordinator, Itumo Daniel, commended The Carter Center for its consistency and impactful intervention in the state.

Daniel disclosed that a Coverage Evaluation Survey conducted by independent evaluators from outside the state was ongoing to assess the effectiveness of previous mass drug administration exercises and guide future strategies.

He noted that the 2026 theme, "Unite to Act Towards Elimination of NTDs," aligns with the WHO 2030 roadmap and signals a shift from disease control to total elimination.

"With unity, decisive action and sustained commitment, we are confident that Ebonyi State will eliminate neglected tropical diseases and secure a healthier future for all," Daniel said.

# Cover

# Despite record FAAC windfalls, states sink deeper into debt, poverty worsens

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

In the space of two years, Nigeria's state governments have witnessed one of the sharpest revenue expansions in recent history. The Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) allocations surged on the back of fuel subsidy removal, foreign exchange reforms and stronger oil receipts, pushing trillions of naira into subnational accounts.

Yet, as allocations climb to record levels, so too does the portion siphoned off for debt servicing, particularly foreign loans, while spending on healthcare and other human development priorities remains stubbornly low. The result is a widening gap between fiscal abundance and everyday reality in a country where poverty continues to rise.

#### A growing debt burden in the midst of plenty

According to BudgIT's State of States report 2025, states collectively spent N2.11 trillion on debt servicing in 2024, accounting for 26.45 percent of their cumulative expenditure. In other words, more than one-quarter of what states spent last year went to paying back creditors rather than building infrastructure, strengthening healthcare systems, or investing in education.

Total debt stock for 35 states rose by 6.87 percent, from N10.01 trillion in 2023 to N10.57 trillion in 2024. While domestic debt declined significantly by N1.99 trillion (35.98 percent) to N3.54 trillion, foreign debt edged upward by 1.66 percent, increasing from \$4.50 billion to \$4.58 billion.

The composition of that debt is even more revealing. Twenty-four states now have more than half of their debt denominated in US dollars. Kaduna leads with 97.39 percent of its debt in foreign currency, followed by Jigawa at 96.42 percent and Ondo at 90.04 percent. With exchange rate volatility persisting, such exposure heightens fiscal vulnerability.

Per capita debt also rose, from N40,469 in 2023 to N41,766 in 2024. Twelve states exceeded the national average, with Lagos topping the list at N166,253 per person.

Beyond formal debt stock, states are weighed down by legacy liabilities: contractor arrears of N434.87 billion; pension and gratuity arrears of N626.8 billion; salary and staff claims of N33.73 billion; judgment debts of N64.44 billion; and other liabilities totalling N79.91 billion.



These obligations underscore that the fiscal stress goes deeper than headline borrowing figures.

#### Foreign debt service: A growing drain

The strain intensified in 2025. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics, based on FAAC figures, show that states paid N455.38 billion in foreign debt service in 2025, up from N362.08 billion in 2024.

In practical terms, a larger portion of FAAC inflows was deducted at source to service external loans before funds even reached state coffers.

Lagos recorded the highest foreign debt service deductions at N92.80 billion in 2025, up from N72.32 billion the previous year. Rivers followed with N48.58 billion, nearly doubling its 2024 figure. Kaduna ranked third at N47.93 billion, while Ogun and Cross River completed the top five.

Regionally, the South-West accounted for N162.77 billion, 35.74 percent of total foreign debt service in 2025. The South-South followed with N100.37 billion (22.04

percent), while the North-West recorded N81.97 billion (18 percent). The North Central posted the lowest at N27.65 billion.

#### Record revenues, limited social investment

The debt story becomes more striking when placed alongside the surge in FAAC allocations. According to data from the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), total FAAC disbursements rose from N8.21 trillion in 2022 to N10.14 trillion in 2023, and then to N15.26 trillion in 2024, a 66.2 percent increase in just two years. In 2025, FAAC reportedly disbursed about N33.27 trillion, nearly double the 2024 figure, buoyed by subsidy removal, FX reforms, and improved oil remittances.

But BudgIT's 2025 report shows that human development remains under-prioritised. States spent an average of just N3,483 per person on healthcare in 2024. Not a single state reached N10,000 per capita in health spending. Only Lagos,

Bayelsa, Edo, Abia, Kwara, Niger

and Delta exceeded N5,000 per capita.

For a country battling rising disease burdens and fragile primary healthcare systems, the figure is telling.

#### Poverty deepens despite fiscal expansion

According to the World Bank's estimates, poverty levels climbed to 61 percent in 2025, about 139 million Nigerians living on less than \$3 per day, up from 129 million in 2024. PwC projects that the poverty rate could reach 62 percent in 2026, affecting roughly 141 million people.

This trajectory suggests that increased public revenues have not translated into broad-based welfare gains.

#### Projects over people

Public finance analysts argue that political incentives may partly explain the disconnect.

"Many governors prefer ribbon-cutting projects; roads, bridges, and flyovers, which are more politically visible than the

long-term, invisible work of training teachers or stocking primary health centres with drugs," Kabir Isah, an Abuja-based public affairs analyst, said in an earlier conversation with BusinessDay.

He noted that human capital investments take years to yield results. "Human capital development (education and health) takes a decade to show results. Because governors operate on four-year cycles, they often lack the incentive to invest in reforms that will only benefit their successors."

For Vahyala Kwaga, BudgIT's deputy country director, the responsibility does not lie solely with governors. Citizens must demand more. "Citizens should ensure that as we prepare for elections, they demand and insist on candidates that will act differently," he said in an earlier conversation with BusinessDay.

"Citizens should insist on political aspirants making credible commitments to how they will govern differently and accountably if they are elected."

#### The development question

Nigeria's states are not short of revenue in nominal terms. Nor are they short of borrowing.

The challenge lies in the intersection of rising debt service, currency risk, and spending patterns that favour visible infrastructure over long-term human capital development. With over a quarter of expenditures devoted to servicing debt and foreign obligations rising, the fiscal room for transformative social investment narrows.

As FAAC allocations reach historic highs, the central development question persists: can states convert revenue windfalls into measurable improvements in citizens' welfare, or will mounting debt and political incentives continue to crowd out inclusive growth?



# Disaster waiting to happen as developers...

Continued from Page 1

the scorching sun to the residents and also welcomed visitors to the largest green estate in Africa.

But considering the chaos that has enveloped the once beautiful and peaceful town, the few who witnessed its glory find it difficult to recall the past, because it is truly gone, and sadly for long.

From banks and businesses taking over empty spaces and green areas designed for relaxation, to street trading and markets springing up everywhere and to gutters being blocked and to overpopulation, the residential estate designed to house the participants of the Second World Festival of Black Arts and Culture of 1977 (Festac77), is an eyesore and far from decent living to say the least.

Sadly, from its original 5,000 contemporary dwelling units and seven major avenues, meant to accommodate 45,000 people, the town's original residencies are competing with makeshift accommodations and shanties, all outside the masterplan.

However, a disaster waiting to happen is the current building on buffer zones that have saved the town from environmental impacts since 1977.

Aside from being a windbreaker, protecting the town from environmental impacts, the buffer zone has taken a lot from the residents, with all the waste water from the town, rain water, and all manner of things being emptied in the zone.

Today, churches and mosques have taken over the once lush buffer zone, motor parks, mechanic workshops, gas refilling plants and petrol stations, markets and refuse dumps have taken over, exposing the town to harm.

"Before, you cannot see Mazama, Agboju and Alakija from Festac Town, no matter how tall the building is because the trees in the buffer zone offered enough covering," Ademola Onitiri, a concerned old resident lamented.

Considering the exploitation of the buffer zone, Onitiri decried the ugly development, describing it as "a disaster waiting to happen".

Onitiri, who spoke for other helpless residents, said: "We original allottees are helpless. We have complained to the Federal Housing Authority, which supervises the town, we have complained to the Lagos State government and asked them to stop issuing C-of-Os to the people in the buffer zone, yet more buildings are springing up."

In the same vein, Yinka Shonibare, a concerned resident of Festac, noted that having the buffer zones across Festac built-up is like a disaster waiting to happen.

According to him, the buffer zones were intended to serve several purposes aimed at limiting the effect of flooding and other environmental challenges in Festac Town.

"Well, the green zone serves a lot of purposes. It retains and absorbs water that would have flooded Festac."

"It is designed with drainage that collects water and human waste from Festac for onward discharge into the canal," he said.



According to him, the green zones were meant to supply oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide, and also help to improve the ecosystem balance.

"The greens help filter the atmospheric air in Festac, limiting harmful air (plants have such ability)," he said.

Shonibare also added that it does not seem that any remedial action can be taken by the government or is in sight based on the level of construction currently going on in the area.

"Anyone in Festac would have noticed that virtually all the roads are bad because the drainages are blocked by the constructions along the buffer zones. Also, little rain causes floods in Festac now," he said.

Chimezie Agumbah, another resident, lamented that residents are tired of complaining about the environmental effects of building within the buffer zones around Festac built-up because those involved are adults with children.

According to him, residents have dug the drainages leading into 23 Road from Second Avenue multiple times, yet the road gets flooded whenever it rains.

"They have dug that place countless times. People don't throw trash in it or anything, yet it clogs once it rains," he said.

His concern highlights the environmental consequences of having the buffer zones and other 'green zones' across Festac either built-up or occupied by other activities that do not serve the primary purpose for which the zones were created.

But, another person familiar with the situation who pleaded anonymity told BusinessDay that Amuwo-Odofin Local Government Area, where Festac is situated, raised a concern sometime last year by writing to the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) on the environmental effects of having the buffer zones built-up.

According to him, the Local Government is addressing the issue on an inter-agency level, and is waiting for FHA to take necessary actions on the matter.

"Last year, we wrote to FHA on this same issue. They told us they will

look into their books to ascertain if the people there are building illegally or not. However, we are yet to receive any correspondence on the matter from FHA since then," he said.

He also told BusinessDay that the two major roads leading into Festac Town will be rehabilitated very soon by the Lagos State government and that many of the structures along the buffer zones might have to go.

"You know, the Lagos State government did a groundbreaking flag-off of the reconstruction of the 2nd Avenue and 7th Avenue roads and I believe some of these structures will have to give way for free flow of water when the road is rehabilitated," he said.

While the rehabilitation of the two major roads connecting Festac Town with other parts of Lagos is expected to significantly improve mobility, reduce vehicle damage, boost economic activities and enhance the overall quality of life, residents are also optimistic that the reconstruction will also bring some level of restoration along the already built-up buffer zones.

On its part, the FHA has intermittently engaged in demolishing illegal, makeshift shops and structures within the zone, such as in 2021, to reclaim the area, though encroachment persists.

Also, during the tenure of Gbenga Ashafa as the managing director/CEO, Federal Housing Authority (FHA), over 500 illegal makeshift shops were demolished in Festac Town.

Then, Ashafa insisted that the measure was to ensure a proper survey in line with the FESTAC master plan, and also giving possession to the real allottees as several quit notices were served on the illegal occupants before the actual demolition was carried out.

In the same vein, Akintola Olagbemiro, the then South-West zonal manager of FHA, said that the authority started the implementation of the second phase of the consent judgment, which was for clearing the illegal structures within the buffer zones along the 2nd Avenue as well as the expressway.

"Before then, we had earlier implemented the first phase of the judgment, which was to dredge the canal along the buffer. This will allow the clearance for the proper survey and development of parcels of land along this axis in accordance with the master plan."

But despite all the efforts to sanitise the town and preserve the masterplan, more shanties, shops, worship centres and mechanic workshops are still springing up, even in the buffer zones.

The development counters the assurance of past FHA leadership that promised to continue the demolition exercise until Festac Town wears its original look.

Many concerned residents, especially original allottees, are calling out Oyetunde Oladimeji Ojo, the current managing director/CEO of the Federal Housing Authority of

Nigeria.

For them, Ojo, who was appointed in February 2024, has not done enough to sanitise the town as illegal structures are still springing up across the town, amid massive encroachment in the buffer zone.

"He is focused only in Abuja. The FHA is doing little or nothing to checkmate recent encroachments in the buffer zone," Yakubu Inuwa, a resident and serving immigration officer said.

For Uche Okpe, another angry resident, the FHA cannot deny involvement in the illegal structures, especially within the buffer zones because nobody will dare build anything there without, at least, seeking FHAs approval.

"Nobody can build anything in the buffer zones or any empty space without FHA's approval. So, who gives these illegal occupants approval? Can FHA deny knowing they exist? I think, it is time to get serious with the issue because Festac is being exposed now to a potential weather threat, crime, and pollution," he said.

Again, Inuwa, who inherited his two-bedroom apartment in 21 Road, from his late father, who was also an immigration officer, blamed the sad development on FHA, saying that if the authority had not given any approval, people will not dare build anywhere near the buffer zones or empty lands in Festac.

"The green lawn in my area, which we used to play in as teenagers is gone. A hotel is standing in its place, with noise, unknown faces and exotic cars that disrupt the peace of our estate.

"FHA should continue the demolition, charge offenders to court, and leave its double standard that has seen some illegal structures still standing after every demolition exercise," he said.

But Abidemi Olayemi, an agronomist and environmentalist, pointed to the danger ahead if the buffer zone in gone.

"Festac will be submerged by flood if the buffer zones are gone.

"The water outlets along 1st Avenue and 21 Road empty into the canal, while those in 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th Avenues empty into the buffer zones. Imagine what will happen when there is no place to contain the water. Festac will definitely be submerged," he warned.

Also, Esther Obuya, an Abuja-based environmentalist, noted that Festac is swampy and was heavily sand filled before construction, and that with human waste and rain water finding no place to go, they would be retained within, amid potential danger, especially houses sinking, roads caving in and erosion every.

"We are inviting building collapse, underground erosion, pollution and pulling down of roofs by strong winds because the buffer zones with the trees, which serve as windbreakers are gone."

The government cannot build another Festac, even if the money is there. So, let us preserve this one. It is still the largest estate in Africa and no government has taken it upon itself to rival that project. It is a shame," she concluded.



# Cover

## Transmission 'Wahala': As lawmakers...

Continued from Page 1

tled that expectation.

On Tuesday, the Senate rescinded its earlier decision that had rejected mandatory electronic transmission of election results from polling units to INEC's portal after vote counting. Lawmakers subsequently re-amended the bill to accommodate electronic transmission.

However, the revised provision stops short of making it compulsory. Instead, it allows electronic transmission but provides that, in the event of internet failure, the manually completed Form EC8A will serve as the primary means of result collation.

To some, that caveat is reasonable. To others, it is a loophole wide enough to drive a political truck through.

Form EC8A remains the foundational document in Nigeria's electoral process. Completed at the polling unit immediately after votes are counted, it is the first official record of the ballot outcome. In election petitions, courts frequently rely on EC8A forms because they represent the results at source.

Yet, critics argue that once results leave the polling unit physically, they become vulnerable to alteration during transit or collation.

### Hiding under technology?

Opponents of mandatory electronic transmission say Nigeria's technological infrastructure is not yet robust enough to sustain a fully digital process.

"People need to understand what real-time means. Real-time transmission can only happen if the INEC adopts an e-voting system. For now, INEC does not have the capability for e-voting. Maybe in two or three years, we can adopt e-voting. But as of today, INEC has not put an e-voting system in place," said Adeniyi Adegbomire, chairperson of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee reviewing the amendments.

The argument rests on connectivity gaps. Large swathes of rural Nigeria still experience poor or non-existent internet access. In such areas, insisting on real-time upload could delay collation or disenfranchise voters.

But legal practitioners and civil society actors counter that the issue is not whether Nigeria has achieved perfect digital coverage, but whether lawmakers are willing to close legal ambiguities that have historically undermined public trust.

Olisa Agbakoba, a senior advocate of Nigeria, warned in a recent op-ed: "The National Assembly must act decisively to embed mandatory real-time electronic transmission of results in the Electoral Act, removing all ambiguity and closing the legal loopholes that have been exploited to undermine the people's will. Democracy demands



nothing less."

Victor Giwa, another legal practitioner, framed the debate differently during an appearance on Channels Television. "We are talking about the problem of not having a network, that is what the issue actually is. The National Assembly should be tasking our Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) on how they can pursue serious technological development, setting targets for these MDAs and INEC."

For critics, invoking poor network penetration is less a technical argument and more a political shield.

### A pattern of distrust

The tension did not emerge in a vacuum. The 2023 elections exposed significant trust deficits, particularly around the upload of presidential results to the IRev portal. Although

INEC insisted that the glitches did not invalidate the outcome, public confidence suffered.

The new amendment debate reopens those wounds. When lawmakers initially moved to remove electronic transmission from the clause altogether, protests erupted from citizens and civil society groups who saw it as a regression.

The Senate has now constituted a nine-member harmonisation committee to reconcile differences between its version of the bill and that earlier passed by the House of Representatives. But the broader question remains unresolved: should electronic transmission be a legal obligation or merely an administrative option?

In a country where election petitions routinely end up in court, clarity in the law is not a luxury, it is a safeguard.

### INEC moves ahead

Amid the legislative back-and-forth, INEC has pressed forward. The commission has officially scheduled the 2027 general elections, with Presidential and National Assembly polls set for February 20, 2027, and Governorship and State Assembly elections slated for March 6, 2027.

Joash Amupitan, INEC chairman, announced the timetable in Abuja, emphasising that preparations are underway despite delays in the passage of the amended Electoral Act.

"The commission has worked meticulously to set the election timetable and sequence of activities to ensure a smooth electoral process in 2027. We remain committed to conducting free, fair, and credible elections, even as we await the National Assembly's approval of the

amended Electoral Act," he said.

The commission has submitted recommendations to lawmakers and signalled that certain activities may be adjusted depending on when the revised legislation is enacted. In essence, INEC is preparing to conduct an election under rules that are still in flux.

### More than a technical debate

The stakes are high. Elections are not merely administrative exercises; they are the foundation of democratic legitimacy. When citizens doubt the process, they doubt the outcome. And when they doubt the outcome, governance itself becomes fragile.

The debate over electronic transmission may appear technical, but its implications are deeply political. A mandatory system would reduce discretion and ambiguity. A permissive system leaves room for interpretation and contestation.

The National Assembly faces a defining choice. It can strengthen the legal architecture of Nigeria's democracy by closing grey areas, or it can leave behind a framework that depends heavily on trust in a political environment where trust is already thin.

For voters who will stand in line two years from now, the question is simple: will their votes travel safely from the polling unit to the final declaration?

Until that question is resolved with clarity and conviction, the credibility of the 2027 election will remain, at best, uncertain and at worst, in jeopardy.



# FDI: Enugu Govt, Haier Group launch \$20m factory, set for \$30m expansion

...We'll produce 200,000 units of ICT annually, create 100 jobs – Haier VP

...It's a boost to FG's quest for \$1 trn economy – Minister

...Mbah lauds Tinubu's economic policies

Continued from Page 1

worth \$20 million would produce smart phones, tablets, computers, smart boards, Android televisions, education and health technologies, and renewable energy solutions for electricity, agriculture, and transportation.

The factory, which saw the Mbah administration provide the land and build the massive structures, among others, while also placing offtake orders of over 25,000 all-in-one desktops and 300,000 tablets to power its 260 Smart Green Schools and encourage the investment, follows the state's other FDI patterns such as the ongoing electric car assembly plant construction at Owo by the Stallion Group and the Nortra Tractor Assembly Plant and Service Centre, Enugu, an investment by ODK Group of Denmark set for commissioning.

Inaugurating the factory in the heart of Enugu's capital city, Governor Mbah said the investment aligned perfectly with the administration's commitment to repositioning the state as a premier destination for investment, industry, and knowledge-driven growth and its push for a \$30 billion economy from \$4.4 billion.

"This partnership represents the convergence of vision, innovation, and opportunity – to generate Made-in-Enugu technologies that compete globally, while enabling us to support key local sector developments.

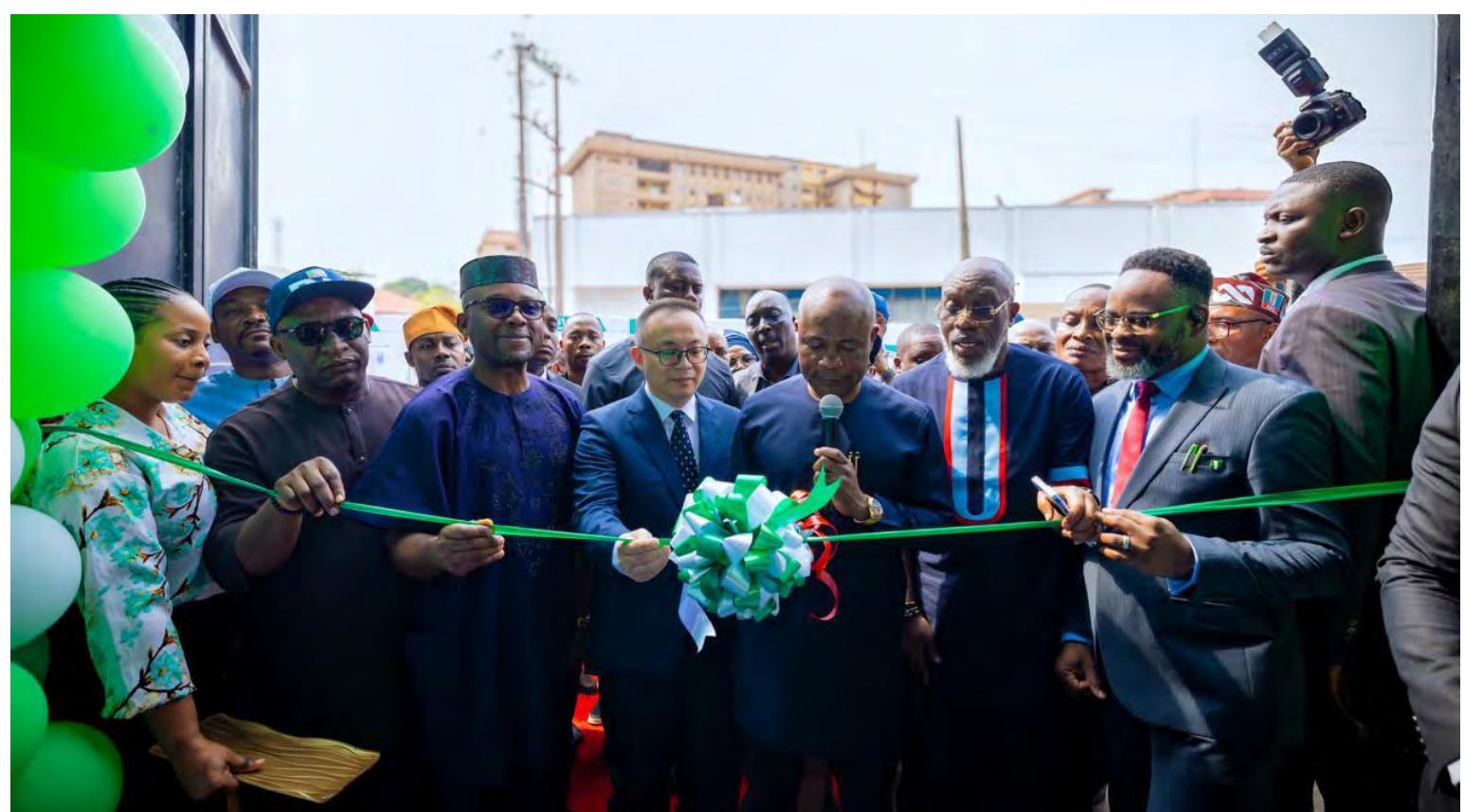
"It means that the devices empowering our students and that support critical industries will no longer be imported. That is strategic. It reduces costs. It ensures sustainability. And most importantly, it builds local capacity," he explained.

The governor added that the factory would also serve as a practical training platform for the state's vocational and technical institutions; generate employment; facilitate technology transfer; stimulate complementary small and medium-scale enterprises and also foster a technology ecosystem in the state.

He hailed President Bola Tinubu's macro policies, which he said had helped to a great degree in attracting a steady inflow of FDIs.

"This steady inflow of FDIs is an indication that the macro pressures that had hitherto prevailed have eased. We have seen the naira strengthen, our foreign reserves grow exceedingly, and a downward trajectory in inflationary trends," he emphasised.

Mbah called on investors from across Nigeria and beyond to follow the Haier example, stressing that Enu-



gu was ready and open for business.

Speaking, Sun Yongle, vice president of Haier Group, said that the factory would produce 200,000 units of various product lines annually, while also employing about 100 people for a start.

He added that Haier Group was working on a \$30 million investment in the state, expanding to mining, agriculture, among others.

"Haier Group is the world's larg-

est manufacturer of appliances, with global revenue exceeding \$60 billion in 2025. We own a portfolio of international brands including GE Appliances, Mabe, Candy, Sanyo Aqua, Hoover, and Fisher & Paykel.

"The Enugu Haier Factory has a designed production capacity of 200,000 units per year, focusing on ICT products, medical equipment, and new energy products. When fully completed, the factory will

employ more than 100 local workers, including our sales and service teams, and we will have over 200 employees in total.

"But this factory marks only the first stage of our investment in Enugu State. We are also discussing co-operation in agriculture, mining, and transportation, including sesame, coal, and tricycles. We expect our total investment in Enugu State to exceed \$30 million.

"Our goal is for our products to be not only Made-in-Enugu, but also designed in Enugu, with management and technical teams mainly composed of local professionals," Yongle said.

He further said that Haier would establish a local Research and Development Centre and a training centre to provide free training and internship opportunities for students in Enugu State, commending Mbah for his support and leadership.

Ndubueze Mbah, a professor and commissioner for Education, commended Governor Mbah for making the "Made-in-Enugu" dream a reality, citing the speedy completion of the factory in 18 months to back his drive for skills-based education in Enugu State.

Kingsley Udeh, minister of Innovation, Science and Technology, restated the Federal Government's support for innovation, industrialisation, and technical education as represented by the Enugu State Government and Haier through partnership.

"The President fully supports this initiative because it aligns with our Renewed Hope Agenda. This is adding to the President's vision of taking Nigeria from where it is currently to a \$1 trillion economy," he stated.

Precious Anih of TVET College, GTC, Enugu, thanked Mbah for giving meaning to the dreams and future of Enugu children and youths.

"You have made us look into the future and have hope," she stated.



# Fashion Talk

## Six simple ways to identify original pixie curls and avoid buying fake hair

CHIOMA ONUH

**P**ixie curls are one of the most sought-after hair textures in the Nigerian market, but they are also among the most faked. Many products sold as “original pixie curls” are either synthetic or mixed with artificial fibres, leading to quick tangling, stiffness and short lifespan. Hair professionals say the easiest way to avoid being misled is to understand how real human hair behaves. Below are proven and widely used methods for identifying original pixie curls.

### Texture and feel test

Original pixie curls made from human hair feel soft and natural when touched. The strands should not feel plasticky, overly shiny or stiff. Synthetic pixie curls often feel smooth in an unnatural way or slightly rough and wiry. Running your fingers gently through the curls should feel similar to touching real hair on the head.



“

**When you rub a strand between your fingers, there is usually slight resistance when you move your fingers upward toward the root and smoothness when moving downward toward the tip**

### Water absorption test

Human hair is porous and absorbs water, while synthetic fibres do not. To test this, place a few

strands of the pixie curls into a bowl of water. Original human hair will absorb the water and sink after a short

while. Fake or synthetic hair usually floats on the surface because it repels water.

Human hair has a cuticle layer that runs in one direction. When you rub a strand between your fingers, there is usually slight resistance when you move your fingers upward toward the root and smoothness when moving downward toward the tip. Synthetic hair lacks this cuticle structure and feels smooth in both directions.

### Burn test

This is one of the most reliable ways hair professionals distinguish human hair from synthetic fibres. Cut a small strand of the pixie curls and carefully bring it close to a flame. Original human hair burns slowly and produces a smell similar to burnt hair or feathers. Synthetic hair melts quickly, gives off a chemical or plastic smell and forms a hard bead at the end. This test should be done carefully and only with a small strand.

### Cuticle direction test

pixie curls often melt, shrink, stiffen or release a chemical smell when exposed to heat. This test should always be done on low heat and on a small section of hair.

### Movement and shedding observation

Human hair pixie curls move naturally and have a soft bounce when shaken or worn. They also shed minimally when combed gently. Synthetic pixie curls tend to look stiff, hold one fixed curl pattern and may shed excessively or tangle easily after a short period of use.

Hair professionals advise buyers to be cautious of prices that are far below the average market rate for human hair pixie curls. Original human hair is more expensive due to sourcing and processing costs. Buyers are also encouraged to ask for clear videos of the hair, not just photos, and to buy from reputable vendors or salons with verifiable reviews.

“

**Synthetic pixie curls often feel smooth in an unnatural way or slightly rough and wiry. Running your fingers gently through the curls should feel similar to touching real hair on the head**



# Bliss with Nonye Ben-Nwankwo

Email: chiwuagwu@yahoo.com Phone number (SMS only) 08057511893

## I always promote movies I feature in – Ibrahim Suleiman

**A**ctor, Ibrahim Suleiman, has responded to a content creator and movie commentator, Dami Dawson, who had called him out claiming that he didn't promote a particular movie he featured in, even after he was paid for it.

In a video he posted on his Instagram page, the actor debunked the narrative, stating his side of the story while also demanding for an apology from Dawson.

He said, "I have never done this before but I realized that in today's society that silence is mistaken for consent or confirmation. Earlier this evening, I got some messages and I saw a video that someone called me out that I didn't promote a film that I was in. The film is titled Dead Tide, which came out last year.

"The film was supposed to have been released in first quarter of 2025 but it got pushed back to April. When April came, I called the producer and director of the movie when I didn't hear anything. He told me some things came up and they had to push it back further. I told him I was going for summer in the US because I had galleries lined up, where I intended to show



my art works and I had meetings with curators, so I told him I wouldn't be in the country for most of the summer. He said it was okay."

Ibrahim said promotional materials came out and he posted them on his social media

pages but he couldn't attend the screening of the movie because he had traveled to the US as at then and he asked his wife, Linda, to attend on his behalf.

He said, "Promotional materials came out eventually and for everything we were asked to

post, I posted those including teasers, trailers and screening information. I posted all those on my insta stories. I couldn't attend the premier because I wasn't around. I asked my wife to attend the premier. I sent her the details and she realized she was filming at Ikeja that day and the premier was happening at Sango Tedo. She said she didn't know if she would get there on time since she didn't know when she will set. I also told some of my friends and some of them couldn't make it and some attended. Now, tell my why someone will come on instagram almost a year later and start to call me out, claiming that I failed to promote a film we contractually obligated to promote."

Ibrahim said he has integrity and he frowns at people who try to smear his image.

"I spent so much time in the nine years I have been in Nollywood to make sure that my white stays white. I stay on my lane, I do my job and I carry good vibes. You will not be the person that will make me jump in the mud. When you have your fact, I want a formal apology on that same page that you had the guts to post trash about me."



### My father is still alive - Yul Edochie

**A**s the internet was agog few days ago with a story that veteran actor, Pete Edochie had passed on, his actor son, Yul, has come out to debunk the news, saying that his father is still very much alive.

Eulogizing his father on his Facebook wall, Yul said he is sure his father would live more than 100 years, despite what the rumour mongers say.

He said, "Nwokeee! The Lion of Africa. My man for life. Ezigbo mmadu. You will definitely live beyond 100 years."

Yul further admonished those carrying the false news as he reiterated that the legendary Pete Edochie is still alive.

"To the public, disregard any false news saying Chief Pete Edochie passed away. The Lion of Africa is fully alive, hail and hearty."



### NFVCB Approves 102 Films in January 2026

**T**he National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) led by the Executive Director, Dr Husseini Shaibu, has approved a total of 102 films for distribution and exhibition for the month of January 2026, in line with its statutory mandate to regulate and classify film and video content. This reflects an increase of 161.5% increase compared to 39 films classified in December, 2025.

A Breakdown by Language shows as follows: English: 86, Igbo: 8, Yoruba: 3, Hausa: 3, Hindi: 2.

According to the board, this distribution reflects the continued dominance of English-language productions in the Nigerian film market, while also highlighting contributions from indigenous Nigerian languages and foreign content.

A further perusal by rat-

ings reveals the following categories,

G (General Viewing): 3, PG (Parental Guidance): 4, 12A: 4, 15: 64, 18: 27

The board said the classification outcome indicates a significant number of films falling within the 15 and 18 rating categories, underscoring the Board's commitment to ensuring age-appropriate content and safeguarding young audiences from potentially harmful material.

While the Board appreciates the cooperation of stakeholders across the film value chain and reiterates its dedication to transparency and professionalism in the discharge of its regulatory functions, the Board restates its resolve to ensure compliance with classification of all films and video works produced to be distributed online especially on YouTube.

## OBJ, business moguls attend Flutterwave gala

**I**t was a night of glamour, style, business and innovation recently as Flutterwave, Africa's payments technology company, in partnership with hospitality brand, The Delborough, hosted some of Nigeria's most powerful business and public sector leaders, including former president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, for an exclusive Gala Night in Lagos.

Held at The Delborough Lagos, the black-tie gathering brought together decision-makers from technology, aviation, hospitality, FMCG, insurance, fashion & beauty, and the public sector for an evening of elevated conversations, entertainment, and strategic connections. The event underscored Flutterwave's renewed commitment to strengthening its involvement in Nigeria's business ecosystem and supporting local enterprises as they scale globally.

From the moment guests arrived on the red carpet, the tone was set for a night of sophistication and purpose. Industry leaders, founders, policymakers, and creatives mingled over light



refreshments, posed for photographs, and shared candid conversations about the future of Nigerian business.

The highlight of the evening was a keynote address by the Guest of Honour and Chairman of the event, Chief Obasanjo, who spoke on innovation, leadership, and the role of private enterprise in national development. His remarks set the stage for broader discussions around economic growth and Nigeria's place in the global economy.

Speaking on the significance

of the night, Olugbenga 'GB' Agboola, Founder and CEO of Flutterwave, said: "Nigeria is home, and it remains one of our most important markets. Our goal is to build deeper relationships with the businesses and leaders driving the economy. Flutterwave has the infrastructure to support industries across aviation, hospitality, FMCG, tech, and beyond, and we are committed to working closely with Nigerian businesses as they grow locally and expand globally."

Also commenting, Dr Stanley Ifeanyi Uzochukwu, Chairman and Founder of The Delborough, said: "At The Delborough, our vision is to provide world-class hospitality for leaders who are shaping industries and the future of our country. Hosting this Gala with Flutterwave enables us to do what we are best at – creating a space where meaningful business relationships can be built, ideas can flow, and excellence is experienced at every touchpoint."

Among the dignitaries who graced the event are Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State, former President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, Pastor Paul Adefarasin, Pastor Flourish Peters, Dr. Cosmas Maduka (CON), President and CEO of Coscharis Group, Sir Olu Okeowo, Founder and Chairman of Gibraltar Construction Nigeria Limited, Dr. Michael Onuoha C, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer of Ailes Group, Ernest Ndukwe, Chairman of the Board of Directors, MTN Nigeria, Erica Nlewedium, Omotola Jalade

# The Worshipper

## How 2026 Lent opens another convergence of fasting among faithful

Stories by JOHN SALAU

As Christian faithful prepare for the 2026 Lenten season, clerics have called on Nigerians to see the convergence of the fasting season as a divine opportunity to deepen interfaith relationships across the country.

The call is coming on the back of the fasting season, which is expected to commence on Wednesday February 18, 2026 with Ash Wednesday.

Similarly, Muslim faithful are expected to commence this year's Ramadan in the evening of February 17, while the first full day of fasting starts on Wednesday, February 18, subject to the sighting of the crescent moon.

For adherents of both faiths, Lent and Ramadan are traditional seasons of prayer, repentance, fasting, and charity, which help the faithful to renew their heart and strengthen the call to live as believers.

The Lent season presents Christians an opportunity to commemorate the passion, death, and resurrection of



Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Ramadan helps Muslims to commemorate the first revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad.

Fasting over the years has been associated with healthy living and wellness, which faithful leverage to deepen their faith in God. Accordingly, it is believed that love of God is proven in love of others, especially in showing love to the less privileged and vulnerable.

"Fasting makes it easier to

recognize what we 'hunger' for and what we deem necessary for our sustenance," Pope Leo XIV, stated in his Lenten message, urging Catholic faithful to abstain from harsh words and rash judgment.

According to the Pontiff, the liturgical season offers Christians an opportunity to place the mystery of God back at the center of their lives. "Moreover, it helps us to identify and order our 'appetites,' keeping our hunger and thirst for justice alive."

Pope Leo added that fasting teaches Christians to govern their desire by purifying, freeing, and expanding it, in order to direct their desire toward God and good deeds. He also highlighted how fasting helps open believers to the deep desire for justice, which help to free Christians from complacency.

"Fasting opens our eyes to suffering and enlarges our compassion," Chidi Anthony, founder, Kings in Christ Power Ministries and president,

Pentecostal Ministers' Forum (PMF), said.

In these sacred seasons, Christians and Muslims enter a time of prayer, fasting, repentance, and generosity. For the faithful, the fasting season allow them to turn their hearts towards God in penitence.

Also, the fasting season helps adherents of both faiths to be merciful and also learn to see one another as brothers and sisters in faith, and other works of life.

"When Christians and Muslims fast simultaneously, it is more than a calendar coincidence. It carries spiritual, social, and national implications," Anthony said, highlighting that, "When Christians enter a season of fasting, often during Lent or through corporate consecrations and Muslims simultaneously observe Ramadan, something unusual happens in society."

According to him, conversations about God become more visible beyond the surface with deeper implications for people of both faiths. He added that prayer gatherings increase across several places, while restaurants are quieter in the daytime. "The atmo-

sphere shifts," said Anthony.

He disclosed that the convergence offers a season of heightened spiritual awareness among faithful. "When millions deny themselves food to seek God, the spiritual temperature of a nation rises."

Anthony added that fasting is not just about abstaining for believers in Christ, he said that it is about alignment. "It is about returning our hearts to the Father, recalibrating our desires, and seeking His will for our lives and our land Nigeria," he said.

James Akinade, Lagos bishop, Motailatu Church of God (C&S), said Nigerians must use the Lenten season to change for the better. According to him, both the leaders and the led must embrace change in the true spirit of Lent.

"Nigerians must be sincere. The Bible says peace be unto those who love God in sincerity. Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach. We are doing the exact opposite of the truth in Nigeria and God will never bless a nation where His laws are broken with impunity," he said.

## SECAM advocates African solutions to African problems, rooted in shared responsibility

### ...Signs MoU with AU to strengthen cooperation

The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) has advocated

for African-led solutions in tackling the continent's wide challenges.

According to SECAM, such principles are rooted in

solidarity, shared responsibility, and a common vision for the future of Africa.

To this end, SECAM and the African Union (AU) on

Friday February 13, 2026 signed a renewed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at the African Union Commission (AUC) Headquarters in Addis Ababa.

The partnership high-

lights strengthening institutional partnership between the African Union and SECAM and underscores the Catholic Church's continued commitment to contribute meaningfully to Africa's priorities.

The MoU was geared towards strengthening cooperation in the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights, the advancement of good governance, democracy, and the rule of law.

Signed by Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, President of SECAM and the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ban-kole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) of the African Union Commission.

The MoU also seek to enhance peacebuilding, reconciliation, and social cohesion across the continent. It will also bolster joint efforts in addressing humanitarian crises, protecting displaced persons and vulnerable populations.

The partnership is also made in response to climate

change through sustainable natural resource management, and promoting integral human development in line with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

According to Adeoye, the renewed agreement aligns with the new directives and institutional frameworks issued by the African Union Commission, reinforcing structured collaboration between the AU and its partners.

He added that the timing of the signing is particularly significant, coming six days after SECAM hosted a high-level side event in partnership with the African Union on Water Sustainability and Sanitation on February 7, 2026 in Addis Ababa.

It will also take place just one day before the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union, scheduled for 14-15 February 2026.

The renewed MoU reflects a shared conviction that effective multilateral cooperation is essential and that collaboration among international organisations, governments, civil society, and faith-based institutions is vital for advancing justice, peace, and integral human development.



L-R: Angela Chidi Anthony; Chidi Anthony, founder, Kings in Christ Power Ministries; Emmanuel Aina, assistant inspector-general of police (AIG) & national co-coordinator, and Beatrice Bose Aina (wife), during the installation of Anthony as the national president, Christian Police Fellowship of Nigeria, at the 8th Biannual Convention held in Ibadan recently.

# The story of Alufa Joseph Obayagbona and the desirability of biographies

CHUKS EMMA OLUIGBO

January next year will make it 50 years since Nigeria held FESTAC '77, a festival that brought Africans together culturally. Meanwhile, the story about the creator of the logo used is still nearly buried in obscurity.

It was the late Jamaican political leader and proponent of the Pan-Africanism movement, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who once said, "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots."

The above words clearly underscore the relevance of history to human society. A society without a sense of its history is a lost society. A society is made up of individuals, and it is the activities of these individuals that shape the history of a society. Put in another way, individuals make history.

It is for this reason that it is important for individuals, especially those who play active part in the events that shape society, to tell their stories - or have their stories told by those who have the right tools to do so. Such stories, if well told, hold a lesson or two for those who hear or read them. Unfortunately, many important stories are left untold, thus denying humanity of the lessons that should accrue from such stories.

This is why everyone who has played a part in putting together the book, *Pa Joseph Alufa Igbinovia Obayagbona: The Account*, deserves commendation.

Authored by Felix Osarhiemen, a lecturer in the Department of History, University of Benin, *Pa Joseph Alufa Igbinovia Obayagbona: The Account* is a historical account based on the life of Pa Alufa Joseph Igbinovia Obayagbona. The author describes the book as an academic biography which relies heavily upon the documented facts and noted accomplishments of Pa Alufa Joseph Igbinovia Obayagbona's life; a historical excursion that interrogates the interplay of related facts and incidents that coalesce into the totality of existence as well as the all-round accomplishments of the subject.

Presented in a chronologically organised form, the book tells the story of Pa Alufa Joseph Obayagbona's life as a visual artist and sculptor in a variety of media, his humble beginning, his ancestry and place of birth, childhood and family influences, stint with formal Western education, foray into non-formal vocational training, rise to national prominence, and the shabby treatment meted out to him.

The 145-page book is presented in eight chapters. The first chapter deals with Pa Obayagbona's environmental background, genealogical origins, childhood and family influences, educational development, arising complications and alternative

outcomes, while chapter two takes a look at the structure of the Benin state and society into which Pa Alufa was born, the beginning of his career as an artist, and so on.

Chapter three delves into Pa Alufa's life as a family man; chapter four looks at his professional exploits and prodigious expressions, including his membership of the Edaiken United Carving Industry, his relocation to Port Harcourt, and his return to Benin City; chapter five jumps into the issues around FESTAC '77 and Pa Alufa's involvement in it, and chapter six embarks on an excursion into the history of Idia, mother of Oba Esigie and pioneer Iyoba in Benin Kingdom, the battle for the throne, the Benin-Idah War, and the 1897 invasion and looting of artefacts.

The seventh chapter relates the story of how Pa Alufa was short-changed by the Bendel Arts Council and his return to private practice, while the last chapter examines his recognitions and awards for excellent achievements.

The book presents Alufa Joseph Obayagbona as a child prodigy, whose prodigious nature became fully manifest while he was still undergoing apprenticeship in Igbesanmwan, in Benin City.

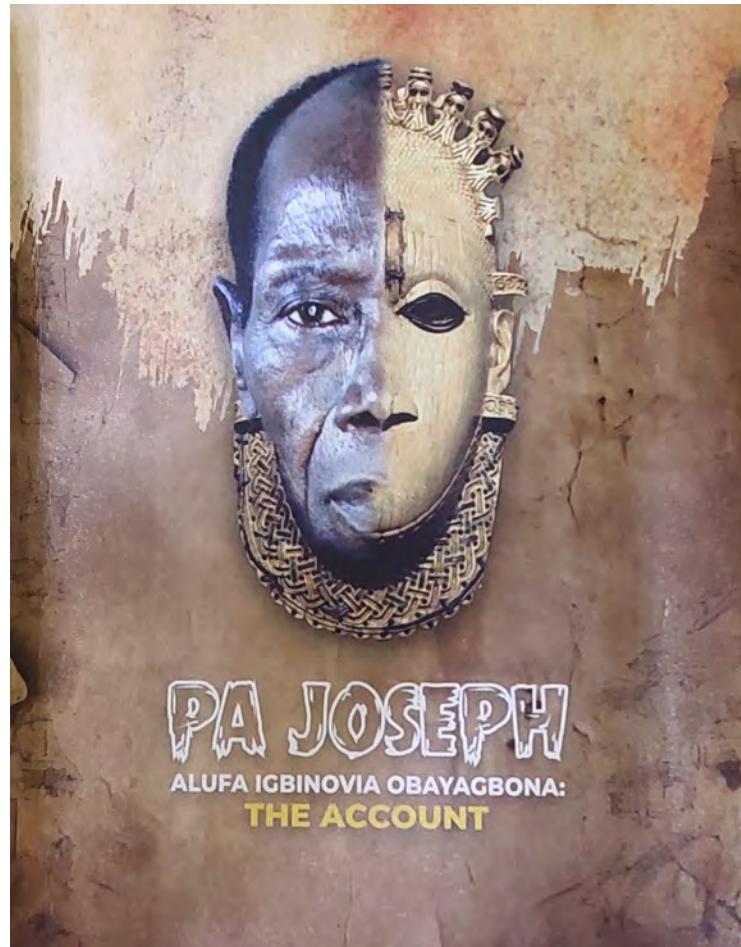
"Within months of his tutelage, he began to exhibit skill and competence that were far above his age and ahead of his learning on the job," the author notes.

"This precociousness was not unnoticed by his master, as well as the other apprentices in the workshop - four in number at the time. Further proof of his exceptional talent was shown in the unusual development where he began to accompany his master to execute commissioned jobs outside of the workshop in the guild quarters in Igbesanmwan," he notes.

The author further cites an instance when a royal mandate was given to Alufa's master, Samson Okungbowa, and other carvers in Igbesanmwan to design and install befitting carved wooden doors in the Holy Aruosa Cathedral - the Benin native church located along Akpakpava Street directly opposite Igbesanmwan Street - where the Oba of Benin and his subjects worship Osanoba or Osanoghodua, the Supreme God.

"As an apprentice, Alufa was also privileged to accompany his master to other works in the palace, the abode of first-class chiefs in the kingdom, as well as other very important personalities in the capital city and its environs. This was a remarkable occurrence as apprentices were hardly ever allowed to leave the workshop while undergoing training, let alone joining up with masters in executing works outside of the guilds' locale," the author writes.

But perhaps the most important



aspect of Alufa's life story as presented in the book is his involvement with the Second World Festival of Black Arts and Culture, otherwise known as FESTAC '77, which took place in Lagos from January 15 to February 12, 1977.

The book notes that to facilitate the processes leading to the organisation and execution of FESTAC '77, the arts councils of the various states in Nigeria opened communication lines and advertised in all media at the time (print, electronic, voice, non-verbal, etc.) that all interested artists, cultural groups and troupes as well as writers and performers should submit their works for selection and assessment, adding that the successful works selected by a panel set up by the arts councils on behalf of the Nigerian government and the other international organising agencies

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Out of five carvers and artists commissioned by the Bendel Arts Council to hasten the process of getting the logo for the FESTAC '77 ready in good time, it was Alufa's work that was chosen.

Here is how the author narrates it: "The officials in the Arts Council were ecstatic that Alufa achieved this feat within record time. The Permanent Secretary and other senior officials of the Arts Council commended him greatly for the superlative work he had done, especially given the short timeline, the sophistication of the finished work and the overall symbolic importance that it held for the local community, the state, the country, the African continent and the Black race for whom it had eternal global cultural relevance."

However, as the author puts it, the successful replication of the Iyoba Idia mask that was used as the logo and symbol of FESTAC '77 totally changed the trajectory of the life and professional career of Alufa Joseph Obayagbona by a curious twist of fate.

"Ordinarily, it brought him for the first time into official limelight at the local, state, national and international levels. However, in its associated societal expectations - monetary, personal popularity, communal acknowledgement, etc. - events did not exactly play out as would have been the case," the author writes.

In the end, Pa Alufa Joseph Obayagbona, according to the author, felt short-changed by the system (as it is erroneously claimed in some quarters that the FESTAC '77 emblem was done and created by Pa Erhabor Emokpae - instead the balanced story is being recorded by the US Library of Congress and the champion of FESTAC '77, Olusegun Obasanjo, who is still alive). Putting this record straight has become most imperatives due to the wrong narratives about Pa Alufa Joseph Obayagbona, the creator and carver of FESTAC '77 emblem, and draw attention to the book - *Pa Joseph Alufa Igbinovia Obayagbona: The Account*.

On November 6, 1976, Alufa presented the works to the Bendel State Arts Council, Alufa's home state, put out the advertisement, he set to work and produced two impressive carved pieces separately named Em'edo Em'ighan and Olokun Obanamen.

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# Art

## Shadows and Spirits: Eternal dance of Ibeji in the heart of Lagos

OBINNA EMELIKE

Walking into the Eco-bank Pan African Centre (EPAC), Victoria Island, Lagos, one senses an immediate shift. The familiar hum of Lagos' corporate pulse softens, giving way to a contemplative stillness—measured, reverent, almost rhythmic. This is Éré Ibeji, the latest and deeply affecting offering of the Lagos Pop-Up Museum, curated by the Àsà Heritage Africa Foundation and open to the public until February 12, 2026.

This is not merely an exhibition of carved wood. It is a passage into the Yoruba imagination—a space where art, spirituality, memory, and family exist in constant dialogue.

### The pulse of the twin spirit

Among the Yoruba people, twins—Ibeji—occupy a singular and sacred place. They are not simply siblings born together; they are believed to share a “double soul,” embodying cosmic balance, continuity, and prosperity. The Yoruba, who have one of the



L-R: Julie McKay, public affairs officer, US Embassy; Nkechi Adedeji, curator, National Museum Lagos; Oluwatoyin Sogbesan, director, Àsà Heritage Africa Foundation; and Odun Orimolade, curator, Lagos Pop-up Museum and Yaba Art Museum at Yaba College of Technology, at the opening of the exhibition on January 17, 2026.

highest twin birth rates in the world, see twinhood as both a blessing and a spiritual responsibility.

When one twin dies, the equilibrium of the family is disrupted. The response is not mourning alone, but creation. An Éré ibeji—a sacred wooden figure—is commissioned to house the spirit of the departed twin, ensuring harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds.

At EPAC, these figures do not sit passively. They seem to

observe, to remember. Their surfaces bear the soft sheen of decades of ritual care—evidence of hands that bathed them, clothed them, fed them with palm oil and beans, spoke to them, sang to them. Historically, Éré ibeji were treated not as objects, but as living presences within the household.

The exhibition captures this philosophy with remarkable sensitivity. Through a carefully curated selection of historic and interpretive

figures—distinguished by stylised proportions, elaborate hairstyles, scarification marks, and symbolic ornamentation—Éré Ibeji insists that these works be encountered as living heritage, not frozen artefacts.

Archival photographs and documentary images further contextualise the figures, revealing domestic rituals and belief systems that affirm a core Yoruba idea: life does not end with death, and identity does not dissolve with the

body.

### An exhibition that teaches forward

Beyond aesthetics, Éré Ibeji is an educational act. Through scheduled school visits, young Lagosians—many encountering these traditions for the first time—are introduced to indigenous knowledge systems often absent from formal curricula. In a city racing relentlessly toward the future, the exhibition quietly but firmly argues for transmission over nostalgia.

### The architect of memory: Dr. Oluwatoyin Zainab Sogbesan

Behind this layered and emotionally resonant exhibition is Dr. Oluwatoyin Zainab Sogbesan, one of Nigeria's most influential voices in heritage preservation and museum practice.

An architect by training and a cultural historian and museologist by vocation, Sogbesan holds a PhD in Culture, Policy and Management from City, University of London. She is the founder and director of Àsà Heritage Africa Foundation, an organisation dedicated to safeguarding and

reinterpreting Africa's tangible and intangible cultural assets through African-centered frameworks.

Sogbesan, who serves as president of ICOMOS Nigeria and vice president of ICICH (the International Scientific Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage under ICOMOS), operates at the intersection of local practice and global policy. Her work consistently interrogates who tells African stories, how museums frame them, and how heritage can remain relevant to contemporary communities—especially younger generations.

Her curatorial and advisory portfolio includes landmark initiatives such as the LagosPhoto Home Museum Project, consultancy work with the European Union National Institute for Culture (EUNIC Nigeria Cluster), and participation in Re:assemblage 2025–26, an international platform rethinking archival practices for African and Afro-diasporic art institutions. As a juror, researcher, and panelist, she has contributed to global conversations on restitution, decolonisation, Yoruba palace architecture, and community-led heritage documentation.

## Copyright Levy: PMAN commends FG's approval, tasks members on registration

### ...As MCSN offers clarifications

OBINNA EMELIKE

Following the recent release of N1.2 billion, in the first tranche of copyright levy by the federal government, the Nigerian creative industry, particular musicians are excited considering the anticipated economic impact.

In view of the above, the Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN) and Musical Society of Nigeria Ltd/Gte (MCSN) have commended the federal government for approving the Copyright Levy Act 2022, which guarantees the levy, while calling on members of PMAN to register to enjoy the benefits accruing from it.

Addressing a World Press Conference, which held at the PMAN National Secretariat, Nigerian Music House, Lekki, Lagos recently, Pretty Okafor, the association's president, explained that the fund from the copyright levy is meant to reach the grassroots and every Nige-



an creator, no matter where they are located.

Okafor explained the place of sound recording in the framework, noting that it captures a shared interest between producers and performers whose performances are documented in recordings. According to him, in many territories, the rights and revenue streams from sound recordings are commonly structured on

a shared basis, often around a 50/50 model between producers and performers, insisting that all parties would get what truly accrues to them.

However, PMAN maintained that Nigeria's system must protect legitimate right owners and ensure that lawful benefits reach real creators; performers and producers rather than opportunists, gatekeepers, and counterfeit claimants.

Okafor reiterated that PMAN remains the only legally recognised union/association of performing musicians and employers of musicians; including stakeholders across the performing and production ecosystem.

The Okafor-led leadership is also strengthening protection for performers and improving industry compliance, resulting in a memorandum

of understanding with MCSN on July 1, 2020, aimed to support licensing compliance, enforcement, and protection of performing musician's rights.

“The collaboration is designed for compliance, accountability, and improved welfare for performers whose labours power the Nigerian music economy,” Okafor said.

On modality for the registration, Okafor noted that

PMAN will compile verified entries from its national database and provide them to MCSN to support a credible and auditable disbursement process for eligible performers.

He advised musicians to jettison misinformation being circulated by factions or individuals to derail participation or position themselves as gatekeepers over what belongs to Nigerian creators as a matter of law and policy.

PMAN used the forum to convey its gratitude to President Bola Tinubu for his political will and administrative clarity ensured that the first tranche of the Copyright Levy under section 89 of the Copyright Act 2022 was signed into law and released through the relevant instructions.

It also recognised the leadership of the Attorney-General of the Federation, Minister of Justice and commended the efforts of John Obi Asein, director-general, NCC, as well as Mayowa Ayilaran, CEO, MCSN, for their diligence and clarity demonstrated in advancing collective and communicating the development to the public.

# Igbo nation not excluded from junior secondary Living History -Accessible Publishers, authors

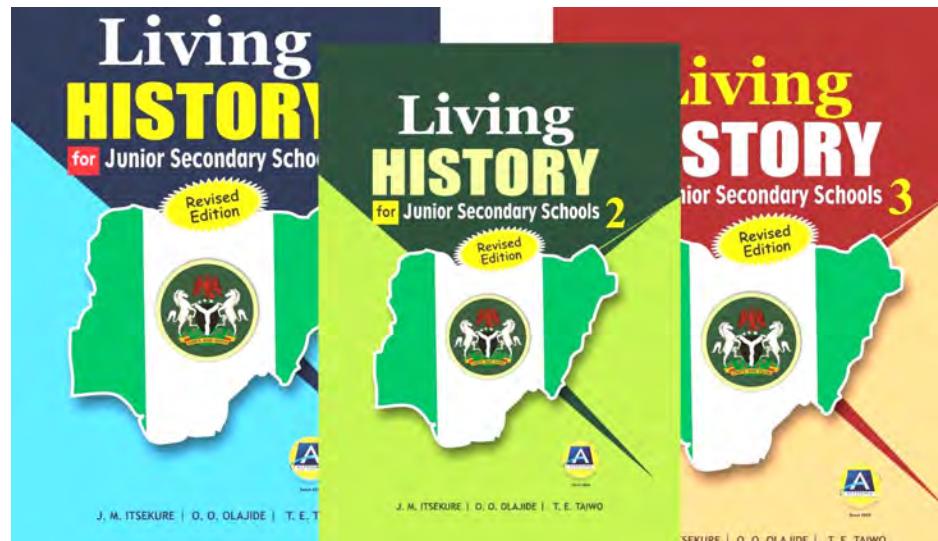
OBINNA EMELIKE

Following claims made on a Facebook video post by Vivian Ifeoma that the Igbo nation is excluded from Living History for Junior Secondary Schools (JSS 1 – 3), Accessible Publishers Limited, a publishing firm and authors including: J. M. Itsekure, Olaiyan Olukeye Olajide and Taiwo Eucharia Taiwo (who are professional historians, teachers and researchers), have debunked the claims, saying it is false.

They blame it on reading culture challenges and poor comprehension even for those who manage to read. They maintain that the claims are false and borne out of mischief as there is enough material on Igbo history appropriate for the junior level learners the books cater for.

The parties noted that in the viral post that has been widely circulated and attracted the interest of many, it is clear that Ifeoma either did not read the books or decided to be mischievous in the malicious attack of a reputable publisher that has contributed so much to educational development of the country with books that cut across many subjects.

In a statement shortly after the video posts, Accessible Publishers Ltd put out a disclaimer that said, "Our attention has been drawn to a social media video referencing a section of Living History for Junior Secondary Schools (JSS



1). After an internal review by our seasoned authors and professionals, we observe that page 27 of the book is dedicated to Igbo-Ukwu: Culture and Artefacts, where the history, artistry, and cultural contributions of the Igbo people are explored as part of Nigeria's shared heritage. This section reflects our long-standing commitment to cultural representation within curriculum-approved educational content.

"Our firm, Accessible Publishers Ltd, wishes to clarify that all its textbooks are developed in strict compliance with the curriculum guidelines issued by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), and are authored and reviewed by seasoned subject-matter

experts. We therefore invite educators, parents, and the wider community to read the book, explore the content, and form their views based on the complete material. Accessible Publishers Limited remains committed to producing educational resources that inform, inspire, and respect Nigeria's rich diversity."

A close reading of the books' chapters reveals excerpts below that clearly show that Igbo history is not excluded as falsely claimed in the videos but a firmly entrenched part of the book series.

In 'Land and People of Nigeria' in chapter 2 of Book One in the 3-part books, the authors generally describe the location and people that constitute the Nigerian entity. And on page 15, they write,

"Nigeria is inhabited by a large number of tribal groups with over 550 languages. These language groups had in the past formed their own kingdoms and had instituted political entities in Nigeria. These include the Yoruba, Edo, Igbo, Hausa, Ibibio, Efik, Fulani, Kanuri, Tiv, Angas, Ijaw, Isoko, Urhobo, etc. Some of these groups have peculiar customs, traditions and languages."

And on page 16, the authors continue, "Despite the numerous tribal groups that exist in Nigeria, the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo tribes are dominant and they account for over 60% of the country's population... The Igbo tribe constitutes about 18% of the population." And in Chapter 3, 'Pre-History: Early Centres of Civilisation' in pages 27 - 30,

the authors focus on 'Igbo-Ukwu Culture and Artefact' and describe the excavation work of the archeologist Professor Thurstan Shaw at Igbo-Ukwu as one of the earliest Nigerian civilisations. Book two of Living History 2 has the opening chapter titled 'The Non-Centralised States in Pre-Colonial Nigeria', where the authors focus on Igbo and its Origin and explore this historical origin to flesh out the founding of the Igbo nation.

With the ample evidence, it is therefore disingenuous and wicked for anyone to claim that the Igbo nation does not feature in Living History for Junior Secondary Schools (JSS 1) or consigned to a footnote. Ifeoma's claim is not only false but malicious in intent.

Taiwo, one of the authors, who holds a BA in History from the University of Lagos and an MA degree in History from the University of Ibadan, expressed "shock and disbelief" at Ifeoma's spurious claim, saying the authors followed the curriculum and could not have excluded any part of Nigeria from the historical book series.

According to her, "The first thing that came to my mind (when I saw the video) was, was it really about these books? The first video post wasn't that clear; you had to zoom to see the covers. That was the post the man made. But I then saw the one the lady (Vivian Ifeoma) did, with the books' covers. So, my first reaction was shock and disbelief.

because there is no way Igbo would not have been mentioned in the books."

On why she thought the content makers decided to exhibit ignorance about books they possibly hadn't read before going public, Taiwo said, "Well, the first thing that came to my mind was that this person had not read the books, because the man was saying if Efik history is in a book, how can Igbo history not be there? The next video post was a woman showing the covers. The first book mentioned Igbo history. In writing about the history of any people, what you consider is the geographical location, climate, their neighbours, and then who are they? You can't understand a people without knowing their location; it is always about space and time. In addressing that, we mentioned the Igbo among other tribes."

Taiwo gave details and specific areas where Igbo history is mentioned in the books, including Igbo population, archeological excavations in Igbo-Ukwu and more.

"There is a place where we mentioned the last census Nigeria had in 1979, with 75% of Hausa/Fulani, 21% of Yoruba and 18% of Igbo that give us the population of Nigeria, and I highlighted this and other minorities in the book," Taiwo stated. "We then moved on to centres of civilisation in Nigeria. Now, the importance of this is to tell us the earliest times we had human civilisation in any area."

OBINNA EMELIKE

## NIFS, British Council partner to foster creative collaboration through Ubuntu Café



The Nigerian creative community and some entertainment stakeholders were excited as the maiden Lagos edition of 'Ubuntu Café' debuted on Friday to promote networking and collaboration among creatives.

The unveiling by Nigerian International Film Summit (NIFS), was in partnership with the British Council Nigeria, Programme for African Leadership (PfAL), and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

The event brought together filmmakers, artists, poets, fashion designers, cultural leaders and other practitioners across the creative industry value chain, to exchange ideas and explore opportunities for cross-sector and cross-border partnerships.

Ijeoma Onah, founder of NIFS, said that the initiative was designed to place film at the centre of the creative ecosystem and connect practitioners from other sectors to its opportunities.

Onah explained that film

could serve as a platform to promote other creative expressions such as fashion and music by providing visibility and recognition for practitioners.

"What we are trying to do is place film at the centre of the creative industry and help people in other sectors access opportunities within it.

"Fashion designers, for instance, can showcase their work through films, while musicians can gain exposure by being featured in productions."

"These are low-hanging opportunities that can elevate people across the creative space," she said.

Onah noted that the gathering was intended to create an informal platform where creatives could meet, connect and build partnerships beyond major festivals and formal events.

According to her, such interactions have reduced in recent years, and the Ubuntu

café provides an avenue to intentionally bring people together to spark collaborations and business opportunities.

"We want to do this more often because when people meet, meaningful connections and partnerships are formed. If you don't intentionally create such platforms, those opportunities may never happen," Onah said.

Also speaking, Donna McGowan, country director,

British Council Nigeria, said that the event was supported under the organisation's Festival Connect Fund, which aims to foster collaboration between creatives in Sub-Saharan Africa and the United Kingdom.

McGowan said that Ubuntu Café was inspired by the African philosophy of community, adding that the initiative celebrates creativity, culture and intellectual exchange while encouraging

partnerships across art forms.

"It is about bringing people together to celebrate African creativity, exchange ideas and spark new partnerships. At its core is community, the belief that 'I am because we are'.

"We have people from different artistic fields, students and established professionals. When different voices come together, it is fascinating to see what can emerge," she said.

McGowan noted that while similar gatherings had been held in London, the Lagos edition marked the first time Ubuntu Café was hosted in Africa.

She added that there were plans for follow-up sessions in London and other parts of the region, with opportunities for more editions in Lagos depending on stakeholder engagement.

Chude Jideonwu, media entrepreneur, who also spoke at the event, encouraged creatives to develop the courage to tell authentic African stories and embrace originality.

He urged practitioners to focus on local content and alternative storytelling that reflects African realities and experiences, adding that not every story needs to appeal to everyone.

Jideonwu emphasised the need for creatives to take pride in their uniqueness and consistently produce content that projects African identity and perspectives.

Tosin Adebisi, programme director, LSE and PfAL, who is also the founder of Ubuntu Café, said that the gathering was conceived at LSE in 2022 as a unique African space for ideas, culture and connection.

# Travel



## Osun Sacred Grove: Adventure that awaits you

OBINNA EMELIKE

**W**hile the Sukur Cultural

Landscape in Adamawa State stands as the first World Heritage Site in Nigeria, amid its breathtaking views, rough terrain, exciting people and unique homestead, there is yet another place of interest to explore.

This time, in the South-West part of the country and precisely in Osogbo, the capital city of Osun State.

Though ancient, the seemingly sleeping town offers many attractions to culture enthusiasts, nature conservationists and tourists who dare visit across the year.

Set in the outskirts of the ancient town is one of the last remnants of primary forest in south-west Nigeria. The forest, which is a major attraction to the city, is so dense, rich in biodiversity, as well as, hosts the Osun Sacred Grove, the second World Heritage Site in Nigeria.

While at the sacred grove, which is regarded as the abode of Osun, the goddess of fertility and one of the pantheons of the Yoruba gods, visitors are pampered by nature, amid art and cultural offerings that are simply out of the world. Yet, the landscape of the grove is dotted with a meandering river, sanctuaries and shrines, sculptures and art works in honour of Osun and other deities. Of course, the sacred grove, which is now seen as

a symbol of identity for all Yoruba people, is probably the last in Yoruba culture to have retained its primary nature and preserved for a very long time. The fact testifies to the once widespread practice of establishing sacred groves outside all settlements.

Meanwhile, set within the forest sanctuary are forty shrines, sculptures and art works erected in honour of Osun and other Yoruba deities, many created in the past 40 years, two palaces, five sacred places and nine worship points strung along the river bank with designated priests and priestesses.

The new art installed in the grove has also differentiated it from other groves. Osogbo is now unique in having a large component of 20th century sculpture created to

reinforce the links between the people and the Yoruba pantheon, and the way in which Yoruba towns linked their establishment and growth to the spirits of the forest.

The restoration of the grove by artists has given it a new importance; it has become a sacred place for the whole of Yorubaland and a symbol of identity for the wider Yoruba Diaspora, other Africans seeking to connect to their roots and even the Western world seeking deeper understanding of African culture, mythology and religious practice.

The grove is an active religious site where daily, weekly and monthly worships take place. In addition, an annual processional festival to re-establish the mystic bonds between the goddess

and the people of the town occurs every year over twelve days in July and August and thus sustains the living cultural traditions of the Yoruba people.

The grove is also a natural herbal pharmacy containing over 400 species of plants, some endemic, of which more than 200 species are known for their medicinal uses.

Most importantly, the grove hosts thousands of guests including indigenes, other Nigerians, African diasporas, especially from Brazil, Haiti and the United States of America to the month-long Osun Osogbo festival every August.

However, the town offers many other art and cultural attractions. It is home to many visual artists, especially wood carvers, while quality

local textile art and weaving are abundant, especially at Nike Art Gallery Osogbo.

However, timeless artifacts and local fabric designs are among souvenirs that remind of your visit to the art and culture hub.

For those who desire to meet and connect with the people and their culture, the grove offers enough of such opportunities as visitors are always welcomed to the homes of the people, learn more about them, eat, drink, dance and excite themselves.

The grove awaits your visit across the year, especially in August for the annual festival.

It is about three hours' drive from Lagos and the roads are relatively smooth, while there are a handful of cheap and clean hotels to lodge in.

## Sunbird Tourism boost MICE offerings with LICC

**S**unbird Hotels and Resorts, Malawi's leading and publicly listed hotel chain, has opened doors to its highly anticipated Livingstone International Conference Centre (LICC). Located within the Sunbird Beach Resort, home to Sunbird Livingstone and Sunbird Waterfront in Salima, the state-of-the-art facility represents an investment of K11 billion and marks a major milestone in Sunbird's strategic repositioning of its lakeside resort portfolio.

The new development underscores Sunbird's commitment to product innovation and service excellence, following significant recent product development and upgrades at Sunbird Waterfront and Sunbird Livingstone. The LICC is poised to strengthen Salima's standing as a premier destination for business and



leisure along the scenic shores of Lake Malawi, and to bolster Malawi's capability in Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism.

Speaking on the development, Samson Mwale, chief executive, Sunbird Hotels & Resorts, said, "Our vision is to consolidate our position as the preferred brand in hospitality. This drives our commitment to continuously exceed guest expectations and deliver unparalleled experiences across all our hotels and resorts, including the MICE segment. The LICC will elevate the delegate experience by combining modern design, cutting-edge technology, and premium hospitality.

"Strategically located within our Sunbird Beach Resort complex, the LICC will feature world class amenities, including

a 1,000-seater main conference arena equipped with advanced audiovisual technology, and a total conference capacity of 1,500 delegates across six breakaway rooms with capacities ranging from 20 to 150 participants. The centre will also include dedicated dining facilities with a capacity to seat 300 people, designed to provide an enhanced dining experience for conference guests."

Mwale emphasized that the LICC is a reflection of Sunbird's commitment to innovation and sustainability:

"The facility will not only attract regional and international events but will also stimulate tourism, investment, and job creation in the area. It's a significant step forward in positioning both Sunbird and Malawi as a serious player in the regional

hospitality and conferencing space."

Sunbird Hotels and Resorts is Malawi's leading hotel chain with 9 properties comprising of: four city hotels in all three regions of Malawi - Sunbird Capital, Sunbird Mount Soche, Sunbird Lilongwe, and Sunbird Mzuzu; three popular beach resorts along Lake Malawi - Sunbird Waterfront, Sunbird Livingstone and Sunbird Nkopolu; a beachside Inn on the northern lakeshore - Sunbird Chintheche; and an iconic mountain resort in the former capital city of Zomba - Sunbird Kuchawe.

"Sunbird Hotels & Resorts" the home of hospitality" is known for offering excellent and personalized services, great cuisine and comfortable accommodation.

# WordMatters

## with CHRIS AGBEDO



# Enugu's 'disruptive' IGR revolution and the arithmetic of trust

Words matter. They frame reality before facts are examined; they sculpt perception before spreadsheets are opened. In public finance, language is never neutral. "Generated," "projected," "record-breaking," "optimised" - each term does more than describe; it signals competence, ambition, even triumph. But words, however burnished, cannot carry legitimacy on their own. They must be escorted by evidence. Numbers too, are not innocent. They do not merely count; they confer legitimacy, command applause, and sometimes, conceal fractures beneath polished surfaces. When Enugu State announced that it generated N406.77 billion in Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) in 2025, an 80 percent performance of its N509.95 billion projection and a 125 percent leap over 2024, the figure landed like a thunderclap. In a federation where most states survive on FAAC oxygen, such fiscal muscle is not routine. It is disruptive. However, disruption, especially when amplified by declarative language, inevitably invites scrutiny.

APC Chieftain, Chief Basil Ani, has called the number "impressive" but brittle, arguing that it collapses under interrogation. His challenge is blunt. If Enugu truly earned over N400 billion in a single year, why do pension arrears persist? Why are contractors unpaid? Why are flagship projects such as the Nike-Opi Road dualisation incomplete? Why does the cost of living in the state remain punishing? In his framing, the number is either mismanaged abundance or inflated theatre - "a boast without impact."

On the other side stands the Chairman of the Enugu State Internal Revenue Service (ENSIRS), Emmanuel Nnamani, offering a structured defence. He traces the trajectory: N26.8 billion in 2022 (N16.2bn tax; N10.6bn non-tax), N37.4 billion in 2023, N180.5 billion in 2024 (with N150bn from non-tax sources), and now N406.77 billion in 2025, of which N355.2 billion (87.4 percent) is non-tax revenue, and N51.5 billion (12.6 percent) tax. The growth, he says, follows a strategic pivot under Governor Peter Mbah: asset optimisation, recovery of natural resources, revival of moribund enterprises like Sunrise Flour Mill and Niger Gas, plugging leakages, digitising collections, and reducing dependence on FAAC.

Between accusation and explanation lies the narrow corridor of public trust. The question is not whether numbers can grow. They can. The question is whether growth translates into felt development and whether the architecture of that growth is structurally sound. First, the scale of the leap deserves context. Moving from N26.8 billion in 2022 to N406.77 billion in 2025 represents a more than fifteen-fold increase in three fiscal cycles. Even accounting for inflation, currency volatility, and policy shifts, such acceleration is extraordinary. Ex-



traordinary claims do not automatically imply falsehood; they simply demand extraordinary transparency.

The composition of the 2025 figure is instructive. Tax revenue at N51.5 billion reflects a 72 percent rise from N30 billion in 2024, which is a strong but plausible expansion if compliance improved and the tax net widened. The real revolution is non-tax revenue: N355.2 billion. That is where the story thickens. Non-tax revenue is a capacious basket. It may include dividends from state-owned enterprises, fees, royalties, mineral proceeds, asset sales, concessions, fines, and other administrative receipts. When such a category accounts for nearly nine-tenths of total IGR, clarity becomes not optional but compulsory. What portion came from coal exploitation? Were the proceeds recurring royalties or one-off signature bonuses? Were there asset sales, equity divestments, or concession fees booked as revenue? What accounting standards govern the recognition of these inflows? Are they audited independently and published in disaggregated form?

Fiscal credibility is not built on aggregate numbers alone but on the granularity beneath them. Ani's critique about pension arrears and contractor payments strikes at the moral centre of governance. Pension obligations are not discretionary expenditure; they are deferred wages. If arrears persist, two explanations are possible. One: the revenue inflows are not as liquid or as recurrent as suggested; perhaps, they are tied to capital-intensive, long-gestation projects or earmarked uses. Two: prioritisation has favoured capital expansion over social obligations. Neither scenario automatically indicts the revenue figure, but both require explanation.

Cash flow is not the same as revenue. A state may record substantial inflows tied to specific projects or partnerships, yet face timing mismatches in meeting recurrent obligations. However, where

public perception sees unpaid retirees alongside headline billions, trust begins to wobble and erode. Optics matter because governance is also theatre; yet, it must be theatre anchored in substance. The ENSIRS chairman emphasises asset optimisation and the revival of dormant enterprises. If Sunrise Flour Mill and Niger Gas have indeed moved from liabilities to revenue-generating assets, that marks a structural shift. States that sweat their assets reduce dependency and enlarge fiscal space. Likewise, plugging leakages through technology can produce dramatic improvements in compliance and traceability. These are orthodox reforms in modern public finance.

However, asset-based revenue models carry risks. Natural resource proceeds can be volatile, subject to commodity cycles and contractual opacity. One-off windfalls can inflate annual figures without guaranteeing sustainability. If 87.4 percent of IGR rests on non-tax sources, the durability of that base must be demonstrated. A revenue revolution that depends on episodic extraction is a sprint; development requires a marathon. The projection of N870 billion IGR for 2026 intensifies the stakes. If achieved, Enugu would approach revenue levels that dwarf historical patterns for subnational entities in Nigeria. Such ambition is not inherently problematic; it signals confidence. All the same, projections untethered from publicly verifiable data risk converting fiscal policy into speculative fiction.

Ani's other charge concerns the lived economy: aggressive levies, enforcement actions, and a high cost of living. Here, subtlety is essential. The ENSIRS breakdown shows tax revenue at N51.5 billion, just 12.6 percent of total IGR. If accurate, this weakens the claim that residents are being "squeezed" solely to manufacture revenue headlines. However, perception may arise not from the quantum of tax revenue but from the manner of collection - multiple agencies, overlapping fees, or coercive enforcement can generate public resentment

even if the aggregate tax share is modest. Fiscal reform must therefore, be matched by regulatory reform. Efficiency in collection should not translate into intimidation in execution. Citizens are not revenue tools; they are shareholders in the state.

What then is the responsible position? First, the Enugu State Government should publish a comprehensive, independently audited breakdown of the N406.77 billion IGR. This should itemise non-tax sources: royalties, dividends, concessions, asset sales, fees, fines, and other receipts. It should clarify which inflows are recurrent and which are one-off. It should disclose contractual frameworks governing mineral and enterprise revenues. Transparency is not an admission of guilt; it is an inoculation against suspicion.

Second, expenditure patterns must be aligned visibly with revenue growth. Clearing pension arrears, settling certified contractor claims, and accelerating completion of high-impact infrastructure will convert arithmetic into evidence. Development is the proof of revenue. A road completed speaks louder than a spreadsheet circulated.

Third, sustainability must guide ambition. A tax-to-IGR ratio of 12.6 percent suggests heavy reliance on non-tax sources. Over time, a balanced mix is healthier. Robust, broad-based taxation - fairly administered - provides stability. Resource and asset income can supplement, but not substitute, a diversified revenue base.

Fourth, citizen engagement should deepen. Fiscal town halls, published quarterly performance reports, and open-data portals can bridge the trust deficit. In an era where numbers travel faster than context, proactive disclosure is strategic governance.

Chief Ani's scepticism, stripped of partisan colour, performs a democratic function. Opposition from within is not obstruction; it is audit by other means. Yet, critique must also concede the possibility of reform-driven success. If Enugu has indeed engineered a structural fiscal turnaround, it deserves acknowledgement, tempered by verification. The danger lies at both extremes: reflexive dismissal of any impressive figure as fabrication, and uncritical celebration of any large number as achievement. Governance is not a duel of press statements; it is a ledger that must balance in reality. Enugu's fiscal narrative now stands at a crossroads. It can become a model of subnational resource optimisation, showing how a state once dependent on federal allocations reclaims its economic spine. Or it can become another episode in Nigeria's long chronicle of announced abundance and experienced scarcity.

Ultimately, revenue is a means, not an end. The end is dignity for retirees who served their state, liquidity for contractors who built its roads, affordable living for its residents, and infrastructure that outlives press releases. The Nike-Opi road dualisation still reads more like a declaration than a destination, its progress lingering around ceremonial clearings and televised demolitions rather than sustained

construction. In Nsukka, the state's second largest urban centre, major arteries strain under neglect; Orba Road, delivered by the immediate past administration, has receded into a geography of potholes and patchwork. Promised Smart Schools in the zone remain more conceptual renderings than fully completed, commissioned institutions shaping young minds. If N406.77 billion has indeed been generated, its signature should not hover in budget speeches; it must settle tangibly in asphalt that endures the rains, classrooms that open their doors, hospitals that function without deficit, and pension arrears finally written off the ledger of neglect.

Numbers confer power; transparency confers legitimacy. Enugu has announced the former; it must now entrench the latter. Revenue proclaimed in columns must be traceable in concrete, steel, salaries, and settled obligations. A figure of N406.77 billion cannot remain an abstraction suspended in budget documents; it must descend into roads that endure the monsoon, schools that open with teachers and students inside them, hospitals that function beyond ribbon-cuttings, boreholes and pipe-born water taps that dispense water, and pension accounts no longer shadowed by arrears.

Public finance is ultimately a covenant. Every naira collected is a promissory note issued to the citizenry. The strength of that note lies not in the boldness of its headline but in the clarity of its ledger and the visibility of its outcomes. In the arithmetic of trust, addition is not performed on paper alone; it is tested in streets, markets, classrooms, and pay slips. Only when revenue survives the audit of lived experience does it mature from statistic to stewardship.

That the measured scepticism comes not from a rival political party but from within the ruling APC alters its weight. It is quite challenging to caricature an internal critic as a professional naysayer. A dissenting voice from the same political household reframes the debate from partisan sparring to institutional introspection. In that sense, the moment echoes the biblical admonition: "Medice, cura te ipsum" as captured in Luke 4:23 - 'Physician, heal thyself'. When scrutiny arises at home, it demands not deflection but demonstration.

The most effective rebuttal to doubt will not be rhetoric but records; not counter-accusation but completion; not projection but proof. If the numbers are sound, let them stand the test of disclosure and delivery. In doing so, government aligns its numbers with its nouns, its projections with its proofs, affirming that in the grammar of governance, words matter most when they are made flesh in transparent accounts and measurable outcomes, and that accountability constitutes the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations that gives public finance its meaning.

# Real Estate Market Updates

## with CHUKA UROKO

A Diary of Developments, Transactions, Appointments

## What growth in data centres means for real estate in Nigeria

**O**n an incremental basis, the number of data centres in Nigeria is growing, presenting implications for the real estate market in the country. By the last count, the number has hit 21 and this has not only positioned the country as a continental leader, but also as a regional digital hub.

It is expected that this rising number of centres will attract companies requiring Grade A office spaces, corporate housing for expatriate staff, and serviced apartments for business travel.

The demand particularly benefits submarkets where commercial space commands premium rents as the concentration of data centres has been shown to enhance property values in connected areas.

A new report by Panterra, a research and investment firm, confirms this, adding that the demand also creates development opportunities in underserved regions.

Ayo Ibaru, director of research and chief investment officer at Panterra, advises investors to target commercial properties near data centre clusters, and anticipate spill-over demand and infrastructure improvements.

An earlier report by Estate Intel, an African real estate market intelligence platform, notes that the data centre segment has emerged as the fastest-growing asset class in Nigeria's construction industry, with a development pipeline equivalent to 186.37 percent of



existing stock and total supply projected to exceed 218 megawatts (MW) by 2030.

The report, titled 'Lagos Real Estate Development Pipeline Report', revealed that Nigeria's data centre capacity is expected to grow from 56.1MW in 2025 to more than 218MW by 2030—representing over 3.7 folds increase.

"This growth is being driven by rising interest from major global players such as Equinix, OADC and Digital Realty, reinforcing the sector's strong development trajectory," Dolapo Omidire, Estate Intel's Founder/CEO, said.

Data centre construction has become increasingly more investor-friendly. Licenses approval is now taking shorter times, thereby encouraging more investors to take position, and also raising invest-

ment interest in real estate market.

According to the Panterra report, Airtel Nigeria will invest \$120 million in its Nxtre by Airtel Data Centre in Eko Atlantic. It aims to be Nigeria's largest upon completion in Q1 2026. The data centre will serve hyperscale cloud service providers.

The centre which sits on 28,000sqm, is designed as a carrier-neutral, 38MW IT load system in a G+5 building with two data halls per floor. This will support over 3,000 racks at up to 25 kW per rack.

It is expected that the market for data centre construction will reach \$565 million by 2029, up from \$250 million in 2024. Rising demand has led to developments in major cities. Lagos hosts most data centre construction in places like Lekki,

Oregun, Ikorodu, Eko Atlantic, Magbore, among others.

"The current data centre development focus is likely to accelerate due to increased demand," Ibaru hopes, noting that investors are seeking future infrastructure opportunities.

The growth of these centres is, however, not without some challenges such as high land, building, and electricity costs, which may stifle growth. Again, Nigeria's data centre strategy is a growing investor drag as internet use, fintech growth, and government digitisation demand safe, local data infrastructure.

Rising data centre growth is a global phenomenon as investment in the data centre market globally reached \$61 billion in 2025, according to an analysis by S&P Global, first reported by CNBC.

## Worries mount as short-lets fuel security breaches in gated communities

**W**orries are mounting among many Nigerians over the unchecked growth of the short-let apartment business and rising security breaches in gated communities, including highbrow neighbourhoods in the country's major cities, especially Lagos.

Growing business travels and the need for security and privacy have driven up demand for short-let rentals, turning prime neighbourhoods into playgrounds accessible not only to the highest bidders, but also to criminally minded elements.

Besides mounting pressure on urban housing markets, the growth of this new form of rentals has also brought with it security breaches, as was recently recorded in Banana Island in Lagos, where transient occupants punctured its security architecture.

Banana Island is an artificial island located off the foreshore of Ikoyi, Lagos. It is shaped like a real banana and is a well-planned mixed development, including residential, commercial, and recreational buildings.

The island is known for its upscale living, luxury properties, and high density of affluent residents, making it one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Nigeria, providing homes for the very rich and influential members of Nigerian society. The buzzwords for this enclave are security and exclusivity.

The reported arrest of eight suspected criminals, alleged to be occupants of the short-let apartments in that elite community, led to the ban of such facilities, including all Airbnb-style rentals, by the management of the estate.

A resident of the exclusive es-

tate, who spoke to BusinessDay, explained that the decision to ban the operations of the short-let apartments was aimed at protecting the estate's residents' security, privacy, and the peaceful coexistence in the community.

According to the resident, who said his mind was troubled and spoke on the condition of anonymity, the arrested suspected criminals were using short-term apartments as bases for robbery within the gated community.

"The management of the estate reasoned that the transient nature of short-term rentals undermines collective security and residents' privacy," the resident noted, stressing that the ban was a significant step towards maintaining the estate's reputation as a secure and exclusive enclave.

Banana Island is, however, not an isolated case in terms of robbery and sundry thieving in gated communities across many locations in Lagos. A lady who introduced herself simply as Bisi, also told BusinessDay that there have been many reported security breaches in the estate she lives in Ogbia area of Lagos.

"It is not long since some robbers were arrested in the estate where I live, and all of them were found out to be these short-stay tenants. They will come, rent an apartment for two-three days during which they strike and check out. And this happens in many other estates," Bisi stated.

Hakeem Odukale is the chairman of the landlords and residents' association in a moderate estate in the Ojo area of Lagos. He too told BusinessDay that all cases of robbery he has had to deal with in his estate are traced to short-stay tenants in one-room or two-room apartments in the estate.

## New ACEN leadership pledges to reposition profession for national devt

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

**T**he newly inaugurated leadership of the Association of Consulting Engineering in Nigeria (ACEN) has pledged to reposition consulting engineers as indispensable partners in Nigeria's development.

Kunle Adebajo, the new president of the association has therefore urged members to pursue impact, innovation and ethical leadership.

Adebajo explained that engineering remains central to national transformation, noting that infrastructure, healthcare, energy and technology all depend on the "deep-rooted application of engineering principles to transform ideas into practical solutions."



L-R: Noimot Salako-Oyedele, deputy governor of Ogun State; Kunle Adebajo, ACEN new president, his wife, Sylvia Adebajo, and Olufemi Daramola, representative of the Lagos State deputy governor, at the ACEN new president's investiture in Lagos recently

"Our priority is to position consulting engineers as indispensable partners in Nigeria's development journey; this means moving beyond just the role of technical service providers to becoming trusted advisors, policy advisors, and champions of sustainable development," he said.

Adebajo spoke in Lagos on Thursday during his investiture

ceremony, which drew government officials, industry leaders and members of the engineering community.

Declaring that "the stakes are very high," Adebajo said his presidency would be anchored on collaboration and collective action, warning that Nigeria's infrastructure deficit continues to threaten economic growth and competitiveness.

"Nigeria stands at crossroads. Our infrastructure deficit remains a major threat to economic growth and global business," he said.

He acknowledged progress in some areas but noted that "millions still lack access to reliable electricity, safe water, efficient transportation, and resilient public works." According to him, addressing these gaps requires not only investment, but

also innovation, intelligence and education.

He emphasised continuous professional development and global best practices, adding that consulting engineers must ensure projects meet "global standards of safety and efficiency."

He urged members to focus on measurable outcomes. "If we are doing our work and doing all our activities without impact, we are getting nothing. What we will be looking for is impact," he said.

In his lecture, Bambo Adebawale underscored the strategic importance of consulting engineers in national planning and execution, warning that sidelining technical expertise has severe consequences.

"I do not build bridges, but I cross them. I do not calculate load factors, but I'm grateful

that somebody does," he said, acknowledging the often understated but critical role engineers play in everyday life.

He observed that many infrastructure failures stem from compromised engineering processes.

"When more than half of major public infrastructure projects are delayed or cost overruns occur, it's rarely because the plan was not improved. It's usually because consulting engineering assumptions were ignored, rushed, underfunded, or compromised," he said.

Adebawale cautioned that the cost of engineering failures goes beyond finances. "When engineering fails in Nigeria, people pay. They pay with their lives. They pay with their money. They pay with safety, but above all, they pay with confidence," he said.

# Feature

## Food security or temporary relief? The battle for Nigeria's oil-seed future

TAOFEEK OYEDOKUN

**F**ood security is not defined at the port of entry. It is determined in the fields, in the mills, and in the rural households that depend on agriculture for survival. Yet Nigeria's vegetable oil industry, spanning palm, soybean, groundnut and other oilseeds, now finds itself squeezed between the pressure to liberalise trade and the realities of high-cost domestic production. Industry leaders say that without policy clarity and enforcement, the country risks sacrificing long-term self-reliance for short-term price relief.

From the palm estates of Cross River and Edo to soybean clusters in Benue and Niger, the strain is no longer theoretical. In less than two months, palm oil prices have dropped by nearly half, even as the industry approaches peak harvest. Smallholders are selling below cost. Refiners are operating below optimal capacity. Investors who committed capital to plantations with long gestation cycles are reassessing their exposure.

On one side is the government's push to ease food prices. On the other is the structural vulnerability of local production. Caught in between is a familiar policy cycle: borders loosen when inflation rises; protection returns only after producers are weakened.

At a national press conference on Wednesday, leaders across the vegetable oil value chain warned that the recent influx of imported oils and inconsistent enforcement of existing policies threaten to unravel more than two decades of gradual domestic recovery.

"Food security is not solely about ensuring that food is available and affordable today," Fatai Afolabi, a sustainability consultant and convener of the press conference, said. "It is also about safeguarding the capacity of local producers to continue producing tomorrow."

### A fragile sector rebuilt from near collapse

To understand the anxiety in the room, stakeholders traced the industry's history.

"In the 70s and 80s, even into the 90s, the palm oil industry was almost comatose," Emmanuel Ibru, chairman Plantation Owners Forum of Nigeria, said. "At the beginning of the present democratic structure, we had a lot of support from the Obasanjo government... the imposition of duties and the ban on refined vegetable oil helped protect the market."

Olusegun Obasanjo's administration introduced tariff protections and import restrictions



that encouraged domestic investment. According to Ibru, production rose from about 800,000 tonnes two decades ago to between 1.3 and 1.4 million tonnes today.

That growth attracted billions of dollars in capital from both foreign and local investors, including companies such as Okomu, Presco, Ellah Lakes, and the likes. Now, industry players argue that sudden policy reversals threaten those investments.

"Plantation is not something you do and after one year you start harvesting," said Okey Ikoro, chairman of the Vegetable and Edible Oil Producers Association of Nigeria (VEOPAN). "It has a long gestation period. If you cannot have policy that sustains this gestation period, how can you do more?"

Industry estimates suggest between two and three million Nigerians are directly or indirectly engaged in the oilseeds and vegetable oil value chain, from smallholders to transporters to refinery workers.

Ibru posed a fundamental question: "While you're trying to push down food prices, what's the point if the people meant to benefit don't have the jobs or resources to partake in it?"

### Price crash and the smallholder shock

For Alphonsus Inyang, president of the National Palm Produce Association of Nigeria, the immediate concern is the rural farmer.

"Currently, we are trading at a price that is 50% less than what it was just less than two months ago," he said. "We are selling at less than production price. This is not good enough for smallholder farmers who depend on this for school fees, for medicine, for the well-being of their households."

He linked the price collapse to what he described as uncontrolled inflows of palm oil through land and sea borders. According to him, "we have more than 300 entry points... more than 30 entry points through the waterways. And we keep seeing lorries and trailers leaving Oron, heading to every other part of the country."

Government is losing revenue. The farmers are being suppressed



through the influx of oil that comes in at very low prices," he added.

### Smuggling, policy drift and enforcement gaps

From the manufacturers' perspective, the problem is not just importation, but inconsistency.

Mohammed Tahir, chairman of the Vegetable Oil Sub-Sector of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, described government action as "a knee-jerk decision."

"You have a policy on ground... import prohibition on vegetable oil," he said. "All of a sudden there is a change of direction, a preference of trade over domestic production. What happened to enforcement?"

He pointed to Nigeria's earlier backward integration successes in cement and other sectors as proof that policy discipline works.

"When you talk of food security," Tahir added, "it is not only about bringing food into the country. If you are not self-reliant, the same foreign exchange issue can rise again and you fall back into the same trap."

### Soybean politics and the import question

In the soybean subsector, the debate carries its own political undertones. Ayodele Christopher Uwala, president of the Soybean Association of Nigeria, described soybean as "a political crop," alleging that strong interests are pushing for large-scale importation despite its impact on domestic producers.

"The will to import a lot of soybeans into the country is very, very high," he said. "If Nigeria is consuming 1.6 million tonnes and we produce 1.2 million, then only 400,000 should be imported. But there are no statistics. They just allow people with power to import."

Uwala also raised concerns about the quality of some imported products, warning that poor-quality materials could have health implications.

"Industries that were producing at 5 percent capacity have gone up to 60 percent because they are able to get materials. That is good," he said. "But what about the quality? What are the elements in those materials being crushed? It is going to affect the health status of Nigerians."

closures alone. High production costs remain real: expensive fertilizer, unreliable power, insecurity in farming communities, limited mechanization, and weak statistical data.

Uwala highlighted the need for targeted input support: "If government is ready to give necessary inputs, the farmers are ready to produce at all costs."

"We have advocated that tractors acquired by government should be given to associations, not just to governors," he said.

The crisis, therefore, exposes two overlapping tensions: Short-term consumer relief versus long-term production stability and trade liberalisation versus strategic sector protection.

Nigeria consumes an estimated three million tonnes of palm oil annually, though even industry leaders admit official data remains unclear.

The domestic market is worth billions of dollars. Yet, according to stakeholders, Nigeria now controls barely a third of it.

"Every single drop of oil that comes into Nigeria creates employment in another country," Ikoro said.

The oil palm tree is often called the "tree of life" in Southeast Asia, a symbol of rural transformation and industrial growth. In Nigeria, it remains a contested commodity, oscillating between neglect and political intervention.

The choice before policymakers is not simply about cheaper oil at the port. It is about whether Nigeria will remain a consumption market or rebuild itself as a production powerhouse.

For now, the farmers are watching the prices. The refiners are watching their balance sheets. And the investors are watching policy signals.

In agriculture, timing is everything. Miss a planting season, and you lose a year. Miss a policy window, and you may lose a generation.

"A food strategy that feeds the nation today must also empower those who will feed it tomorrow," Afolabi, the convener of the conference, said.

# Analysis

## CBN: Tackling inflation with monetary policy tools, structural reforms

MICHAEL NWADIKE

The steep decline in Nigeria's inflation rate from 34.8 per cent as of December 2024 to 15.15 percent last December was largely driven by the monetary policy easing and positive outcome of key reforms instituted by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The reforms enhanced FX stability, spike in foreign reserves to \$46.8 billion and exchange rate stability. As the MPC meets on February 23 and 24th, many stakeholders expect the apex bank-led monetary policy committee to continue prioritising macroeconomic stability that would accelerate disinflation to single digit, expand FX inflows and support stronger naira.

The rapid moderation in inflation rate, rising competitiveness of the naira and growth in foreign reserves all point to a positive phase in Nigeria's economic journey.

Already, Nigeria's headline inflation rate dropped to 15.15 percent in December 2025, down 2.18 percentage points from 17.33 percent in November, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported.

The NBS Consumer Price Index (CPI) report for December 2025 also showed that inflation remains significantly lower than the 34.8 percent recorded in December 2024.

Food inflation, a major component of overall inflation, also recorded a sharp decline. On a year-on-year basis, it stood at 10.84 percent in December 2025, down from 39.84 percent in December 2024. The decrease was largely driven by falling prices of tomatoes, garri, eggs, potatoes, carrots, millet, vegetables, plantain, beans, wheat grain, groundnut, pepper, and onions.

The NBS data underscores continued moderation in price pressures across the country, signaling a positive trend for households and policymakers managing inflationary challenges.

### Why inflation rate is on decline

The CBN says structural reforms are beginning to filter through to the broader economy, helping to stabilise the naira and ease lending rates as inflation continues to moderate.

For the apex bank, the monetary policy actions reflect a deliberate strategy to restore macroeconomic stability after years of fiscal and external pressures.

These developments reflect the commitment and focus of the bank's leadership in restoring stability to the financial system, lowering lending rates are emerging as one of the tangible outcomes of the CBN's policy trajectory.

The CBN said alignment of fiscal and monetary policies is indispensable at a time when technological innovation and digital finance are rapidly transforming the financial landscape.

### Push for lower interest rate

The CBN-led MPC had last November, retained the benchmark interest rate at 27 percent, extending its pause



Olayemi Cardoso, CBN governor

on monetary tightening as the bank seeks to consolidate recent progress in stabilising prices, exchange rates, and capital flows.

CBN Governor, Olayemi Cardoso, said the MPC voted by a majority "to maintain the monetary policy stance," adding that members were convinced that the economy required more time for earlier decisions to filter through.

He signaled that the bank was sticking to its disinflation strategy despite calls from parts of the private sector for more easing to reduce borrowing costs.

It was observed that the decision marks the fourth time last year that the MPC has held the benchmark rate steady, following a 50-basis-point cut in September—the only reduction since the aggressive tightening cycle of 2024, during which rates were raised six times to curb inflation and support the naira.

The committee also adjusted the corridor around the benchmark rate to +50/-450 basis points and retained the Cash Reserve Ratio at 45 percent for deposit money banks, 16 percent for merchant banks, and 75 per cent for non-TSA public-sector deposits.

The liquidity ratio was kept unchanged at 30 per cent. According to the communiqué, the stance was underpinned by the need "to sustain the progress made so far towards achieving low and stable inflation," adding that future policy choices would remain "evidence-based and data-driven."

The bank attributed inflation rate decline to sustained monetary tightening, improved FX market stability, higher capital inflows, and relative calm in fuel prices.

Cardoso noted that investors who had previously stayed away due to volatility were returning, noting that "after stability comes investment, and after investment comes growth."

He said Nigerians would "in the fullness of time" begin to feel the effect of the current stability as investment strengthened job creation and incomes.

### Monetary policy decisions impact

The CBN's decision adjusting the Standing Facility corridor around the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) at +50/-450 basis points, represents sanction against banks not keen on lending to

real sector.

By adjusting the Standing Facility corridor around the MPR from +250/-250 basis points to +50/-450 basis points, banks taking excess deposits to CBN instead of lending to businesses, will now be paid 450 basis points below the 27 percent benchmark interest rate.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC's) decision was underpinned by the need to sustain the progress made so far towards achieving low and stable inflation. The MPC reaffirmed its commitment to a data-driven assessment of developments and outlook to guide future policy decisions.

Confirming the development, Managing Financial Derivatives company Limited, Bismarck Rewane, said that by reducing the amount CBN pays to banks taking idle funds to its vaults, will accelerate lending.

For the MPC to adjust the asymmetric corridor, means that the apex bank will not be paying much to banks for keeping money idle at the Central Bank, which is the key thing.

Rewane explained that the CBN's decision, which signals positive yields on short-term assets, will continue to strengthen portfolio capital inflows, support the naira, and reinforce the disinflation path.

"The MPC's decision also reflects current global trends emphasising central bank autonomy and independence, as seen in most advanced economies," he said.

"The next MPC meeting is in February 2026. In the coming days, a cautious "wait-and-see" approach is expected, with T-bill rates and debt management policies under close scrutiny. The naira will likely trade in a range of N1,450–N1,500/\$ in the near term, while GDP growth is projected at 3.9 per cent in 2025 and 4.2 per cent in 2026. However, 2026 presents key risks of imponderables and exogenous shocks, including a likely fall in the price of Brent to \$55pb," he said.

Rewane added: "We believe that the MPC will most likely cut the policy rate by 100bps to 26 percent per annum at its February 2026 meeting. This dovish stance by the CBN should in no way undermine the current gradual decline in inflation."

Other analysts said that Monetary Policy is always

conducted by influencing monetary and credit conditions to achieve set macroeconomic goals, and by adjusting the Standing Facility corridor around the MPR, the intention is to boost lending to the domestic economy.

### More loans to private sector

The CBN's money and credit statistics showed that N74.41 trillion credit was extended to the private sector in October.

The figure represents improvement from N72.53 trillion in September, and an increase of about N1.88 trillion represents a month-on-month growth.

It represents the strongest positive movement so far in 2025.

On a year-on-year basis, credit to the private sector increased only slightly, from N74.07 trillion in October 2024 to N74.41 trillion in October.

The modest annual gain shows that while the stock of private credit is broadly back to where it was a year earlier, the real story is the short-term rebound that followed the September rate cut.

Cardoso said MSMEs remain central to our efforts. Last year alone, microfinance lending expanded by over 14 per cent, and new digital-credit products reached more than 1.2 million small enterprises — evidence of the sector's growing depth and capacity. We are improving access to credit, supporting microfinance institutions, and expanding financial products tailored to smaller enterprises.

"The Central Bank of Nigeria will continue to steer monetary policy with discipline, anchored firmly to its core mandate of price stability. Stability remains the bedrock upon which investment flourishes, resources are allocated efficiently, and purchasing power is protected. In 2026, we will deepen engagement with stakeholders, strengthen collaboration with other regulators and international partners, and foster responsible innovation across the financial system," he said.

**Reserves record significant increase**  
Nigeria's gross external reserves rose to \$46.8 billion as of February 4, marking the highest level in eight years, with capacity to cover 14 months imports for the country.

The reserves position represents an 18.9 percent increase from \$38.88 billion in January 2025. The improvement is attributed to increased oil exports, diaspora inflows, and foreign portfolio investments.

Rewane, said stronger external reserves have helped to ease pressure on the naira, which appreciated by 0.65 percent to N1,385/\$.

"This is the strongest level of the naira in the last two years when it was N1,329.65/\$ in May, 2024. Improved reserve buffers have also lifted import cover to 14 months, helping reduce exchange-rate pass-through to inflation, lower input-cost volatility for small and medium-sized businesses, and support household purchasing power and consumer confidence ahead of the pre-election year," he said.

He estimated the fair value of the naira at about N1,257 to the US dollar.

Rewane posits that the local currency is undervalued by approximately 11 percent when assessed using the purchasing power parity (PPP) model.

He noted that currencies typically converge towards their PPP-implied values over a five-year horizon.

According to him, the appropriate exchange rate based on current PPP estimates stands at N1,256.79 to the dollar, reinforcing the view that the naira remains below its fair valuation level.

President, Association of Bureaux De Change Operators of Nigeria (ABCON), Aminu Gwadabe, said the naira has remained stable across market for several months, ending years of volatility in the market.

Other factors driving reserves build up include improved FX inflows, higher oil receipts, increased remittances through official channels and renewed interest from foreign portfolio investors following FX market reforms instituted by the Cardoso-led CBN.

Overall, strong reserves position will continue to bolster exchange rate and promote financial sector stability.

Other industry data shows that Nigeria's external reserves were last at this level on August 27, 2018, when it stood at \$45.9 billion.

The reserve build-up signals stronger buffers for import cover and currency stability, reflecting steady inflows and improved foreign exchange management since the forex reforms began, as the country prepares for a general election.

The founder/Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for the Promotion of Public Enterprise (CPPE), Dr Muda Yusuf, hinted at a positive outlook for Nigeria's external reserves as he does not see anything derailing the forex and fiscal reforms that have brought about stability and improvement in external reserves.

Other analysts said the growth in the external reserves can only be sustained in 2026 if the CBN avoids excessive FX intervention, fiscal authorities are restrained from spending pressures and the FX reforms are not reversed.

They said, "Historically, election cycles in Nigeria tend to introduce policy uncertainty, FX demand pressure, and capital flow reversals. So, while reserves can be sustained in the short term, maintaining this momentum throughout an election year will depend on discipline."

The CBN had, in its 2026 Macroeconomic Outlook for Nigeria, projected that Nigeria's external reserve would rise to \$51.04 billion in 2026, supported by stronger oil earnings, foreign exchange (FX) market reforms, and improved external inflows.

The apex bank said the outlook reflects higher oil revenues, increased bond issuance, sustained diaspora remittances, FX market reforms, and expanded domestic refining capacity.

• Nwadike is an Abuja-based financial analyst

# Reminiscence

## The journey of resilience in the face of adversity and uncertainty - Fintiri's book reveals

HAPPY ZAROKADA, Yola

The city of Yola and its surroundings were unusually lively on this particular Monday in February 2026. From the early hours of the morning, the ancient city remained calm. It welcomed an extraordinary mix of prominent figures, including politicians, religious leaders, scholars, policymakers, civil society leaders, students, and community members from within and outside Nigeria.

At the centre of the gathering was reflection and a focus on the 2023 general election in Adamawa State. The people of Adamawa State, alongside dignitaries from across Nigeria, came together to unveil a book that narrates a story of grit, resistance, and triumph in the political landscape of the century.

Yet, beyond the symbolism of political flow and royal drums, the ceremony stood out as a powerful meditation on mentorship, humility, and the enduring importance of good human relations. Titled, 'Fintiri: The Man They Could Not Stop,' the book is more than a biography; it is a political chronicle and a testament to resilience in the face of adversity and uncertainty.

The book celebrates the life and leadership journey of Governor Ahmadu Umar Fintiri, a man whose political rise has been marked by determination, widespread popular support, and an unwavering commitment to the people's mandate. It captures not only his achievements in office but also the turbulent path



that tested his resolve and, ultimately, strengthened his legacy.

Fintiri emerged as governor of Adamawa State following the 2019 general election, riding on the collective will of the people. His administration quickly made its mark across key sectors, earning widespread approval and consolidating public trust.

Roads were built, institutions strengthened, and governance took on a renewed sense of purpose. For many indigenes, his leadership represented a break from the past and a promise of stability and progress.

That growing popularity, however, set the stage for one of the most dramatic political contests in Adamawa's history.

The book devotes significant attention to the 2023 gubernatorial

election, which became a national talking point. Described as a fierce tug-of-war, the contest nearly descended into controversy when the people's mandate appeared poised to be hijacked.

In a stunning and unprecedented move, the suspended Resident Electoral Commissioner, Hudu Yunusa-Ari, declared the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate, Senator Aishatu Dahiru Ahmed Binani, the winner of the election before collation was completed.

The declaration sparked outrage, confusion, and tension across the state and beyond. But within hours, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) at its national headquarters nullified the announcement, reaffirming the

rule of law and restoring credibility to the process.

What followed was a reaffirmation of the people's voice.

When the dust settled, Governor Fintiri emerged victorious with approximately 431,000 votes, defeating Senator Binani, who secured about 399,000 votes. The outcome not only validated his re-election but also reinforced his image as a leader whose political journey, though challenged, could not be derailed.

"Fintiri: The Man They Could Not Stop" chronicles these moments with clarity and boldness, exposing the political intrigues, power plays, and mischief that defined the election season. It tells the story of a man tested by opposition and circumstance, yet anchored by

popular support and institutional justice.

More than a book launch, the event in Yola became a moment of reflection on democracy, resilience, and the power of the people's mandate. The conversations it has sparked continue well beyond its pages, positioning the book as both a historical document and a call to safeguard democratic values.

In telling Governor Fintiri's story, the book ultimately tells a larger story about Adamawa State itself: a people determined to choose their leaders and defend their choices, no matter the odds.

Beyond the glitz of its unveiling, the book quickly entered another arena altogether - the unforgiving court of public opinion. What followed was an intense wave of scrutiny, political X-ray, admiration, and sharp criticism, played out largely on the ever-restless social media space.

For some readers and commentators, the title itself became the first battleground. They argued that it was sentiment-laden and subtly targeted at certain ethnic nationalities, raising concerns that rather than preaching unity, the book risked reinforcing divisions. In their view, even if Governor Ahmadu Umar Fintiri's political journey formed the backbone of the narrative, the choice of title projected a message that many found unsettling and at odds with the ideals of collective struggle and shared progress.

Others, however, saw the work as a bold political chronicle — one that unapologetically documented the realities of power, resistance, and survival in Adamawa's political landscape. To them, the discomfort it generated was proof that the book had struck a sensitive nerve.

Among the most pointed reactions came from Umar Ardo, a governorship aspirant under the platform of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). In a widely circulated post, Ardo questioned the depth of the author's research and offered a sharp counter-narrative to the book's central premise. He wrote: "If Kumangar had conducted in-depth research on Fintiri's rise, he would have titled his book: 'Fintiri: The Man They Made Governor'!"

Ardo's remark further fueled the debate, drawing a clear line between those who viewed Fintiri's ascent as a product of personal political resilience and those who believed it was the outcome of collective forces, structures, and alliances.

In the end, the controversy only amplified the book's visibility, ensuring that it was not merely read, but argued over, a testament to its place in the ongoing political conversation of Adamawa State and beyond.



# Other Side of Borno

## Tourism: Despite insurgency, Maiduguri is new destination for real estate

OLATUNJI OMIRIN, Maiduguri

**B**orno, a globally pitied axis of insecurity, is rewriting its story: from terror to business, tourism, and real estate development, underscoring the message that the troubled Lake Chad shores entity is striding out of its predicaments into possibilities for global investors to explore.

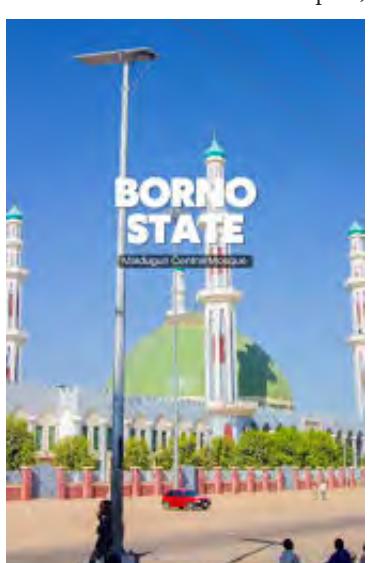
Most spectacular in this story-rewriting process is the transformation of upscaling urbanisation of the state's capital city, Maiduguri, and other principal towns to keep pace with the restoration of peace and security, which most strikingly shows the construction of New Maiduguri, and the general transformation of land use from an age-old, fraudulent and accountability-weak traditional system to digital platforms.

Starting with the construction of New Maiduguri city, necessitated by the city's rapid expansion and the urgent need to decongest the city, the state government, through the Borno Geographic Information Service (BOGIS), has embarked on the construction of a 136-kilometre Ring Road cutting through the Maiduguri Metropolitan, Mafa, Konduga and Jere Local Government Areas.

Last year, Gov. Zulum flagged off the construction of the road. Accordingly, the new city is to be developed on both sides of the Ring Road. BOGIS has designed five layout templates, and is already allocating plots according to their classifications and the choice of the respective individual or corporate applicants: High, Medium or Low-density areas; residential or business/corporate.

Most striking in this development, however, is the frenzy among estate developers and industrialists already acquiring plots. These include building a solar panel plant, another gas plant, numerous filling stations, and an inland dry port.

Aside from this, there is also an industrial hub in the area. The Governor Zulum administration is currently building Kashim Ibrahim University Teaching Hospital and staff quarters, as well as the Mai Mala Buni estate and a modern trailer park,



Borno State



Gov. Zulum

all situated around these new layouts.

Seven estate developers are among the topmost on the list of investors that have applied for plots to establish business enterprises. Three of these have started building massive housing estates, while the other four are finishing their paperwork.

"We are telling the whole world that Borno is safe for investors and they should come and invest in the Borno economy. Some of these investors are from Abuja and Lagos; many have reached out to us, but we are taking our time studying their MoU," Engr. Bababe, the Executive Secretary of BOGIS, announced.

"The layouts we are presenting today are not merely parcels of land. They represent Governor Professor Babagana Umara Zulum's unwavering commitment to urban renewal and sustainable development as enshrined in our 25-Year Development Plan and its 10-Year Implementation Strategy."

Business Day reports that nearly two years ago, Governor Zulum flagged off the ring road that encompasses the entire Maiduguri metropolitan area, connecting critical locations from Njimtilo Axis through Gwange, Tungushe, and the Chad Basin Research Institute area, extending to Dalori, Silvaz in Mafa, and returning to Njimtilo near the University of



Pyramids peanut bags Maiduguri



Relaxation by the sea

Maiduguri Teaching Hospital.

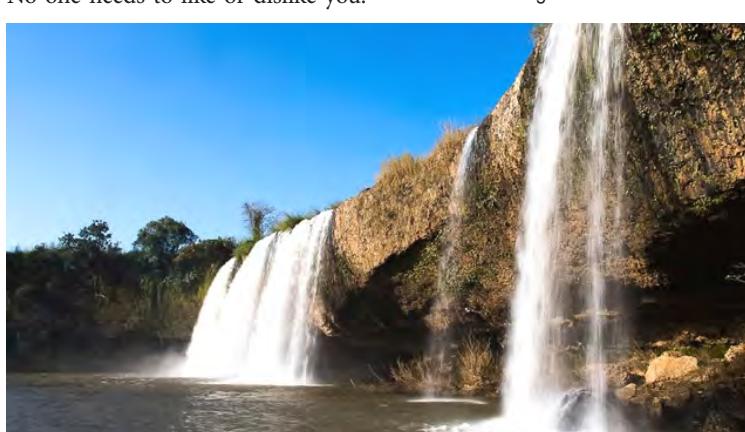
He added that phase one of the project, spanning 16.5 kilometres, is already underway with 10 kilometres paved and fully operational. Along this transformative corridor, BOGIS has meticulously designed multiple residential and commercial layouts to accommodate the state's growing population and facilitate economic expansion.

"As of today, we have launched four layouts comprising 2,777 plots, offering a mixture of residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational spaces. Within the week, a fifth layout with an additional 2,100 plots will be released, bringing our total to approximately 4,300 plots available for allocation."

He continued, "What makes this initiative truly revolutionary is not simply the impressive number of plots, but rather the seamless, transparent, and corruption-free digital process through which they are being allocated to deserving citizens."

"Gone are the days when you needed to interact with officials, pay bribes, or seek connections to secure land allocation," Bababe declared emphatically, his words resonating with an audience all too familiar with past frustrations.

"Our new system operates with zero human interface. You apply online, your application is processed online, and approval is granted online. No one needs to know your face. No one needs to like or dislike you."



Water falls

The system is fair, transparent, and incorruptible.

"For citizens less familiar with digital technology, BOGIS has thoughtfully incorporated a representative appointment feature, allowing applicants to designate trusted individuals to manage their applications on their behalf, with all such arrangements fully documented within the system for complete accountability and transparency."

"Demonstrating remarkable technical mastery and urban planning expertise, BOGIS has segmented the available plots into three carefully designed density categories to accommodate different needs and budgets. High-density plots measure 450 square meters, equivalent to the traditional 50 feet by 100 feet plot size, and prices range from 750,000 naira to 4 million naira, depending on location."

Medium density plots range from 600 to 900 square meters, offering more spacious options for those seeking additional land. Low-density plots measure 1,200 square meters, providing premium residential space in the most desirable locations. Furthermore, plots are classified by their proximity to the main Ring Road into front, middle, and rear categories, with pricing carefully adjusted to reflect market value, accessibility, and development potential.

Bababe noted that it had adopted strategies to control the circulation of fake land titles. He emphasised that since the inception of Zulum's administration, reforms have been made to make lands accessible and affordable to the general public.

He said, "In the current dispensation, the Borno State government placed greater emphasis on the issues of land reform, particularly land titling and has delegated some of its powers of approving consent to the commissioner to facilitate the proper functioning of land titling."

Since he was appointed Executive Secretary of the Borno Geographic Information Service (BOGIS), Adam



Hotels in Maiduguri

Bababe has presided over one of the most ambitious and successful transformations in the history of land administration in Borno State.

For instance, Bababe's achievements could be described as a fusion of administrative innovation and cultural patriotism. BOGIS has not only achieved unprecedented institutional efficiency but has also restored critical elements of Borno's cultural identity.

One of the most significant efforts in this regard was the restoration of Maiduguri's original street names, many of which had been replaced over time with names that bore no relevance to the state's heritage.

However, these actions reflect a deliberate effort to protect Borno's indigenous values from what he described as creeping cultural imperialism.

The restoration of historically and culturally appropriate street names has symbolised renewed pride and ownership among local communities, strengthening ties between citizens and their environment.

The results achieved by BOGIS over the five years from 2020 to 2024 provide a compelling case study in public-sector transformation. During this period, the agency conducted valuation assessments for compensation in 1,610 cases and successfully executed 1,604 valuation assignments.

Additionally, 597 survey and subdivision assignments were carried out, with only 45 cases left untreated, an efficiency rate rarely recorded in public land administration anywhere in Nigeria.

In the grants and allocations area, the agency processed 6,713 requests, received 6,102 files, and fully processed 6,005 of them. Only 97 files remained pending, underscoring the high operational throughput achieved under Bababe's leadership.

Further data from 2021 to 2024 reinforces the agency's performance. Within that timeframe, 2,098 valuation files were received, and 1,708 approvals were issued by the Governor. Another 449 files were processed following payment of the required consents, and 764 cases involving surrender and subdivision were successfully completed.

Many attribute the success to a combination of leadership integrity, system automation, and consistent performance monitoring. The agency's revenue collection has improved markedly, with previously overlooked or infrequently paid charges now being remitted promptly. This has contributed to the growth of the Borno State government's internally generated revenue.

More importantly, BOGIS's activities in recent years have helped demystify land ownership processes for ordinary citizens, many of whom previously viewed land administration as inaccessible and riddled with bureaucracy. Indeed, with urbanisation and land digitisation, Borno is rising from the terror to trade and tourism in the northeast region and beyond.

# News Feature

## NDDC looks up to new governance structure for consolidation

IGNATIUS CHUKWU

**S**uccess without succession, according to management experts, is failure. The present administration in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) led by Samuel Ogbuku, a youth and one of those who led aspects of the Niger Delta struggle, is credited with reordering the intervention agency.

He launched what he called transition from Transaction to Transformation, and many said this has positioned the NDDC into being proactive and into executing projects and programmes successfully with less rancour, acrimony or scandals.

Now, with stability in both the Commission and the region, the management has announced plans to achieve succession of ideas and activities. Thus, Ogbuku has affirmed that the Commission has started implementing a new 'Governance Advisory Report' as part of its strategy to consolidate its performance and reposition itself for greater impact in the year ahead.

Speaking during a two-day NDDC Management Retreat at the Landmark Events Centre, Owerri, Imo State, Ogbuku noted that the retreat focused on strengthening governance and improving project and service delivery.

The 2026 NDDC Management Retreat was anchored on the theme: "Consolidating Performance and Repositioning the Commission for Strategic Impact in 2026." It had in attendance the topmost executive directors of the Commission including Boma Iyaye, Victor Antai, Ifedayo Abe-gunde, and all the directors of the Commission.

The NDDC CEO stated that the Commission was already implementing the Governance Advisory Report, prepared by the multinational business management consultancy firm, KPMG, to facilitate its transition from transaction to transformation.

According to him, the KPMG report provides the tool for a new institutional culture, anchored in sound ethics and good corporate governance, to improve NDDC's



Chiedu Ebie, NDDC board chairman

internal processes and protocols.

He urged members of the NDDC Governing Board and Management Committee to be deliberate in avoiding the mistakes of the past, though the experiences shaped the Commission's present reality.

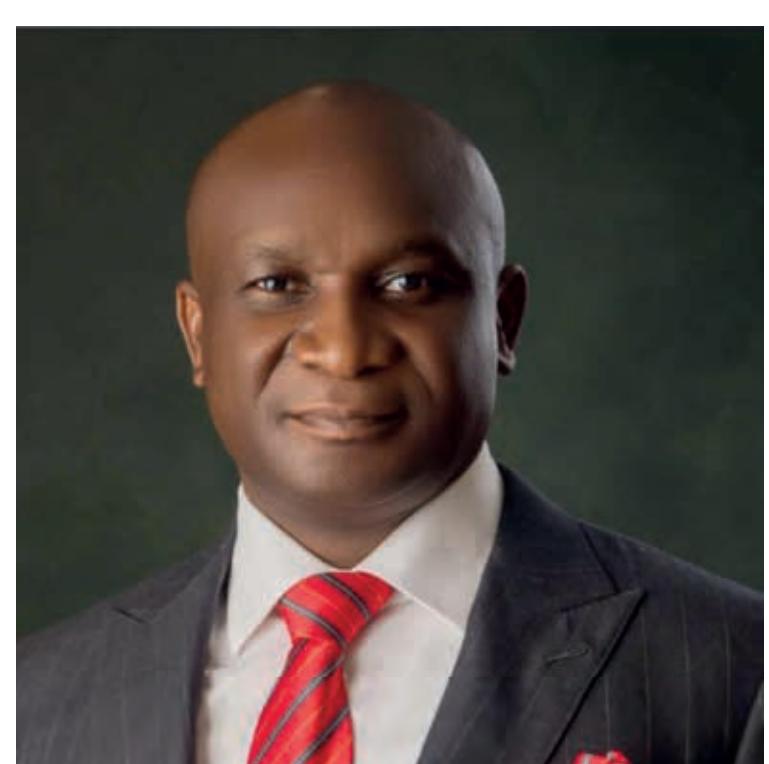
Ogbuku declared: "The 2026 NDDC Management Retreat offers a strategic platform for us to deepen our collective understanding of the Commission's Standard Operating Procedures, SOP, and code of conduct, which remain the foundation of our service delivery. It is an opportunity to reflect on our institutional values, reassess our operational processes, and ensure that our actions consistently align with

the Commission's mandate and expectations of the public.

"Beyond policy discussions, this gathering calls for a renewed commitment to strengthening internal cohesion, collaboration, and mutual accountability across all levels of the organisation. By fostering unity of purpose, improving communication, and reinforcing ethical standards, we can enhance efficiency, promote transparency, and position the Commission to deliver greater impact in the Niger Delta region.

"Let us therefore, use this retreat not only as an opportunity for reflection, but as a catalyst for innovation, teamwork, and sustained institutional excellence."

Ogbuku called on the Direc-



Samuel Ogbuku, NDDC MD/CEO

tors to practice good governance by implementing the basic rules, practices, and processes of corporate governance and adopting a set of relationships among the organisation's board, management, and key stakeholders.

Speaking earlier, Patterson Ogon, the NDDC Director, Planning, Research and Statistics, affirmed that the Commission remained committed to facilitating sustainable development across the Niger Delta. "Achieving this mandate, however, requires deliberate planning, strong coordination, and a shared sense of purpose," he said.

He stated further: "This retreat provides a structured platform to set a clear direction for

2026. It offers an opportunity for performance review and stock-taking, particularly regarding project delivery and the Commission's strategic agenda. It also enables Management to clearly define roles and responsibilities, align priorities, and establish action-oriented outcomes.

"Above all, the retreat reinforces our accountability framework and strengthens our performance architecture, ensuring that our collective efforts translate into measurable impact for the people of the Niger Delta."

Ogon, noted that the retreat aimed to evaluate past performance and set a transformative agenda for the region's development in the coming year.

Speaking on the topic, "Consolidating Organisational Performance Through Human Capital, Change, and Team Alignment," Dada Joseph Olugbenga, the lead presenter and director of studies at the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), urged the NDDC to emphasise teamwork and strive for robust engagement on key issues affecting the Niger Delta region.

According to Seledi Thompson-Wakama Director, Corporate Affairs, Olugbenga advised the NDDC to focus on consolidating performance, strengthening governance, and repositioning the Commission for greater strategic impact.



Cross section of NDDC management and staff at the training.

# News Extra

## Lagos Energy Summit 2026 to kick start bankable power projects

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

**B**uilding on the success of its maiden edition, the Lagos Energy Summit 2026 is positioned as a high-impact investment and policy platform aimed at accelerating energy access, improving service reliability, and mobilising private sector capital into Lagos State's power sector.

Lagos State Government, through the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, announced the second edition of the Lagos Energy Summit, scheduled to hold from Monday, May 18 to Wednesday, May 20, 2026, at the Lagos Oriental Hotel, Victoria Island.

The Summit reflects a strategic shift from regulatory reform to bankable project execution, following the implementation of the Lagos State Electricity Law 2024, which provides a robust framework for subnational electricity governance and investment.

The Summit, themed "Lagos Energy Evolution: Transforming the Future," will convene government leaders, regulators, financiers, developers, and innovators to advance actionable solutions to Lagos State's critical energy challenges, including grid constraints, energy poverty, and over-dependence on fossil fuels.

Discussions will focus on scaling renewable energy solu-



tions, expanding decentralised generation, strengthening distribution infrastructure, and supporting Lagos State's transition to a 24-hour economy.

The Summit will be hosted under the leadership of Mr. Babajide Olusola Sanwo-Olu, Governor of Lagos State, with Dr. Kadri Obafemi Hamzat, Deputy Governor, serving as Co-Host.

The event will be strategically coordinated by the Commissioner for Energy and Mineral Resources, Honorable Biodun Ogunleye, who also serves as the Summit's Team Lead, alongside key stakeholders in the energy sector.

Speaking ahead of the Summit, Biodun Ogunleye noted that the event "will not only review progress recorded since the enactment of the Lagos State Electricity Law but will also catalyse actionable partnerships that deliver measurable outcomes across

the generation, transmission, and distribution value chains."

Over the three-day programme, participants will engage in plenary sessions, technical masterclasses, investment roundtables, exhibitions, and curated B2B matchmaking sessions, with expected outcomes including the execution of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), public-private partnership frameworks, and pipeline project commitments, as well as technical site visits to key energy infrastructure projects across Lagos State.

With an anticipated attendance of over 4,000 participants, both onsite and virtual, and strong regional and international media coverage, the Lagos Energy Summit 2026 is positioned to deliver tangible solutions that advance Lagos State's long-term goal of sustainable, reliable, and inclusive energy access for residents and

businesses.

Lagos historically has been plagued with persistent energy supply crises which is amplified by the volume of dirty fuel deployed and blackouts which has been a daily experience.

The first audacious attempt at resolving the energy challenges was the Enron Badges IPP initiated by the then Governor Tinubu (in December 6, 1999) and who is also the president that signed off the Electricity Bill that empowers subnationals to have regulatory oversight over electricity in their respective states.

Overtime, the Lagos State Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources has evolved as the apex organ of government to ensure the vision of "Energy for all" is realised with the context of making the city a 24hrs economy and a choice destination for investment, entertainment and social activities.

## Greensprings School's students achieve high ratings in 2024/25 IGCSE examination

BLESSING ADIMABUA

**F**ive graduates of Greensprings School have made Nigeria proud by emerging at the top in the recently released results of the 2024/25 International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) examination.

The five students who all graduated from Greensprings School are Temilola Afolake Okeniyi, Kanyekene Jasmine Njoku, David Ayodeji Ayodele, Riritarioluwa Daniel Doherty and Osinachi Josh Okwara. They were also

among the top five performers for the year.

According to the recently released 2024/25, Temilola Afolake Okeniyi achieved an impressive 8 A and 1 A grades; Kanyekene Jasmine Njoku achieved 8 A and 1 A grades; David Ayodeji Ayodele secured 8 A grades while Riritarioluwa Daniel Doherty and Osinachi Josh Okwara each recorded 7 A and 2 A grades.

Across the broader cohort, many students earned multiple distinctions in core subjects, including Mathematics, English Language, and the Sciences, aligning with inter-

national benchmarks for the Cambridge IGCSE curriculum. The results highlighted students' ability to demonstrate strong subject mastery, critical thinking, and consistent academic focus.

Commending the achievements of the students, Feyisara Ojugo, deputy director of Education of Greensprings School, Lagos, said the results achieved by the students reflect a strong culture of academic discipline and excellence of the school.

She noted that 2024/25 performance reflected Greensprings School's continued

commitment to maintaining high academic standards and providing an environment that supports student achievement.

"These outcomes at this level typically indicate strong instructional systems, structured academic support, and early preparation strategies that help students perform confidently in external examinations," she said.

She further stated that these results also provided a strong foundation for students progressing into advanced academic pathways, including the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and other pre-university qualifications.

"Looking ahead to the 2025/2026 academic session, expectations remain high as the school continues to build on this momentum, sustain academic excellence, and equip students with the skills required to thrive in increasingly competitive global learning environments," she said.



## Brand promotes culture of sharing, family bonding at Ramadan

JOHN SALAU

**A**s Muslim faithful commence this year's holy month of Ramadan, a global appliance company, is urging Nigerians to ignite the culture of giving while also promoting family bonding all through the month of Ramadan.

Tagged 'Midea Ramadan', the campaign will feature activities aimed at supporting the Nigerian Muslim communities by feeding and sharing of gifts that will help the faithful make the most of the fasting season.

The brand will be spreading the message of love, giving and sharing among Muslims in three major cities (Lagos, Ibadan and Kano), while emphasising the importance of small domestic appliances (SDAs) using these appliances in making meals for breaking of fast (Iftar).

Kenneth Ekwueme, marketing manager, Midea Nigeria, stated that research has proven that breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

According to him, the brand will leverage various

platforms to support Muslims through the holy month of Ramadan to reflect, prepare their zakat offerings and encourage family and friends.

"Muslim faithful fast for long hours. Midea small domestic appliances can be used to prepare some of the most nutritious meals for balancing the protein and calcium that the body needs in the face of long hours of fasting," Ekwueme stated.

He added that the brand partnered with selected chefs and has developed nutritious and nourishing recipes – all infused with the goodness with Midea small appliances that make preparing Sahur and Iftar meals easier for Muslims.

According to him, another unique leg of the initiative is the #Iftarwithmidea campaign, aimed at further highlighting the fasting period as a time to be generous, and accommodating with others.

He also disclosed that the brand has also selected some Muslim influencers to help push the #Iftarwithmidea narrative. "This will be done online and it's specifically for those who engage with them and answer their questions."

## NIVEA targets nationwide impact, transparency in national consumer promotion

BLESSING ADIMABUA

**N**IVEA, a global iconic skincare brand owned by Hamburg-based Beiersdorf AG, has said that its ongoing historic N3 billion National Consumer Promotion was geared towards creating nationwide impact, campaign scale and transparency.

According to the company, despite the growing list of winners, the promotion is still ongoing, with many more prizes yet to be won in the coming weeks.

The ongoing "Double the Care, Double the Glow" campaign rewards consumers instantly and weekly, while building toward even bigger prizes at the grand finale of the twelve-week promotion.

At the end of the campaign, consumers stand a chance to win N5 million, N3 million, N2 million, three brand new SUVs, and ten all-expense-paid trips to Spain to watch Real Madrid live at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium, leveraging NIVEA's global partnership with the iconic football club.

Speaking on the latest draw and the growing list of winners, Fiyin Toyo, marketing director for Central, East & West Africa (CEWA) at Beiersdorf, said the campaign continues to deliver on its promise.

"What excites us most is seeing real Nigerians win in real time. Every draw reinforces our commitment to

fairness, transparency, and genuine consumer appreciation. With Regina and Omotola joining our growing list of millionaires this week, we want Nigerians to know that the promo is still on, and the next winner could be anyone," she said.

Toyo said that every eligible purchase guarantees instant rewards and multiple chances to win throughout the duration of the campaign, adding that to participate, customers needs to purchase any NIVEA 400ml Body Lotion variant - Cocoa, Rich Nourishing, Even Glow, Advanced Care, Perfect & Radiant, or Deep; Locate the unique code on the pack; Scratch and dial \*7022\*code# and follow the prompts and receive N1,000 instant airtime and automatic entry into weekly draws.

She further said that the N3 billion Consumer Promotion is fully approved and regulated by the National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC), Lagos State Lotteries and Gaming Authority (LSLGA), and the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), assuring participants of a credible, transparent, and well-governed process.

At the recent draw, James Aondongu from Abuja and Agbanu Vanessa from Onitsha each won N1,000,000 and joined other new millionaires for the week. Their wins add to a growing list of Nigerians whose lives have been positively impacted by the promotion.

# News Extra

## NEPC equips newly registered exporters with skills to drive non-oil export growth

IGNATIUS CHUKWU &  
BLESSING ITA

The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) has intensified efforts to strengthen Nigeria's non-oil export base by equipping newly registered exporters with practical skills and regulatory knowledge required to compete in international markets.

This formed the focus of a one-day mentorship training and export clinic organised by the NEPC South-South Regional Office in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in the week.

Speaking at the programme, Ngozi Ibe, the Regional Coordinator, NEPC South-South Regional Office, said the initiative was designed to address a recurring gap within the export ecosystem, where many registered exporters remain inactive due to limited understanding of export processes, compliance requirements, and market dynamics.

According to her, exporting is a structured and regulated business that goes beyond



Group photo of NEPC officials, resource persons, and participants at the seminar

the shipment of goods across borders, requiring compliance with quality standards, proper documentation, market intelligence, financial discipline, and effective risk management.

Nigeria's non-oil export sector has recorded steady growth in recent years, with export earnings rising from \$2.2 billion in 2020 to \$6.1 billion in 2025, while export volumes increased from 4.8 million metric tonnes in 2020

to 7.2 million metric tonnes in 2024. Agricultural commodities accounted for more than 51 percent of total non-oil exports in 2024, followed by semi-manufactured goods.

Ibe noted that sustaining and scaling these gains depends largely on exporters who understand international trade rules, meet global standards, and operate export-ready enterprises. She added that the Federal Government has prioritised non-

oil exports as a key driver of economic diversification, foreign exchange earnings, job creation, and inclusive growth.

She said the export clinic was structured as a practical intervention to bridge knowledge gaps, reduce early-stage export failures, and ensure that newly registered exporters transition from registration to active and compliant export operations.

The programme brought

together key institutions across Nigeria's export ecosystem.

Kpama Raphael, zonal manager of the Bank of Agriculture (BoA), outlined financing opportunities available to export-oriented agricultural enterprises, noting that the bank supports equipment acquisition and value-chain development.

Representing the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Rita Chukwuma emphasised the importance of product safety, registration, and regulatory compliance, highlighting incentives and subsidised certification processes available to small businesses.

From the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), Ezechukwu Nkechinyere stressed that compliance with national and international standards remains critical to sustaining Nigeria's credibility in global markets.

The Head of the South-South Office of the Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute (NSPRI), Mandu Inana, addressed issues of post-harvest handling, storage, and preservation, noting

that poor storage practices contribute significantly to export losses.

Private-sector participation was represented by the Port Harcourt Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (PHACCIMA), which encouraged exporters to leverage business associations for advocacy, networking, and access to market opportunities.

Technical sessions at the clinic covered export procedures and documentation, business structuring, compliance requirements, logistics planning, and risk management, delivered by Ibe.

A separate presentation by Ofon Udofia, Executive Secretary of the Institute of Export Operations and Management, focused on export pricing strategies, cost analysis, and maintaining competitiveness while ensuring profitability.

An interactive question-and-answer session allowed participants to seek clarification on regulatory, financing, certification, logistics, and pricing issues.

NEPC said it will continue to support exporters through capacity-building programmes, advisory services, and strategic partnerships aimed at strengthening Nigeria's non-oil export sector and enhancing the country's competitiveness in global trade.

## Kogi to sanction churches violating security protocols as troops overrun terrorists' den

VICTORIA NNAKAIKE, Lokoja

The Kogi State Government has issued a strong warning to churches across the state over continued violation of the security protocol banning late religious activities as well as worshipping in vulnerable places without security cover and clearance, citing credible intelligence of planned attacks by bandits.

In a press statement made available to newsmen on Tuesday, Kingsley Femi Fanwo, commissioner for Information and Communications, disclosed that security intelligence at the disposal of the government revealed a plot by criminal elements to attack a church in Ijumu Local Government Area of the state.

According to the Commissioner, intercepted conversations among the bandits indicated that the targeted church had continued to operate late into the night, making it vulnerable to attack. The criminals were reportedly heard boasting that they would make "a lot of money" through ransom by kidnapping worshippers during the service.

Fanwo said that although coordinated security measures have since been acti-

vated to avert the planned attack, the development has reinforced the need for strict compliance with the state's preventive security directives.

"We have observed with deep concern that despite clear security advisories, some churches still operate late into the night. This is unacceptable in the face of prevailing security challenges," he said.

He reiterated that no church is permitted to operate beyond 4:00pm, stressing that churches located in isolated or bushy environments must immediately seek safer alternatives in the interest of their members.

The Commissioner warned that any church found violating the security protocol would face sanctions, noting that such actions expose worshippers to grave danger.

"This decision is not targeted at faith or worship. It is a safety-first approach designed to protect lives. Any church that deliberately disregards this protocol constitutes a security risk to its members," Fanwo added.

He further directed security operatives across the state to stop pastors from fixing or conducting night services, emphasising that the government's priority is crime prevention rather than emergen-

cy response after lives have been endangered.

"Our intention is to prevent crime, not to begin running helter-skelter to secure the release of kidnapped victims," he said.

Fanwo dismissed insinuations that the policy reflects fear or weakness, stressing that the Kogi State Government is aggressively confronting criminal elements.

"Our approach is not cowardice. We are mobilising security forces to overrun the criminals, and we are recording significant successes.

However, effective security also requires preventive measures, and we must all act responsibly to protect our citizens," he said.

The Kogi State Government called on religious leaders to cooperate fully with security agencies and align with the safety directives, assuring residents that the administration remains committed to safeguarding lives and sustaining peace across the state.

In a related development, security forces have recorded a major breakthrough in the sustained offensive against

criminal elements in Kogi State, as troops of the Nigerian Army overran a notorious terrorist enclave and recovered a massive cache of arms and ammunition.

Troops of the 12 Brigade achieved the decisive success during a coordinated counter-terrorism operation that dismantled a camp linked to terrorist kingpins Kachalla Ibrahim and Shuaib, figures long associated with coordinated attacks and criminal activities across parts of the state.

The operation, led by Brig-

adier General Kasim Umar Sidi, resulted in the recovery of over 2,000 rounds of 7.62 x 54mm ammunition and a box of high-velocity grenades, a seizure that has significantly degraded the operational and logistical capacity of the criminal network.

After securing the enclave, troops completely destroyed and set the camp ablaze, effectively denying the terrorists the opportunity to reoccupy or reuse the location as a staging ground for further attacks.

Commending the operation, the Kogi State Security Adviser, Jerry Omodara, applauded the gallantry and professionalism of the Nigerian military, describing the intervention as timely and courageous, and stressing that the success sends a clear message that terrorism will find no sanctuary in Kogi State.

Also confirming the development, Fanwo said the State Government is working closely with security agencies on ongoing clearance operations across the state, adding that Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo remains resolute and determined to end criminality in Kogi State through a combination of aggressive security action and preventive measures aimed at protecting lives and property.



# Sunday Magazine

## Northern economy and the tightening grip of terror and banditry

OLATUNJI OMIRIN, Maiduguri

**F**or Fifty years after independence, Northern Nigerian economy, which hinged on agriculture as its mainstay, startlingly thrived to global admiration. From the 1960s to the first decade of the 21st century the current foundations of the entire country's economy, most-notably, the oil refineries, were laid with the proceeds of groundnut, cotton, livestock, tin and columbite trade between Nigeria and Europe.

Even with oil replacing these agricultural products as the mainstay of the country's economy, Northern Nigeria swam in the enviable pride of developing on a very sustainable agriculture-based economy, with agricultural and livestock production and trade multiplying severally.

Alas! Retrogression set in on the decades-old glory, with the advent of various forms of terror - Boko Haram insurgency/I SWAP terror in the North-East; banditry and kidnapping in the North-West; and banditry/kidnapping; farmer-herder clash, and now Lukurawa-Al-Ansur militants in the North-Central.

Apart from these forms of insecurity, a general gunner menace embraced the entire 19-state region and the FCT. It is sufficient to say that the terrorists and bandits are more emboldened than ever from the Sokoto down to Lake Chad shores in Borno/ Yobe, onto Benue/ Plateau, Kastina-Kaduna-Zamfara; now, Niger, the new epicentre of terrorism, and recently Kogi-Kwara states respectively.

Indeed, the northern economy is under the grip of terror groups that instill fear into the minds of the locals to generate revenue and receive proceeds of ransom from relations of abducted on highways, schools, homes, churches, mosques, marketplaces, and on farmlands.



**This election season has produced convoluted groups whose focus is not on out-of-school children, hunger, poverty, frequent attacks by kidnappers, banditry, or terrorism, but rather on strategies for repositioning ahead of the 2027 elections**

ism, banditry and kidnapping are spreading across states and displacing communities.

Mamman Osuman, chairman of ACF, who spoke at the 79th National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of the forum in Kaduna Wednesday said the region had continued to face "grave difficulties" since its last meeting in August 2025.

"Terrorism, armed banditry, insurgency, and kidnapping are on the rise, as witnessed in Kwara, Southern Kaduna, Katsina, Benue, and other locations. The consequences have been devastating, with families and communities violently uprooted and displaced," he said.

The Northern economy has now been virtually crushed to inconsequential level with the persistence and worsening of insecurity as the various forms of terror and banditry tighten their grip on the entire region.

**North is under siege - ACF bemoan**

A few days ago in Kaduna, the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) raised fresh concerns over rising insecurity and humanitarian crises in the North, warning that terror-



"This election season has produced convoluted groups whose focus is not on out-of-school children, hunger, poverty, frequent attacks by kidnappers, banditry, or terrorism, but rather on strategies for repositioning ahead of the 2027 elections," he said.

"Insecurity has deepened to such an extent that external military assistance has been required," he said.

The ACF chairman urged state chapters of the forum to be proactive, stressing that its existence "must not be merely ceremonial or rhetorical; it must be principled, sincere, sacrificial, and action-driven."

He said the forum must engage constructively with governments at national and subnational levels "in the pursuit of peace, stability, and the civil rehabilitation of our people."

He called on members of the NEC to be sincere and objective in their deliberations, urging them to propose "practical solutions that will guide remedy, recovery, and progress."

**Terrorism in N/Central threatens Nigeria's political, economic heartland - Olusegun**

According to Olusegun Adeniyi, a former President's spokesman, he wrote his opinion, highlighting that what makes the North Central expansion particularly alarming is the infrastructure already in place.

He said, according to recent research, the Shiroro cell has been operating since at least 2021. Lukurawa has grown to approximately 2,000 members drawn from multiple countries.

These groups have established indoctrination schools, developed financial networks, and created supply chains connecting theatres. They are not coming; they are already here, building capacity while we sleep and make political permutations about a tomorrow not guaranteed.

"But there was psychological distance; Borno seemed far away, the Lake Chad Basin felt like another country. The Northwest's descent

into banditry was more proximate, alarming, but still somehow containable in our minds as a regional crisis. But we can no longer pretend that we don't face a clear and present danger," he said.

He continued, "The North Central zone serves as Nigeria's strategic hinge, connecting the North to the South. If Jihadist groups consolidate their presence in Kwara State, as they clearly intend to do, they will have achieved what has eluded them in the northeastern insurgency: a strategic position from which to threaten not just Nigeria's political capital and economic heartland, but our national cohesion."

He urged members to avoid "unnecessary fanfare, sensationalism, and window-dressing events" and instead focus on programmes geared towards "the urgent restoration, survival, and welfare of our people."

He said the forum must engage constructively with governments at national and subnational levels "in the pursuit of peace, stability, and the civil rehabilitation of our people."

**Insecurity is affecting businesses, community cohesion, and growth- Bishop Moses**

In northern Nigeria, insecurity is destroying once-bright hopes for education, business, and safe travel. School shutdowns,

student abductions, attacks on farmers, and fleeing investors have turned fear into a major barrier to progress and economic growth in the region.

Speaking on the development, Bishop Moses Suberu, the Bishop of the Diocese on the Confluence of the Orthodox Anglican Communion Nigeria, Lokoja, said the

North Central Nigeria is heartbeat of Nigeria, underscoring its importance because of its nexus between the north and Southern part of country; blessed with fertile soils, diverse peoples, and a rich tapestry of faith communities, has long been a bridge between Nigeria's north and south.

"I speak from a place of deep spiritual conviction and lived experience in this region that truly pulses as the nation's heartbeat. Yet, today, it groans under the weight of insecurity perpetrated by outlawed groups—bandits who kidnap, extort, and terrorise."

"Families are forced to pay millions of naira in ransoms to reclaim their loved ones, turning what should be homes of peace into fortresses of fear. Allow me to address your poignant questions with the wisdom drawn from Scripture, our shared humanity, and the urgent realities on the ground," Bishop Moses.

According to him, the scourge of banditry is not merely a security crisis; it is a profound threat to the very fabric of our society, eroding the bonds that hold us together as Nigerians. In Proverbs 14:34, the Bible reminds us that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."



This evil campaign fosters division along ethnic, religious, and communal lines, as suspicion replaces trust among neighbours.

He pointed out that "Farmers abandon their fields, leading to food shortages and economic despair that pit communities against one another in competition for scarce resources. Motorists dread highways that were once lifelines of commerce, isolating villages and stifling trade. Worshippers, whether in mosques or churches like those under my ministry, gather in anxiety, wondering if their sacred spaces will become targets. This pervasive fear breeds resentment toward authorities, weakening national unity and encouraging vigilante groups that further fragment society."

According to him, "Leaders must keep speaking out against terrorism and lead the counter-narrative. Collaboration with community leaders, politicians, security agencies, and intelligence is key—but it's not enough without concrete action from state and federal governments to create safe spaces for businesses."

"A whole-of-society approach is critical: sensitise individuals, businesses, and communities to be security-conscious, volunteer information, and form vigilante groups. Speed up decentralising the police and formalising state and community police," Senator Iroegbu declared.

**Safe markets, farmlands, and public places would reduce criminality - Zagazola**

The protracted insurgency and banditry crisis across Northern Nigeria has inflicted unquantifiable losses on the region's economy, disrupting agriculture, trade, education and investment, even as the military intensifies operations against terrorist and criminal networks.

"From the farmlands of Borno and Yobe to the markets of Zam-

extremism finds fertile ground. Without collective action, the society's resilience will crumble, leaving generations scarred by trauma and inequality.

The cleric urged President Tinubu's administration to change tactics against terrorists and bandits and bring the insecurity to an end.

"The time for rhetoric has passed; decisive, compassionate action is imperative. Your government has made strides in economic reforms, but security is the foundation upon which all progress stands. Bandits are expanding their operations, from Zamfara's borders into Benue, Plateau, Niger, Kwara and beyond, turning our region into a theatre of unchecked violence.

"I urge President Tinubu and armed forces to prioritise intelligence-driven operations, community policing, and collaboration with local leaders—including faith-based organisations—to address root causes and invest in technology for surveillance, empower our security forces with better training and equipment, and pursue dialogue where possible to reintegrate those misled into banditry," he advised.

**Decentralisation of police will enhance fight against terror groups - Expert**

While collaborating, Senator Iroegbu, a security expert, examined how this growing crisis is silencing dreams and what must be done to protect the region's future.

According to him, the north's economy is haemorrhaging due to insecurity, and it's hard to stay optimistic when the situation seems stuck. The military's efforts are crucial, but more is needed.

According to him, "Leaders must keep speaking out against terrorism and lead the counter-narrative. Collaboration with community leaders, politicians, security agencies, and intelligence is key—but it's not enough without concrete action from state and federal governments to create safe spaces for businesses."

"Livestock production, grain supply and artisanal mining have all suffered, with ripple effects on food prices and employment nationwide.

Zagazola also opined that the economic damage is no longer just local, but the crisis has also affected commercial activities between Niger and neighbouring countries. Local export has also been affected.

He reiterated, "When the North bleeds, the national economy feels it. Agricultural output drops, logistics costs rise, and investors retreat. Insecurity is now a macro-economic risk."

The military's sustained offensives under operations such as Hadin Kai and FANSAN YAMMA have degraded the capacity of Boko Haram, ISWAP and bandit groups in several theatres in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger and Sokoto.

Crop Live stock integration



Green Manure



Cover crops



fara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kebbi and Niger, insecurity has forced thousands of farmers off their land, shut down rural trade routes and crippled cross-border commerce," said Zagazola Makama, the Lake Chad Basin Counter-insurgency Analyst.

However, while tactical gains are visible, the conflict has evolved. Armed groups fragment, re-group, and exploit porous borders, local grievances and illicit economies to survive. "We are winning battles, but the war is adaptive, and victory will not be purely kinetic."

"Better fusion between military, police, DSS and civil defence is critical. Stronger border control, joint patrols with neighbours and targeting of arms smuggling, gold and fuel trafficking will starve groups of resources."

"Military gains must be followed by police presence, local administration and basic services to prevent re-infiltration. Deradicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes, such as Operation Safe Corridor, should be strengthened to reduce the pool of potential recruits."

# Sunday Magazine

## Ineffective intelligence or sheer negligence?

...Massacres continue across Nigeria despite govt efforts

OLATUNJI OMIRIN (Maiduguri), HAPPY ZAROKADA (Yola), NATHANIEL GBAORON (Jos), BENJAMIN AGESAN (Kaduna), and SIKIRAT SHEHU, Ilorin

Persistent insecurity in Nigeria has been blamed on many factors. One that sticks out so prominently is the allegation of ineffective intelligence. Many observers have said that there seems to be an unholy interplay between ineffective intelligence and sheer negligence on the part of relevant authorities.

**KWARA**  
Community frets over unanimous letter  
Many observers and critics have continued to point finger at security authorities for failing to protect the citizens or for even abandoning the people when it matters most.

Many have alleged that the attacks on Woro, Kaima Local Government Area of Kwara State, could have been prevented if the authorities had acted on intelligence they received. That was not in isolation as there have been many similar cases where bandits and Boko Haram insurgents had notified communities of their planned attacks, and there were no practical efforts to act on such notices until the attacks were eventually carried out.

Just last Friday, Akanbi Kamar Olarewaju, chairman of Oyun Local Government, Kwara State, convened an emergency security meeting at the Council Secretariat in Illemona following a widely circulated letter alleging an impending attack on parts of the local government.

The Council chairman addressed security agencies, traditional rulers and key stakeholders at the meeting, on the seriousness of the matter at hand.

He spoke about a letter purport-

edly written by unknown individuals, who claimed they had relocated from Kaima Local Government and were planning attacks on the Ira and Aho/Inaja axis.

The expectation is that the information would enable relevant authorities protect the communities.

**BORNO**  
Lack of political will major drawback  
Tinubu's administration must wake up to the reality that insecurity is getting worse daily; Nigeria is not getting secure under his watch, as banditry and terrorists are getting bolder and spreading like wildfire at an alarming rate.

For instance, lack of political will, issues of porous borders and weak intelligence gathering have been the major obstacles undermining the spread of terrorism in Nigeria.

No serious nation should allow large portions of its territory to remain outside effective governance.

Nigeria has over 4,000 kilometres of land borders and close to 870 kilometres of coastline. Across these borders, there are over 1,000 entry points, but only about 100 are properly manned by security agencies. I think the federal government is always treating issues of terrorism with unseriousness.

According to him, weapons often enter the country through unmanned routes, waterways and even official ports, sometimes with internal compromise.

You ask yourself how containers carrying weapons pass through scanners at the ports. There has to be some level of complicity. Such containers cannot pass without someone failing to do their job.

ISWAP operates across borders, and operations against them have also taken place outside Nigeria. This cooperation is a good measure. We need sustained investment in border security, technology and regional cooperation to curb in-



signals are unclear or operational

directives lack urgency, responsi-

on economies that thrive in unstable environments. The country's porous borders —

particularly across the Sahel region — allow

attackers to strike with little resis-

to attack communities, yet such

information is treated lightly. They

eventually invade, destroy property,

kidnap residents, and cart away

values, with little or no conse-

quences. To me, this amounts to

total negligence," he said.

"There's a lot of negligence on the

side of authorities concern; personally, I don't buy the idea of incorpo-

rating 'repentant Boko Haram' into

Nigeria's security outfit," he said.

**PLATEAU**  
Plateau in panic, families flee

Plateau State remains gripped by

fear as killings and kidnappings

continue across the state. Residents

in several communities live under constant threat, while security agencies move to restore order.

Recently in Wase Local Govern-

ment Area, hundreds of residents of

Zurak and Sabon Gari communi-

ties fled. Men, women, and children

were seen trekking to neighbour-

ing villages like Kampani, carrying

their belongings in search of safety.

The latest attacks left a soldier

and five residents dead in Zurak,

while three soldiers were declared

missing. Residents said attackers

first targeted security posts before

moving into homes, burning houses

and shops, and looting food and

valuables.

In the recent attacks, the police

authorities and local government

denied any of such. The denials

were first made by the Commissi-

on of Police, Muhammad Ra-

bui, followed by the Kauru Local

Government chairman, Dauda

Madaki together with Kaduna

State government represented by

the Commissioner for Internal

Security and Home Affairs, Sule

Shaubi.

They described the re-

ported kidnap as mere falsehood

which was being peddled by con-

flict entrepreneurs who wanted to

cause chaos in Kaduna State.

However, the community insist-

ed that their people were abduc-

ted by the bandits and within 24 hours

after police denials, they released

the names of those in captivity.

With the release of their names,

the police made a U-turn and said

its earlier remarks on the attack was

to avoid panic, but to allow it carry

out its work diligently.

where members of Boko Haram re-



portedly issued prior notice before



carrying out attacks that resulted in



abductions, destruction of homes,



and looting of food supplies.



"Government often reacts after



incidents occur rather than tak-



ing proactive measures to prevent



them," he said.

"From all indications, we are not



making significant progress in ad-



dressing security challenges. Even



leaders cannot confidently say they



sleep with both eyes closed."



Ekong C. W. (Rtd) said the se-



curity architecture was a complex



situation.



Pointing out that Military may



be doing well but some person-



nel are not in support of what the



Federal Government is doing, they



keep sabotaging the efforts of the



FG. He added that back in the days,



it was not so.



Ekong stated that unless the



security architecture is headed by



a neutral person, like the arrange-



ment previously between Nigeria



and the US, the political undertone



will continue to play out.



"There's a lot of negligence on the



side of authorities concern; personally, I don't buy the idea of incorpo-



rating 'repentant Boko Haram' into



Nigeria's security outfit," he said.



"There's a lot of negligence on the



# Sport

## One week of sack, rumour and fan base influence in football

Stories by JOHN SALAU

**I**n football, managers' movement is synonymous to the game itself; they come and go.

And that movement characterised the football scene last week across the English Premier League and French Ligue 1.

Beyond the sack and rumours of managers' sacking, is a growing influence of the fans base that often forced the club hierarchy to sometimes take decisions contrary to their own philosophy.

In the English Premier League, two managers - Thomas Frank of Tottenham and Sean Dyche of Nottingham Forest were sacked, while Habib Beye of French Ligue 1 side Rennes was also given the matching order.

Frank arrived in the summer as Ange Postecoglou's replacement following a successful seven-year spell in charge of Brentford.

But, his reign as Spurs manager was characterised by a run of poor performances in the league.

For Frank, Tuesday night's 2-1 loss at home to Newcastle, who were winless in their previous five matches, ended up being the final straw.

"Even before a ball had even



Habib Beye



Thomas Frank



Sean Dyche

been kicked against City and Newcastle, the announcement of Frank through the PA system were met with boos.

"It had gotten to the point where regardless of what happened, the home faithful were not going to be happy until a change was made," says Callum Bishop of Sky Sports.

Spurs were booed off by their own supporters at both half-time and full-time of the loss to the Magpies, with chants of 'sacked in the morning' and 'we want Frank out' aimed at the head coach.

As echoed by the fans, the manager was sacked

in morning; leaving Spurs without a Premier League victory in this calendar year.

At Nottingham Forest, Sean Dyche's tenure ended amid growing fears of relegation.

Known for his disciplined and pragmatic style, Dyche was expected to bring defensive solidity and survival experience to his reign at Nottingham Forest.

However, a prolonged winless run and struggles to generate attacking momentum left Forest in a precarious position, prompting the club to seek a fresh approach.

Habib Beye reign as French

Ligue 1 side Rennes manager also came to an end on Monday following a fourth successive defeat at the weekend.

Though Rennes remain in sixth in Ligue 1 and a qualification place for next year's European competitions, despite a defeat to Lens on Saturday.

Rennes hierarchy said they had "initiated a procedure" against Beye and had placed reserve team boss Sébastien Tambouret in temporary charge.

However, Rennes responded by beating champions Paris Saint-

Germain 3-1 on Friday, with Tambouret recording his first win against PSG.

Rennes have not won since early January and during their four-match losing run were eliminated from the French Cup 3-0 by Marseille.

Beye was hired in January 2025 with the club 16th - the relegation playoff position - and lasted just 39 matches despite presiding over a noticeable upturn in form and fortunes.

At Liverpool, the rumour of sack is ever present following the Reds' poor run of form in the Premier League in the

2025-26 season.

"If we don't have Champions League football it has definitely not been an acceptable season," Arse Slot, said in his last match note in response to whether he has to ensure Champions League qualification to make this an 'acceptable' season.

The Anfield faithful want to see a change in the team's performance, especially in the Premier League.

But, Slot thinks the team can still finish strong in the league. "And there is still a possibility that we can do something special this season as well."

### Two Nigerians drafted in 10th 'Basketball Without Borders' all-star

**T**wo Nigerians Obinna Ekezie, and Peter Julius, have been drafted for the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) 40 of the top high-school-age prospects for the 10th annual Basketball Without Borders (BWB) All-Star camp for 2026.

The top 40 drafted high-school-age prospects represent 29 countries and territories that travelled to Los Angeles, at the UCLA Health Training Center as part of the 2026 NBA All-Star.

The 2026 BWB All-Star, open to NBA team personnel, will bring together prospects from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania to participate in athletic testing, movement efficiency, and skill development stations.

The camp will also include 3-on-3 competitions, life-skills seminars, and 5-on-5 games under the guidance of current and former NBA and FIBA players, legends and coaches, including Danilo Gallinari (Italy) and James Gist.

The NBA and FIBA also announced a reimagined format for the BWB program with the launch of 'BWB Next Up' - two annual camps for the top 80 male prospects and top 80 female prospects from outside the U.S.

The new format will replace regional BWB camps and will produce the top-performing players to be selected to participate in BWB All-Star camps at the following NBA and AT&T WNBA All-Star.



### 2026 NBA all-star game tips off Sunday, February 15

**T**he 2026 NBA All-Star game is expected to tip off later today, Sunday, February 15, on the back of the league's annual showcase that tipped off on Friday in Los Angeles, California.

This marked the seventh time LA will be hosting the league's annual showcase.

The NBA All-Star featured Kia Shooting Stars, State Farm 3-Point Contest, and the AT&T Slam Dunk Contest on Saturday at the Intuit Dome, the home of the LA Clippers.

#### Kia Shooting Stars

A timed shooting competition featuring four teams of two NBA players and one NBA legend each. The teams represent NBA All-Star connections, school and team affiliations, and family ties.

Team Harper sees five-time NBA champion paired up with his sons, Dylan Harper (San Antonio Spurs) and Ron Harper Jr. (Boston Celtics).



#### State Farm 3-Point Contest

The State Farm 3-Point Contest featured five 2026 NBA All-Stars: Devin Booker, Tyrese Maxey, Donovan Mitchell, Jamal Murray and Norman Powell.

Two of the fielders are former contest winners Booker (2018) and nine-time NBA All-Star, two-time 3-Point Contest champion with the Portland Trail Blazers, Damian Lillard (2023 and 2024).

Four players made their State

Farm 3-Point Contest debuts: Kon Knueppel, Maxey, Murray and Bobby Portis. Knueppel can become the first rookie to win the event.

In the two-round contest, players attempt to score as many points as possible from multiple 3-point locations within 70 seconds. The top three scorers from the first round advanced to the championship round, where the highest score determines the winner.

# Sports

## Qatar Open: Muchova defeats Mboko to win first title

...As Canadian teenager move within top 10

Stories by JOHN SALAU

Czech's Karolina Muchova defeated Canada's Victoria Mboko 6-4 7-5 to win her first WTA 1,000 event at the Qatar Open final on Saturday.

Muchova clinched her first title since her 2019 Korea Open, and moved from 19th to 11th in the updated world rankings on Monday.

Muchova came through with the victory in one hour and 34 minutes in Doha as she picked up the second title of her career.

"Been a while since I won a tournament, so it's nice to get that feeling again," Muchova said after the win.

After winning her first WTA 1,000 event, the Czech



is now set for the next 1,000 event - Doha Open that starts

on Sunday.

However, Aryna Sa-

balenka and Iga Swiatek, the world's top two players are

both out of the next WTA 1,000 event in Doha.

Sabalenka, who has been out of action since losing last month's Australian Open final to Elena Rybakina, said she was "not feeling 100%" while Swiatek, a quarter-finalist in Doha, pointed to a "change of schedule".

The 29-year-old Muchova landed 75 percent of her first serves with just three points dropped in a clean opening set.

Mboko, 19, managed to take a 4-2 lead in the second set, but Muchova broke twice to seal victory in 94 minutes.

Despite falling to defeat, Mboko, who started the 2025 season ranked outside the top 300, will jump inside the top 10 as she has the most match wins on the women's tour this season.

Acknowledging it was "not the outcome I wanted. There are so many positives to take away," the teenager said.

## FA Cup: Newcastle beat 10-man Villa 3-1 in dramatic come-back

Newcastle United edged fellow Premier League side 10-man Aston Villa 3-1 in a dramatic come-back at the Villa Park on Saturday.

With the defeat, Villa's hopes of ending the 30-year wait for silverware now hinge on the Europa League.

The home side took the lead through a Tammy Abraham's controversial opener.

The England International was judged to be offside, but the goal was allowed to stand with VAR not in operation at the Villa Park.

But, a moment of madness from goalkeeper Marco Bizot

led to a straight red card that shifted the momentum in Newcastle's favour.

Bizot raced off his line in an attempt to stop a Newcastle counterattack just before the break and brought Jacob Murphy down with a sliding challenge near the halfway line, leaving referee Chris Kavanagh with little choice.

Eddie Howe's side were already feeling aggrieved at the lack of VAR in the game following the opener and Digne avoiding a red card for a dangerous tackle on Murphy.

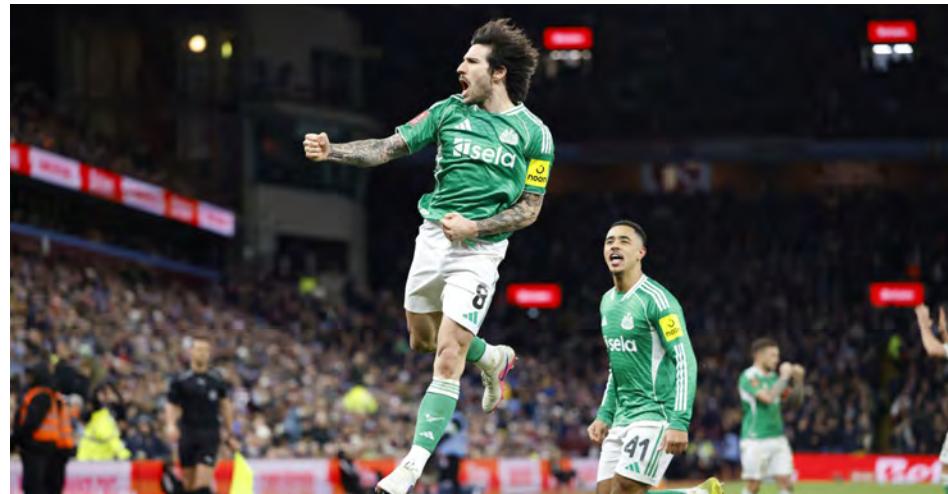
The situation was then compounded when a handball from the same man was given as a free-kick despite contact

arriving inside the area.

However, Sandro Tonali's first effort of the night deflected into the bottom left corner to draw his side level.

With time and numbers on their side, Newcastle cruised into the lead with just under 15 minutes to go when Tonali struck again with added venom from the same position, before Nick Woltemade marked his 24th birthday with a third to secure a spot in the fifth round for his side.

The Magpies will find out who they face in the next round on Monday when the draw takes place before Macclesfield face Brentford.



## James Trafford wants more at Manchester City

Manchester City's number two goalkeeper James Trafford is asking for more playing time after keeping a clean sheet in the FA Cup fourth-round win over Salford City on Saturday.

The goalkeeper admitted the current situation is not what he had imagined, when he arrived back at Manchester City in June for a fee of about £30m.

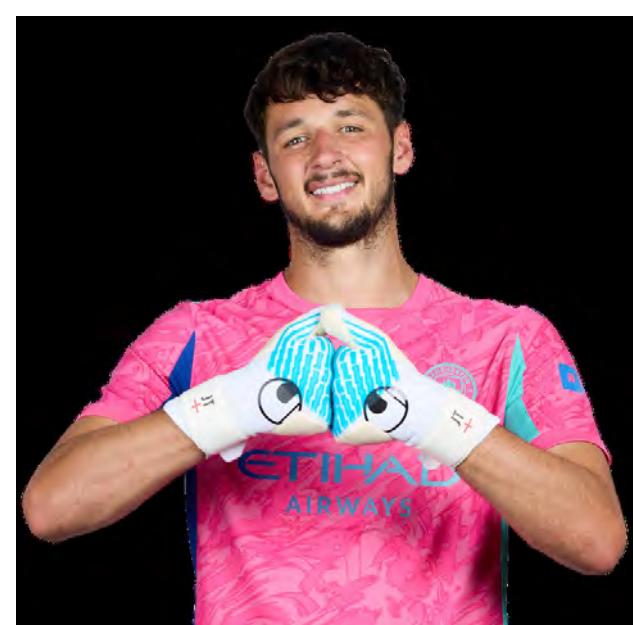
"It wasn't what I expected coming into the season..."

"It's the reality and I have to give it my best shot. It's the situation I'm in. We train every day but making saves, it's good fun," Trafford said.

Trafford played 45 games last season as Burnley won promotion to the Premier League, conceding just 16 goals in the Championship in the process.

The 23-year-old then decided it was time to tackle unfinished business at City, who he had left in 2023 in search of regular playing time.

But the arrival of Champions League winner Gianluigi Donnarumma, who is only



26, dented Trafford's chances of regular football at City.

Donnarumma has played 30 matches for City since arriving from Paris St-Germain (PSG), with Trafford having had to settle for domestic cup games - plus one Champions League appearance.

With Ederson regressing last season, City boss Pep Guardiola had clearly plotted to overhaul his goalkeeping department.

Re-signing Trafford from

Burnley in June seemed the sensible option - a keeper with plenty of experience for his age who had spent six years in the club's academy and impressed for England's Under-21s.

Trafford had also been picked as part of England's initial 33-man squad for Euro 2024 - although he did not make the final cut - and a role as City's number one could have bolstered his senior international prospects.

# Sport

## 2026 World Cup: FIFA to rule on Nigeria's petition against DR Congo Monday

ANTHONY NLEBEM

The Super Eagles' hopes of qualifying for the 2026 FIFA World Cup hang in the balance as world football governing body FIFA reportedly prepares to deliver a high-stakes ruling on Monday, February 16, on Nigeria's eligibility protest against DR Congo.

The FIFA meeting is expected to address several issues, including the Nigeria Football Federation's (NFF) complaint. A favourable verdict could see Nigeria reinstated into the intercontinental play-offs in Mexico later this month, where one of the final tickets to the 2026 World Cup will be decided.

Nigeria's qualification campaign suffered a major setback in November 2025 after a 4-3 penalty shootout defeat to DR Congo in the final African playoff. However, the NFF subsequently filed a formal petition, alleging that six Congolese players had recently switched international allegiance and were ineligible at the time of the match.

The federation submitted its petition to FIFA on December 15, 2025, challenging the eligibility status of the players. FIFA has since been reviewing the matter.

NFF General Secretary, Dr. Mohammed Sanusi, has expressed confidence in Nigeria's case and remains optimistic about a positive outcome.

"We have a good case," Sanusi said. "We do not venture into



what would be an exercise in futility. As far as we are concerned,

we have a strong case, and we are awaiting FIFA's decision on the

complaints we have lodged."

Super Eagles midfielder

Alex Iwobi also remains hopeful that Nigeria can still secure qualification despite the uncertainty.

"We are still waiting; hopefully, we can go to the World Cup," Iwobi said.

If FIFA rules in Nigeria's favour, the Super Eagles will advance to the six-team Intercontinental Play-Off scheduled for March in Mexico, with a place at the 2026 FIFA World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico at stake.

Beyond determining Nigeria's immediate fate, the decision could set an important precedent for how FIFA handles eligibility disputes amid increasingly complex nationality regulations in modern football.

## Osimhen named among IFFHS World's top scorers

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen has been named among the world's most prolific international goalscorers, earning a place in the elite top 20 of the International Federation of Football History and Statistics (IFFHS) rankings for the current decade.

The 27-year-old Galatasaray forward features in the IFFHS

standings for Top Scorers of National Teams (2021-2030), placing him alongside some of the most accomplished finishers in modern football.

Osimhen is currently joint 14th with Serbia's Aleksandar Mitrović, with both players scoring 27 international goals since 2021. The ranking highlights his consistency and effectiveness for Nigeria over the past five years.

A breakdown of his

performances shows steady progression: five goals in 2021, five in 2022 and five again in 2023. He added three goals in 2024 before delivering his most productive year in 2025, scoring nine times for the national team.

Norway's Erling Haaland tops the IFFHS list with 49 goals, followed by England captain Harry Kane (46) and Argentina legend Lionel Messi (44). Cristiano Ronaldo sits on 41 goals, while France's Kylian Mbappé completes the top five with 39.

Other notable names in the rankings include Memphis Depay and Mehdi Taremi (34 each), Romelu Lukaku and Sadio Mané (32), and Son Heung-min (28).

Beyond the decade standings, Osimhen is closing in on national history. Since making his Super Eagles debut in 2017, he has scored 35 goals in 51 appearances, making him Nigeria's second-highest goalscorer of all time.

He now sits just two goals behind the legendary Rashidi Yekini, whose record of 37 goals has stood since 1998. With Nigeria's World Cup qualifying campaign continuing later this year, the milestone appears well within reach.

Despite a growing list of individual honours, including the 2023 African Footballer of the Year award, Osimhen remains focused on collective success. Having won two AFCON bronze medals and one silver, the striker's priority is leading Nigeria to continental glory at the 2027 AFCON, to be hosted by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.



## Kenya's Kering wins \$50,000 prize at 2026 Access Bank Lagos Marathon

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Kenyan runner Ezra Kipchumba Kering claimed the \$50,000 top prize after winning the 11th edition of the Access Bank Lagos City Marathon on Saturday.

Kering clocked 2:11:55 seconds to secure victory in the 2026 edition of the Gold Label race, reinforcing the marathon's status as one of Africa's most lucrative road events.

The 40-year-old athlete, a gold medallist at the 2025 Borobudur Marathon in Indonesia, improved on his previous time by six seconds. Although he delivered a disciplined and commanding performance, he did not threaten the world record of 2:00:35 seconds set by Kenya's Kelvin Kiptum at the 2023 Chicago Marathon.

The men's race featured a tight contest for podium positions. Uganda's Lomoi Samuel pushed Kering deep into the final stretch, finishing just four seconds behind in 2:11:59 seconds to claim the \$20,000 runner-up prize. His compatriot, Namutala Lumbasi, clocked 2:12:25 seconds to secure third place and \$15,000.

Among Nigerian athletes, Boyi Nyango emerged as the first local finisher in the men's race, posting a time of 2:25:32 seconds.

In the women's race, Ethiopia's Dinke Meleka took top honours in 2:37:36 seconds, ahead of Kenya's Cheyech Daniel (2:37:43 seconds) and Ethiopia's Zewdalem Getaw (2:38:59 seconds).

Representing Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, Lagos State Deputy Governor Obafemi Hamzat

commended the organisers for sustaining the marathon's global relevance. He reaffirmed the state government's commitment to the event, highlighting its World Athletics Gold Label status and ambition to attain Platinum Label recognition.

"We are happy to host one of the biggest marathons in the world. The Access Bank Lagos City Marathon is currently a Gold Label race, and we will do everything in our power to achieve the Platinum Label, the highest rank," Hamzat said.

Deborah Badung made history as the first Nigerian woman to complete this year's race, finishing in 2:55:46 seconds, as the marathon continues to blend elite competition with grassroots development and corporate investment in sport.



# Sports

## Tottenham appoint Igor Tudor to lead relegation survival battle

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Tottenham Hotspur have confirmed the appointment of former Juventus boss Igor Tudor as interim manager until the end of the season.

Tudor replaces Thomas Frank, who was sacked on Wednesday, with Spurs sitting 16th in the Premier League, just five points above the relegation zone. The Croatian reached a verbal agreement with the club on Friday, and the deal was finalised on Saturday.

"It is an honour to join this club at an important moment," Tudor said.

His immediate priority will be steering Tottenham clear of relegation danger and restoring consistency after a dismal run of two wins in 17 league matches under Frank.



"I understand the responsibility I have been handed, and my focus is clear: to bring greater consistency to our performances and compete with conviction in every

match," Tudor added.

"There is a strong quality in this playing squad, and my job is to organise it, energise it and improve our results quickly."

Tudor previously managed Juventus, guiding them to a fourth-place finish late in the 2024/25 campaign after losing just one of his first 11 matches in charge. How-

ever, he was dismissed in October following an eight-game winless streak that left the Italian side eighth in Serie A.

The 47-year-old has also

had spells at Lazio, Marseille, Verona, Hajduk Split, Galatasaray and Udinese. He arrives with a reputation for stabilising struggling teams in the short term.

Tottenham sporting director Johan Lange backed Tudor to steady the club during a turbulent period.

"Igor brings clarity, intensity and experience of stepping into challenging moments and producing impact," Lange said.

"Our objective is straightforward: to stabilise performances, maximise the quality within the squad and compete strongly in the Premier League and Champions League."

Spurs are also through to the Champions League last 16, offering a rare bright spot in an otherwise difficult campaign. Their next fixture is the north London derby at home to league leaders Arsenal on February 22.

## Kane becomes first Englishman to reach 500 career goals

ANTHONY NLEBEM

England captain Harry Kane etched his name into the record books on Saturday, becoming the first Englishman to reach 500 professional goals for club and country.

The Bayern Munich striker reached the milestone with a first-half brace in a 3-0 victory over Werder Bremen on Saturday, restoring Bayern's six-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga table.

Kane, already the highest-scoring Englishman after surpassing Jimmy Greaves' tally of 474 goals in December, continues to enjoy a remarkable season. He now has 26 goals in just 22 Bundesliga appearances, and it is only February.

Borussia Dortmund's 4-0 win over Mainz on Friday

had cut Bayern's lead to three points, but the champions responded emphatically in Bremen. Leon Goretzka added a third goal in the 70th minute to seal a comfortable win.

Kane has scored 41 goals in all competitions this season, 13 of them from the penalty spot. His second strike against Bremen brought up the 500-goal landmark for club and country.

"500 is a great number; a lot of hard work and dedication has gone into it," Kane said.

"All I can say is thanks to all of my teammates and managers over the years, and I look forward to the next 50, the next 100."

Bayern were without suspended winger Michael Olise for the first time in 89 matches since his arrival from Crystal Palace in 2024. Bremen kept the league leaders at bay

early on, but Kane opened the scoring after 22 minutes, converting a penalty following a VAR review that confirmed a foul on Lennart Karl.

It marked the third consecutive match in which Kane had put Bayern ahead from the penalty spot. He doubled the lead three minutes later, guiding a low shot in off the right post from the edge of the area.

Bayern captain Manuel Neuer was substituted at half-time due to a recurrence of a calf injury, although sporting director Max Eberl described it as "nothing dramatic" and a "precautionary measure."

Marco Gruell struck the post for Bremen shortly after the break, but Goretzka's composed finish with 20 minutes remaining ensured Bayern maintained control and secured all three points.



## Galatasaray declare Osimhen 'Not for Sale' amid Barcelona, Atlético interest

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Turkish giants Galatasaray have issued a firm statement that Victor Osimhen is not for sale, dismissing transfer speculation linking the Nigerian striker with moves to Barcelona and Atlético Madrid.

Amid growing rumours of interest from Europe's elite, club insiders insist the former African Footballer of the Year remains fully committed to the Istanbul side.

Galatasaray insider Arda Özkan disclosed that he contacted the club hierarchy directly to clarify Osimhen's

situation and received an unequivocal response.

"I asked Galatasaray if there were any developments regarding Victor Osimhen," Özkan said. "The answer was clear: 'We haven't received any offers, and we have no intention of selling him.'"

Özkan also criticised those circulating transfer reports, suggesting the rumours are being driven by external agendas.

"Osimhen has no plans to leave either. Those spreading these stories do not have good intentions toward the club," he added.

Osimhen has been instrumental for Galatasaray this season, scoring 15 goals

in 21 appearances across all competitions, as the club competes strongly on both domestic and European fronts.

The Nigerian forward was signed for €75 million (approximately \$89.25 million) and still has three and a half years remaining on his contract. Reports indicate the club would demand as much as €140 million (about \$166.6 million) should any formal approach materialise.

Last season, Osimhen scored 37 goals and created eight assists in 41 matches. He has continued his prolific form this campaign, registering 15 goals and one assist in 21 outings.



# Possibility of peaceful elections in Nigeria

The recent public outrage triggered by the Senator Godswill Akpabio-led Red Chamber, which literally crossed the red line by the obnoxious rejection of the electronic transmission of election results, real-time after the Green Chamber had given us the green light to do so should be a warning signal to those who believe that political might is right, that their days in authority are numbered. As yours truly stated on February 12, 2014: "Nigerians do not need bombs and bullets but dividends of democracy. We have suffered long enough and not a single citizen should be killed to pave way for any politician to get into position of authority."

Also, as a concerned citizen who has taken active part in election observation in Lagos ( for Daily Times, 2003, 2007 and for GPAAN and INEC in 2023 ) as well as Osun state ( for the Dr. Joe Okei Odumakin-led Women Arise for Change Initiative in 2018 ) one should understand the issues at hand. In addition yours truly was the

Guest Lecturer at the 2018 Independence Anniversary Lecture organized by Nigeria Peace Group (NPG), at Le Paris Hotel, Lekki, Lagos. The topic was: "Panacea for Peaceful Elections in Nigeria- Evaluating the roles of Politicians, Citizens, Security personnel, INEC and the Civil Society".

In fact, we are aware that free, fair, credible and peaceful elections remain the solid foundation and bedrock on which to build the house of democracy. According to renowned authors, Anthony Egobueze and Callistus Ojirika, writing on the topic: "Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Implications for Political Stability" 'elections are key pillars of democracy and have become the commonly accepted means of legitimising government. Once elections are flawed, it is an invitation to violence in the state which may snowball into political instability'.

One must admit that it is not as if electoral violence in Nigeria began in recent times. No! We recall that Justice Sowemimo in his judgment in the treasonable felony against

**"Nigeria politicians have over the years become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power; more reckless and greedier in their use and abuse of power; and more intolerant of opposition, criticism and efforts at replacing them" (Electoral Reform Committee Report, 2008, Vol. 1: 19).**

Obafemi Awolowo and his 'accomplices' observed that: "On the evidence before me, it would appear that politics generally in Nigeria has been conducted with a certain amount of bitterness. Political parties are equivalent to warring camps- elections are conducted with party thugs". That was decades ago.

Is it not a crying shame therefore, that the nagging issue of prebendal politics, in which political office is sought primarily for the aggrandisement of self, family members, associates and cronies as rightly observed by Professor Billy Dudley, a Nigerian political scientist still persists in the 21st Century Nigeria?

To move against the insidious and self-decimating culture of violent politicking we have to employ the Root Cause Analytical Approach, RCAA. There are some fundamental issues bedeviling the polity which we must resolve. For instance, our concept of political leadership is that of serving the self instead of the state. There is little or no sense of allegiance for nationhood, or a patriotic fervour to propel our vision for the larger picture of the 'we' and 'us'. Instead, it is the 'me' and 'I'. It is imperative therefore, that leadership issues and our rich history be taught and imbibed as a way of life; right from our homes, through our schools, religious institutions, to our places of work.

Another factor militating against credible

polls is mass ignorance on the part of the largely illiterate electorate on their rights and responsibilities. Many of them do not know that power belongs to the people in a democracy. They see their elected or selected leaders as the favoured ones to be feared and worshipped instead of servant-leaders, as former president, Umar Yar'Adua (of blessed memory) once canvassed and indeed, admonished. This odious trend has enthroned the culture of king-slave mentality.

We must de-monetise the polity! The high cost of accessing political power, with the greatly attractive perquisites of office, including jumbo pay for politicians is at the heart of our do-or-die politics. In a situation whereby a candidate pays between N40 million and N100 million for his nomination form, has that system not been compromised by corruption?

If such candidates got their money from some rotten-rich political godfathers their allegiance will first go to that person rather than the state or country he is angling to serve, if he eventually wins.

In our prevailing circumstance where politics is arguably the most lucrative 'business,' people would be tempted to steal, cheat or pander to political perverts just to see their dreams to the dawn of fruition. We must therefore, reduce the pay package of politicians to be in tune with civil service salary structure and law making as part time. This perhaps, why yours truly has been canvassing for Volunteers in Government (ViG) as a project on radio, television and in newspapers; to be adopted for decades. But who is listening to me?

In fact, one of the most annoying aspects of our political dysfunction is the type of federalism we practice here. In which other country that goes by the dictates of the presidential system do we have an all-powerful centre controlling 52 percent of the so-called federal allocation? Which country practices the odious and anomalous economic structure that has the state governors going cap-in-hand to the federal capital every month end to get the crumbs from the master's table? Simply put, we must restructure the current polity to diffuse



**AYO OYOZE BAJE**

Baje is Nigerian first food technologist in the media and author of 'Drumbeats of Democracy'

and devolve power to the federating units and weaken the centre.

Furthermore, campaigns by politicians should focus on critical issues on how to find lasting solutions to the people's persisting socio-economic woes. They should be devoid of character assassination, mud-slinging, muck-raking, innuendoes and insults to people and places. We have to also battle the base sentiments of religion and the North-South divide, do away with hate speeches and the born-to-rule mentality. Much as we pretend to the contrary, the lines that separate us are getting deeper and wider by the day!

Since INEC is at the heart of the conduct of elections there should be integrity test for all its members of staff, so that only those who are patriotic, selfless and live above board are employed there to serve the country. INEC must be an unbiased umpire like a committed, objective and dispassionate referee in a World Cup, or League Match game, or any for that matter.

Security personnel must not only be neutral but all hands must be on deck to do away with arms proliferation across the country.

Above all, having suffered enough at the hands of self-serving political gladiators now is the time to rise up and say "no" to making ourselves slaves to our unrelenting political desperados. We must stop snatching ballot boxes, bullying and killing fellow citizens to get our enemies into political power. We must stop selling our votes for peanuts. It is better we endure hunger for a day than having to suffer preventable poverty for another four years in a land God has abundantly blessed with milk and honey. Enough, is indeed, enough!



A Tribute By  
**IKEDDY ISIGUZO**

Isiguzo is a major commentator on minor issues

**W**HAT lies cannot do, more lies can do. The foundation of the saying is the famous quote of Senate President Obong Godswill Akpabio, "What money cannot do, more money can do".

Could this has informed the inability of the 109-member Senate to agree on the text of amendments to Section 60 to minimise the alterations on figures from polling units through the various collation centres that produce the results of our elections?

The House of Representatives whose 360-membership is more than thrice the size of the Senate has kept to the wordings of the joint Committee works, workshops, and conferences on "electronic transmission of results".

In most contributions from APC Senators their excuses for not accepting "electronic transmission of results" jump from excuses to lies. What are their fears?

Plainly put, their party has done so badly in almost every sphere that they know that free and fair elections would see them lose power.

The nightmare of 2023 where the "tech glitch"

## Electoral Act 2026: More excuses, more lies to defend rigging

applied to only the presidential election and handed Bola Ahmed Tinubu victory, is something they cannot go through again.

APC's latest story is that telecommunication network failure, non-coverage of some parts of the country and the capacity of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, could adversely affect "electronic transmission of results" from polling units.

INEC has dismissed these fears, by 2022, saying that its iREV jumps those obstacles effectively. Where there are network challenges, results uploaded to iREV would transmit once the machines are within areas with network coverage.

Politicians whose winning strategy is rigging still come up with more excuses, in fact lies. They want "electronic transmission of results" to be clothed in contentious lines that the courts would determine their meanings.

Our country has moved mainly backwards since APC came to power in 2015. The backwardness has been incremental. Few Nigerians imagined that Nigeria could get worse, to the point that Muhammadu Buhari's Nigeria was paradise.

Who would have believed that a Buhari successor would be worse than Buhari? Who would think that the Tinubu's incompetence, his version of patriotism that centres on selfishness, would be like this?

Trillions are budgeted annually and the money manages to disappear. No work done, no

services provided, not to talk of insecurity where Tinubu's interest stutters depending on where he is visiting next.

Contractors have not been paid a dime, some for works completed since 2024. Their protests have been addressed with more promises. Interests on loans they took have put them in penury. Some have perished with worries from the burdens of being government contractors.

Insecurity affects all. Farmers cannot produce. The roads are so unsafe that to travel on them is close to suicide. Tinubu does nothing about these.

Places like Zamfara are in different insecurity category. The fight for gold, the invested interests, and government's lack of care evidenced by ignoring the lost of lives, territory, are further proofs that being President is good enough for Tinubu.

As a lost second term stares at him, he is desperate to return. Tinubu more than anyone else knows he has not done well. Those around him try to confuse him but the fact is that Tinubu is incapable of doing anything useful for Nigeria.

With Tinubu in power, the scramble for Nigeria continues. There is no time to build a nation. No time to protect our peoples from bandits and terrorists who know that Tinubu's inattentive government is not on the side of Nigerians.

Give Tinubu his presidential jets, mention the most unimportant international events to him and he is off and promoting his foreign trips as if they are the entire essence of his presidency.

The fights over the Electoral Act 2026 are pushes for APC to retain power. The party has no other ways to do this than to use "other means".

Which Nigerians would vote again for a President and party who have proudly built a nation where our governments oppress us?

Nigerians have to be vigilant as we march to 2027. The fight for our individual survival is real against a government that does not care whether hunger or bandits kill us.

We deserve better.

Finally...

.PROF Ali Pate, Minister of Health, said his Ministry received N36 million, yes, millions, in 2025 for capital projects while at the same period the President's SA on Media & Policy Communication got N500 million for Strategic Global Media Engagements. Tinubu has priorities.

.ZAMFARA State's budget of N1 billion to build modern grave yards in its 14 local government areas has drawn a lot of attention from critics. We have to accept that different parts of Nigeria face different challenges. The number of deaths from insurgency demands action from the state government. Governor Dauda Lawal of PDP tired of complaining about security agencies that only listen to Abuja before acting, has embarked on what he can. If government cannot serve the living, let it accord the dead respects. Zamfara tells the story of Nigeria from another angle.