

Governor seeks Edo traditional rulers' support to tackle insecurity

● *Monarchs pass vote of confidence in the governor* ● *Commend his development efforts*

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo is seeking stronger collaboration with traditional rulers across Edo State's 18 local government areas to tackle insecurity and other criminal

activities.

Speaking while receiving traditional rulers from Edo Central and Edo North Senatorial Districts on a courtesy visit to Government House in Benin City, Governor Okpebholo said traditional rulers remain critical stakeholders in the fight against crime because

of their close relationship with their communities.

"There are so many security challenges, and the best people to help me fight insecurity are the traditional rulers. You know your communities because you know those who live there and those coming into the area," he said.

The governor noted that several recent kidnapping cases involved local collaborators who were familiar with the movement and financial status of residents.

"Our people know those who are wealthy and those who are not. They know the movement of people within the

community. If we must stop insecurity in Edo State, we must work together to achieve this purpose," he said.

He urged traditional rulers not to encourage or shield criminal elements, stressing that young people should be discouraged from engaging in crime.

"Let nobody encourage crime. Our children should not be involved. They should understand that crime is dangerous. The President is not happy about the security situation in the country, and I am not happy as well," he added.

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That The People May Know

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Okpebholo hails quality of Benin-Sapele Road ● *Says it will last eight decades*

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo has said the ongoing reconstruction of the Benin-Sapele Road with concrete pavement is designed to last up to 80 years before requiring major maintenance.

Speaking on Thursday while

inspecting the project in Benin City, expressing satisfaction with the pace and quality of work.

He described the project as a durable investment in the state's infrastructure and commended President Bola Tinubu for providing the funds for its execution.

"It is a quality job they are doing here. Everything is going

on well," Okpebholo said.

"I have nothing else to say but to thank President Bola Tinubu for providing the funds. What you are seeing today is the result of somebody who has worked hard to make these resources available. That is why you are seeing this level of development in Edo today."

The governor said the President remained committed to

ensuring that infrastructure projects across the country were completed on schedule because funding had been made available.

"Throughout this Sapele Road, you can see concrete pavement all the way. These are not empty promises; this is serious and expensive work," he said.

"It is a quality job that will

last for at least 80 years before we even need to think about major maintenance."

Some residents praised the governor for the ongoing reconstruction, saying it had eased traffic congestion and improved movement along the busy highway.

Mrs Pat Ogie, a pensioner, said motorists and commuters had previously endured long

hours in traffic on the road but that the situation had improved significantly since work began.

"Before the coming of Governor Okpebholo, we used to experience heavy traffic on this road, but that has become a thing of the past. God will continue to bless our governor," she said.

Another resident, Mrs Justina Osaghae, a trader commended the quality of the project, describing it as a major improvement for road users in the state.

Plans to rehabilitate, overhaul Oba Akenzua 11 Centre, Edo SSG clears air

BENIN CITY

Lack of budgetary allocation affected the plans of Edo State Government to renovate and overhaul Oba Akenzua 11 Centre in Benin metropolis last year, Umar Ikhilor Esq., Secretary to the State Government (SSG), has disclosed.

Ikhilor also noted that aside from the centre, plans were underway for the state government to renovate some areas in the place of the Oba of Benin in need of renovation.

The SSG, gave the reason for the delay in bid to restore the centre as a public monument and a hub to attract cultural activities across the state and beyond, while receiving members and executives of Aigubasimwin Movement World-Wide

and Coalition of Benin Social Cultural Organizations who paid him a courtesy visit in his office in Benin City.

He said: "The issue of the dilapidation of the Oba Akenzua II Cultural Center is what should have been handled last year. In fact the governor sent the then Managing Director (MD) of the Public Building and Maintenance Agency to visit the place and see how it can be restored."

"The agency did a survey and came up with a plan on how to overhaul and rehabilitate the cultural Center. But lack of budgetary allocation affected the plan but now we are reviewing that plan. Aside from the cultural Center, the palace of our revered monarch,

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ONGOING RECONSTRUCTION:

Edo State Governor, Sen. Monday Okpebholo (right) and the representative of the construction company (left) inspecting the ongoing reconstruction of Benin - Sapele Road with concrete pavement on Thursday.

Xenophobia: Reps seek comprehensive review of bilateral relations with S/Africa —Pg 2

Okpebholo mourns archbishop Augustine Akubeze, condoles Catholic faithful —Pg 7

Misinformation fuelling violent attacks on Ebola health workers —Pg 14

FG Signs Games Hosting Agreement with ANOCA for 2027 African School Games —Pg 22

NEWS

Exxon Mobil's affiliate to generate \$1.3bn for Nigeria

ABUJA

ESSO Exploration and Production Nigeria says its one billion-dollar Usan Infill Project in Oil Mining Lease (OML) 138 is expected to generate 1.2 billion dollars in revenue.

Jagir Baxi, Managing Director, ESSO Exploration

and Production Nigeria, ExxonMobil's affiliate made this known on Wednesday in Abuja at the ongoing Nigeria Oil and Gas (NOG) Energy Week.

Baxi said the development would unlock additional 40,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd) from Nigeria's deepwater assets, marking ESSO's return to deepwater drilling

after almost a decade.

The project, which has secured funding from partners in OML 138, was also projected to generate about 1.2 billion dollars in revenue for Nigeria within the next four years.

Baxi disclosed that more than 300 million dollars had already been committed to the project by OML 138 partners.

He added that the investment was developed within 18 months after advanced seismic acquisition and process-

ing was completed in 2024.

He described the investment as a major milestone that aligned with the Federal Government's ambition to increase crude oil production.

Baxi said the project was designed as a short-cycle investment that would deliver first oil within about six months of off-shore execution, with peak production of 40,000 barrels per day expected within 18 months.

"This investment will unlock around 40,000 barrels per

day of new deepwater oil production.

"The project is designed to deliver first-year production within around six months of on-block execution, with peak production within 18 months," he said

He further said that the 2022 renewal of the OML 138 lease for another 20 years provided the confidence needed to proceed with the investment.

Reflecting on the field's

performance, he said Usan had been producing oil for 14 years, during which partners invested over 16 billion dollars to develop the asset and produced more than 350 million barrels of crude oil.

"In these 14 years, about 4.6 billion dollars has been delivered back to Nigeria. This infill project is expected to generate a further 1.2 billion dollars in revenues to the country within the next four years," he said.

World Population Day: UN agency urges Nigeria against population size speculation

ABUJA

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has urged Nigeria to end speculation over its population size, stressing that credible demographic data remains essential for effective planning and investment.

UNFPA Nigeria Resident Representative, Ms Muriel Mafico, made the call on Wednesday in Abuja at a news conference ahead of the 2026 World Population Day commemoration.

Mafico said Nigeria already possessed the expertise and tools required to generate reliable demographic information and should leverage existing initiatives to strengthen evidence-based planning.

"We should not be guessing. Are we 240 million? Are we 250-something million? Are we going to be 450 million in 2050? We should not be guessing," she said.

She said demographic profiles being produced across states and the 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey provided rich infor-

mation that could guide development planning at national and sub-national levels.

According to her, investing in quality data enables government to determine where resources, programmes and services are most needed and ensures interventions reach priority communities.

"That is why we remain committed to investing in data so that we are evidence-driven," he said.

Mafico said the 2026 World Population Day theme, "Realising the Hopes and Aspirations of Young People — Today and for the Future," reflected findings from UNFPA's Global Demographic Futures Survey.

She said the survey, involving more than 100,000 young adults across 73 countries, showed young people still valued relationships, family and parenthood but faced economic and social barriers.

According to her, young people identified financial security, stable employment and emotional readiness as major conditions for starting families, alongside concerns over unequal caregiving responsibilities.

NOA, EDSIEC hold road walk to mobilise voters for LG elections

BENIN CITY

The National Orientation Agency (NOA), Edo State, in collaboration with the Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC), has intensified voter sensitisation through a road walk ahead of Saturday's local government elections.

Speaking at the event, the State Director of NOA, Bar. Osahon Woghiren, said the agency remains committed to mobilising citizens for active participation in the electoral process.

He urged residents to turn out en masse, vote peacefully and ensure that the elections reflect the will of the people.

The exercise, which took participants through major streets in Benin City, was designed to encourage eligible voters to turn out peacefully and fulfil their civic responsibilities.

Officials also used the opportunity to educate residents on the importance of credible elections and the need to reject violence, vote-buying and other electoral offences.



SOLIDARITY VISIT:

A cross section of the traditional rulers from Edo Central Senatorial District and their counterparts from Edo North Senatorial District who paid a Solidarity visit to Gov. Monday Okpebholo in Benin City on Thursday.

Stock market: Investors gain ₦3.45trn

LAGOS

The Nigerian stock market sustained its bullish rally on Tuesday as investors gained ₦3.450 trillion, driven by renewed buying interest in large and mid-cap stocks.

The positive sentiment lifted the market capitalisation by 2.27 per cent, rising from ₦152.135 trillion to ₦155.585 trillion.

Similarly, the All-Share Index advanced by 5,376.70 points, or 2.27 per cent, to close at 242,459.98, up from 237,083.28.

Consequently, the Year-To-Date return strengthened to 55.81 per cent while the market breadth closed positively with 33 gainers and 23 losers.

Airtel Africa and Trans-Nationwide Express led the gainers' chart by 10 per cent each, closing at ₦5,801.40 and ₦2.97 per share respectively.

Also, Fidelity Bank gains by 9.97 per cent, settling at ₦19.85.

Thomas Wyatt increased by 9.89 per cent, finishing at ₦3 and Zichis Agro Allied Industry soared by 9.69 per cent, closing at ₦29.20 per share.

Conversely, Halldane Mc

Call led the losers' chart by 9.95 per cent, finishing at ₦3.53.

Mc Nichols trailed by 8.89 per cent, settling at ₦6.15 while Computer Warehouse Group dropped by 5.65 per cent, ending the session at ₦40.05 per share.

Also, VFD Group dipped by 5.24 per cent, closing at ₦19 and NPF Microfinance Bank shed by 5.19 per cent, settling at ₦10.05 per share.

Market activity improved during the trading session as investors exchanged 518.43 million shares, representing a 5.06 per cent increase in volume.

The shares were valued at

₦22.75 billion in 48,495 deals.

Lasaco Assurance emerged as the most traded stock by volume, with 56.60 million shares exchanged, accounting for 10.92 per cent of the total volume traded.

Aradel led the value chart, with transactions worth ₦4.20 billion, representing 18.49 per cent of the total value traded.

Commenting on the rally, Mr David Adonri, Vice President of Highcap Securities Ltd., attributed the market's positive performance to the return of bullish momentum, saying the recent rally suggests the market has found its bottom.

According to him, the change in market direction began last Friday and has continued into the current trading sessions.

"The upward momentum has returned to the market. The market appears to have bottomed out. I think the change in direction started last Friday, and it has continued," he said.

Adonri, however, noted that while the recovery is expected to be gradual, it is likely to remain steady rather than experience a sharp surge

"The recovery is going to be slow, but it may be steady. It won't be a rapid rise, but a gradual and sustained recovery," he said.

Xenophobia: Reps seek comprehensive review of bilateral relations with S/Africa

ABUJA

The House of Representatives has called for a comprehensive review of bilateral engagement between Nigeria and South Africa, following renewed xenophobic attacks on Nigerians and other African nationals in the country.

The house recommended the suspension of relations with South Africa if necessary and reclamation on specific areas of bilateral cooperation until a credible assurance of the safety of Nigerians in

South Africa is secured.

The call was sequel to the unanimous adoption of a motion on xenophobia by Rep. Yusuf Gagdi (APC-Plateau) at plenary on Thursday in Abuja.

Moving the motion, Gagdi said that recent reports indicated a fresh escalation of attacks targeting Nigerians, Ghanaians, Zimbabweans, Zambians, Mozambicans, Malawians and other African nationals lawfully residing in South Africa.

He said that failure to decisively address the recurring attacks could further endanger

the lives and properties of Nigerians living in South Africa.

He said that continued inaction may embolden perpetrators and weaken confidence in regional institutions established to protect African citizens.

"The recurring attacks threaten diplomatic relations, economic cooperation and continental integration.

"The continued killing of Nigerians abroad without adequate accountability diminishes confidence in the collective commitment of African States to uphold human rights, justice and the rule of law," he said.

The green chambers urged

the Federal Government to immediately summon the South African High Commission to Nigeria to provide comprehensive explanation regarding the xenophobic killings in South Africa.

The lawmakers said that the envoy should clearly communicate the official position of the South Africa government on the protection of Nigerian citizens and other African nationals.

The house condemned the recurring xenophobic attacks, extra judicial killings, unlawful detention and systematic prosecution of Nigerians and other nationals in South Africa.

Nigeria has strengthened data identity protection, says NIMC boss

ABUJA

The Director-General of the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), Mrs Abisoye Coker-Odusote, says the newly enacted NIMC Act 2026 has significantly strengthened Nigeria's digital identity ecosystem.

Odusote-Coker said this the Act had done by enhancing data security and empowering the commission to combat identity-related crimes.

She said this during a courtesy visit to the Federal Ministry of Information, and the National Orientation Agency (NOA), as part of government's efforts to sensitise public institu-

tions on the provisions and benefits of the new Act.

She explained that the repealed NIMC Act lacked data protection powers, leading to the 2023 Data Protection Act and the creation of the Nigerian Data Protection Commission (NDPC).

"It may interest you to know that the new Data Protection Act

that Mr President assented to, is sorted through support with NIMC in 2021, leading to the establishment of the Data Protection Commission," she said.

According to her, the new NIMC Act empowers the commission, in collaboration with security agencies, to arrest and prosecute identity thieves.

"In line with this new man-

date, we have recently revamped our internal enforcement structure through the Inspectorate, Compliance and Enforcement (ICE) Unit to ensure effective implementation of the Act."

Odusote-Coker also disclosed that the commission had activated a ward enrolment programme aimed at expanding NIN registration to all wards across the country.

"It may interest you to know that the president has given us marching orders last year to go and kickstart the ward

enrolment exercise, which we embarked upon on Feb. 16," she said.

She explained that the initiative aligned with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda and was designed to ensure inclusive identity coverage for all Nigerians.

"We are rotating round all the 8009 wards, and this is why our partnership with NOA who is also represented at the ward level is very crucial in helping us disseminate information," she said.



COURTESY VISIT:

L-R, Commissioner for Art Culture and creative economy, Hon Chris Okaeben, The President of Aiguobasimwin Movement World-Wide, Iyamu Osaro Culture, Secretary To Edo State Government, Musa Ikhilor Esq and Coordinator General Coalition of Benin Social cultural Organization, Mr. Amas Osazee, in a group photograph, after a courtesy visit on Thursday.

Photo: Okondoh Talle Ebose

FED Xter commission must reposition to meet Nigerians' expectations – Omidiran

ABUJA

The Executive Chairman of the Federal Character Commission (FCC), Mrs Hulayat Omidiran, says the commission must reposition itself to meet Nigerians' expectations through the effective implementation of the Federal Character Principle.

This is contained in a statement issued by the FCC Spokesperson, Mr Ademola Lawrence, and made available to newsmen on Thursday in Abuja.

Lawrence quoted Omidiran to have said this at the opening of the 2026 Executive and Management Leadership Retreat of the commission in Ikogosi-Ekiti, Ekiti State.

The retreat was themed: "Repositioning the Federal

Character Commission for Institutional Cohesion and National Relevance."

The event had the former First Lady of Osun State and wife of the Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Mrs Kafayat Oyetola, as special guest.

Omidiran described the retreat as a defining moment in the commission's evolution, aimed at deepening collaboration between the board and management.

She said the event was also aimed at strengthening institutional capacity and developing practical strategies for enhancing the commission's constitutional mandate.

"As the constitutional institution entrusted with promoting and enforcing the Federal Character Principle, our re-

sponsibility extends beyond regulatory oversight.

"We must continually strengthen our institutional capacity, uphold the highest standards of professionalism and integrity, and reposition the commission to respond effectively to the evolving expectations of Nigerians," she said.

The Governor of Ekiti State, Biodun Oyeubani, pledged support for the commission's efforts to reposition itself as a more effective institution for promoting equity, inclusion and national unity.

Represented by the Secretary to the State Government, Prof. Habibat Adubiaro, Oyeubani said the retreat's theme aligned with Nigeria's aspiration for unity, fairness and equal opportunity.

He stressed that the commission remained indispensable to promoting balanced representation, social justice and national integration.

"The Federal Character Commission occupies a strategic position in nurturing national integration, promoting social justice and strengthening confidence in public institutions.

"At a time when Nigerians increasingly demand fairness, transparency and inclusiveness in governance, your work has never been more important.

"I urge participants to generate practical and innovative solutions that will further strengthen the commission's effectiveness, credibility and public impact," the governor said.

19 years after, Reps, BPP to review Public Procurement Act

ABUJA

The Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) has commenced discussions with the House of Representatives Committee on Public Procurement on the proposed review of the Public Procurement Act, 2007.

A statement issued by Zira Nagga, BPP's Head of Media and Public Relations in Abuja on Thursday, said the discussions were held at a strategic retreat with the house committee members in Abuja.

The statement said the collaborative session underscored the shared commitment of the BPP and the House Committee to drive reforms that would improve governance, promote sustainable development, and build public trust in Nigeria's procurement system.

It said the retreat concluded

with an agreement to sustain engagements and technical consultations to ensure that the proposed revised Act provides a robust legal framework for effective public procurement management in Nigeria.

The Director-General of the BPP, Dr Adebawale Adedokun, who spoke at the retreat, stressed the need to align procurement laws with current realities to foster accountability and value for money in government expenditure.

Adedokun said that the review of the Procurement Act was expected to modernise procurement processes, address emerging challenges, strengthen oversight, and align Nigeria's framework with international best practices.

He emphasised the crucial role of the BPP in ensuring transparency, accountability and efficiency in Nigeria's procurement process.

Gender-Based violence: Amnesty int'l trains lawyer on strengthening response

OWERRI

No fewer than thirty female lawyers in Imo have been trained by the Amnesty International on ways to strengthen legal response to Gender Based Violence (GBV) and survivor-centred based practice in the state.

The two-day workshop included presentations on understanding GBV in the Nigerian context, media engagement and strategic communication in GBV cases, evidence gathering and referral pathways and inter-agency collaboration, among others.

Speaking at the training on Thursday in Owerri, the Education officer at Amnesty International, Ms Helen Adah said the training was necessitated by the high number of GBV cases in the state.

She added that the programme was convened to better equip lawyers and responders to GBV on proper procedures for handling such cases to achieve the desired results.

She added that the training would enable more sensitisation on GBV and best practices to ensure that violators are properly prosecuted and survivors protected.

Also speaking at the programme, a legal practitioner, Mrs Ndidi Anike Val-Okeoma said the training would provide clarity on the systems on the laws, the existing legal and policy frameworks and how to better deal with GBV cases.

She added that participants would also teach other practitioners, and sensitise people on GBV cases and the various referral pathways and how to secure justice and discourage secondary victimisation.

The lawyer also called on the government to set up sexual assault referral centers for survivors of GBV to improve success rates in the prosecution of such cases.

She also encouraged the participants to apply the core principles of survivor-centered approach which are safety, confidentiality, respect and dignity, non-discrimination and survivor autonomy in GBV related cases.

Speaking to Journalists at the event, the state Chairperson of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Mrs Phil Amaefule said the association remained committed to helping survivors of GBV despite various challenges.

Edo partners virology to enhance healthcare service

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN), has held the 2026 Annual Operational Plan (AOP) Dissemination Meeting in Benin City, to boost effective service delivery in the Health Sector.

According to the Honourable Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Adams Oshiomhole, the AOP remains a key document that will guide the implementation of health pro-

grammes and ensure that resources are effectively utilized to improve healthcare services for Edo people through review and dissemination of the State's operational plan for the 2026 fiscal year.

Dr. Oshiomhole noted that though the AOP was about midway into the implementation year, the soft copies of the plan had been made available to stakeholders. He clarified that the engagement was to officially present the validated plan to relevant stakeholders, advocate renewed collective commitment

to its implementation, answer questions, or provide clarifications to ensure seamless execution.

The Commissioner lauded the vision of the State Governor, Sen. Monday Okpebholo, in the Health Sector, and appreciated development partners including IHVN, the World Health Organisation, for their sponsorship. He commended the USAID, ICI, GHSG-PSM, among others, for their invaluable technological assistance on realising the AOP. He also appreciated programmes of-

ficers, heads of departments in the Healthcare Eco system for the successful engagement.

The Special Adviser to the Governor on Health, Dr. Andrew Iyamu, described the AOP as more than just a document, saying it represents a commitment to delivering quality healthcare to every resident in the State. He commended the Commissioner for Health and the Technical Team for developing the plan and assured participants of the State Government's continued support towards its successful implementation.

Low banking hall traffic raises concerns

BENIN CITY

BENEDICT OKATE

The once-bustling banking halls of many commercial banks across Nigeria are experiencing a noticeable decline in customer traffic, a trend that has sparked mixed reactions among some concerned Nigerians who include; financial analysts and banking professionals.

A visit by our correspondent to several bank branches in major commercial areas of Benin City, the Edo State capital, including Ring Road, Akpakpava Road, Sapele Road and Airport Road, revealed relatively calm banking halls and premises, with only a handful of customers waiting for services that once attracted long

queues.

A businessman, Mr. Osahon Eghosa, attributed the decline to the growing adoption of digital banking platforms. He also noted that rising transportation costs and banking charges have discouraged customers from making frequent visits to bank branches.

"These days, I hardly enter a banking hall except when there is a serious issue that cannot be resolved online. Transfers, bill payments and account management can all be done on my phone within minutes," he said.

A civil servant, Mrs. Grace Omoregie, observed that improvements in electronic banking services have significantly reduced the need for physical visits.

"Unlike a few years ago, customers now have several

options. Most salary earners receive alerts instantly and can complete almost every transaction without going to the bank," she said.

However, another resident, Mr. Ibrahim Musa, expressed concern that some customers, particularly elderly people, still face challenges using digital banking services.

"Older people still prefer face-to-face banking because they are not comfortable with technology. Banks should not neglect them while expanding digital services," he said.

A financial analyst, Mr. Emmanuel Adebayo, described the trend as part of a broader global transformation in banking operations.

"The reduction in banking hall traffic should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in banking activities. Rather, it reflects the rapid adoption of digital financial services. Mobile applications, internet banking, USSD platforms and Point-of-Sale transactions have significantly changed customer behaviour," he explained.

Some bank officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that customer visits have declined significantly over the past few years.

One senior bank official said:

"What you see today is the result of deliberate digital transformation. Customers now prefer mobile apps, internet banking and ATMs. Our banking halls are no longer as crowded as they used to be."

King's College: Why we disagree with concessioning – parents community

LAGOS

Federal Government's concessioning of King's College Lagos has continued to attract rejection from the school's unit of the Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN).

The parents community of the foremost unity college also disagreed with the arrangement.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that the Federal Government has approved concessioning of the college to

its old boys association.

The Chairman of King's College Lagos Unit of ASCSN, Mr. Enang Samuel, told NAN on Thursday that all the staff of the college rejected the concession.

He said that the Federal Government should retain ownership of the college and continue to operate it.

The chairman stressed that concessioning the 116-year-old school would serve private interests rather than public good.

He urged the government not to commercialise the college, saying that King's College

Lagos workers would resist the concession through lawful means.

"All members of staff of King's College reject this concession and are prepared for any legitimate action to defend government ownership of the college and protect public interest," he said.

Also, Mr. Olatunji Ojulari, the Chairman of King's College Lagos Parents Community, expressed displeasure at the development.

Ojulari said that the college remained a national monument.

"We respectfully but totally disagree with the concession

approval

"Our forefathers never donated this land for commercial purposes but to guarantee affordable quality education for generations of Nigerians," he said.

He said that implementing the concession would undermine the school's vision by placing quality education beyond the reach of many families.

"Ojulari said that King's College Lagos had been delivering excellent education at an affordable cost.

"Concession of the school will impose financial burdens on countless parents," he said.

Plans to rehabilitate, overhaul...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

the Oba of Benin is also included in the plan.

"Some renovation work needs to be carried out in the palace. The issue of Oba Akenzua II Cultural Center and the Palace of the Oba of Benin, His Royal Majesty, Omo N'Oba N'Edo, Uku Akpolokpolo, Oba Ewuare II, is being looked into by the governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo."

The SSG added that the Cultural Center attracted a lot people to cultural events, assuring the people that the Okpebholo led administration will restore the Center and ensure it attracts cultural events and activities in Edo State and across the Country.

"I recall that at a point the main event hall was Urokpota Hall, then came the cultural center and it became the center of events.

"Oba Akenzua II Cultural Center should be a public monument and a hub for cultural activities.

As a government we are going to ensure we revive it because there are a lot of activities that can take place here, it is what this government will do," he concluded.

Speaking earlier, the Commissioner for Art, Culture and Creative Economy, Hon. Chris Okaeben, described Edo culture as one of the greatest in Nigeria, noting that advancement in the creative sector will bring endless benefits to Edo people and the State at large.

He said his Ministry is planning to organize the

creative content and about 1,700 persons have indicated interest and it will scale up the opportunity to promote the achievement of governor Monday Okpebholo.

"The Ministry will promote the good intentions of the government, promote and encourage tourists destinations for those intending to visit Edo State.

"I am glad to report that our royal father, the Oba of Benin, invited me and informed me that part of his 10 years coronation (anniversary), will begin with the Edo Festival; the plan for the celebration is on," he concluded.

Speaking on behalf of the group, the Coordinator General Coalition of Benin Social Cultural Organizations, Mr. Amas Osazee, commended Governor Monday Okpebholo on his achievements so far in securing the lives and properties of Edo people.

"I want to thank the governor for not playing politics with the returned artifacts of His Royal Majesty. He has done well in that aspect and he made it known to us that he will never play politics with such. We wish him well in managing the affairs of the State.

"As a group, we appeal to the State government to renovate the Oba Akenzua II Cultural Center. The state of the structure is in doubt and far from what many people want to see. We appeal to the governor to redirect his focus to that because we are cultural people and believe in the legacy of the monarchy and the State government".

Gov. seeks Edo traditional rulers'...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

The governor also appealed to the royal fathers to mobilise support for President Bola Tinubu ahead of the next presidential election, expressing confidence that Edo State could deliver substantial votes for the President.

Responding on behalf of the visiting monarchs, the Oju-

romi of Uromi, HRM Anslem Edenojie II, passed a vote of confidence in the governor, describing his development efforts across the state as commendable.

The monarch assured Governor Okpebholo of the continued support and cooperation of traditional rulers in promoting peace, security and development across Edo State.



MEETING WITH TRADITIONAL RULERS:

L-R Commissioner for Information and Communication Prince Kassim Afegbua, Secretary to Edo State Government Musa Ikhlil Esq, Deputy Governor of Edo State Rt. Hon. Dennis Idahosa, Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo, State Deputy Chairman APC Sylvester Aigboboh and Chief of Staff to Edo State Governor Hon. Yakubu Oshiohena Musa during a meeting with Traditional rulers. Photo: Okondoh

NGX extends rally as investors gain ₦962bn

The Nigerian equities market extended its bullish run on Thursday as investors gained approximately ₦961.75 billion, with sustained buying interest in banking and blue-chip stocks lifting key market indicators for the fifth consecutive trading session.

The Nigerian Exchange (NGX) All-Share Index (ASI) advanced by 1,498.75 points, or 0.62 per cent, to close at 243,958.73 points, while market capitalisation rose by the same margin to ₦156.55 trillion.

Market analysts attributed the positive performance to continued investor confidence, bargain hunting in medium and large-cap stocks, and sustained demand for fundamentally strong equities, particularly FIRSTHOLDCO, ZENITHBANK, ACCESSCORP and MTNN.

Trading activity recorded a sharp increase, with total volume traded soaring 219.45 per cent to approximately 1.66

billion shares, while the value of transactions jumped 392.14 per cent to ₦111.98 billion, executed in 44,780 deals.

FIRSTHOLDCO dominated market activity, accounting for 76.06 per cent of total traded volume and 76.50 per cent of total value traded. Other actively traded stocks included ZE-

NITHBANK, ACCESSCORP, FCMB and FIDELITYBK.

On the gainers' chart, INT-BREW appreciated by 10.00 per cent to emerge the day's best-performing stock. It was followed by FIRSTHOLDCO with 9.96 per cent, ABBEYBANK (9.88 per cent), TRANSEXPR (9.76 per cent), HONYFLOUR (9.68 per

cent) and NAHCO (8.84 per cent).

Conversely, THOMASWY and GEREGU led the losers' table after shedding 10.00 per cent each. They were followed by MCNICHOLS (-9.76 per cent), UPDC (-9.20 per cent), NEIMETH (-8.16 per cent), DAARCOMM (-6.70 per cent) and UBA (-6.53 per cent).

NHRC receives 326,113 human rights violations complaints in June

ABUJA

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) received 326,113 complaints across the country in June 2026, with violations of the right to life emerging as the most prevalent abuse.

The Executive Secretary of the NHRC, Dr. Tony Ojukwu, SAN made this known on Thursday at the presentation of June Dashboard report on human rights violations across

the 36 states and Abuja.

Ojukwu said the staggering number of complaints underscores the urgent need for stronger government action to protect citizens and hold perpetrators accountable.

He stated that June witnessed the historic passage of the constitutional amendment towards the decentralisation of Nigeria's policing structure and operations.

He expressed grave concern over the continued rise in sexual violence against children,

describing the trend as alarming and calling for immediate, coordinated interventions to protect.

"June also marks the first anniversary of the Yelewata massacre in Benue. One year later, survivors remain displaced, living in overcrowded conditions with limited access to food, clean water, and medical care," he lamented.

"The commission joins all those calling for justice for the victims of Yelewata and for every community across the country awaiting accountability.

Anambra Govt. approves 3 months tax waiver for business owners

AWKA

Anambra Government has approved three months tax waiver for business owners under

its newly introduced Voluntary Assets Income Declaration and Tax Regularisation Scheme (VAIDS) from July 6 to Sept. 5.

The State Commissioner for

Information and Value Reformation, Dr Law Mefor, disclosed this in a statement on Thursday in Awka.

Mefor said the scheme offers a one-time chance for taxpayers

to fix their tax issues without facing the full penalties for not complying with the law.

He said that the decision was reached by the tax authority in the state, led by the Executive Chairman, Anambra State Internal Revenue Service (AIRS), Mr Ikeazor Okonkwo.

He charged businesses and

other organisations that have not paid taxes or fees and those who have not registered as taxable persons to explore the three months window to register and pay their taxes.

Mefor also urged other registered taxpayers with additional income, assets or liabilities to disclose them.

He said that those who failed to fully declare taxable income and assets, underpayments or under-remitted taxes or levies would face the full weight of the law.

He added those currently under tax audit, investigation or are involved in a tax dispute with the AIRS and had been issued Best of Judgment (BOJ) assessments but failed to respond within the statu-

tory timeliness would not be exempted from prosecution.

The commissioner said that eligible taxpayers, who make full and honest disclosure, would enjoy 100 per cent waiver of penalties of accrued interest and immunity from prosecution.

He urged those with undeclared income or assets and taxpayers, business owners, companies that had defaulted in declaration of assets and tax payment to regularise with the tax offices or visit the VAIDS portal at tax.services.an.gov.ng/vaids.

Mefor warned that the AIRS would commence full enforcement against defaulting taxpayers at the expiration of the tax waiver by September 5.



SENSITISATION ROAD WALK:

The National Orientation Agency (NOA), Edo State, in collaboration with the Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC) during a Sensitisation Road Walk ahead of Saturday's Local Government elections

Idunmwonwina alleges land grab, seeks Benin Palace, Edo govt's intervention

BENIN CITY

The elders and people of Idunmwonwina Community in Orhionmwon Local Government Area of Edo State have appealed to the Palace of the Benin Monarch, His Royal Majesty, Ewuare II, the Oba of Benin and the Edo State government to intervene over the alleged encroachment on their ancestral land by neighbouring Igbekhue community.

Addressing journalists, the people alleged that the dispute arose after Idunmwonwina complied with the Benin Palace's traditional position that palace land or property should not be located on the boundary

between two communities.

According to the residents, the community deliberately left the palace land at the centre of its territory and cleared the surrounding area to preserve and clearly identify the property.

They alleged that the situation changed when youths from Igbekhue reportedly moved into the area towards the palace land despite the two communities not sharing a common boundary.

The residents said they became alarmed after hearing the sound of a grader operating in the bush.

On visiting the site, they claimed, they found the machine clearing part of their farmland where Igbekhue

youths were allegedly attempting to create a boundary, an action they described as an encroachment on Idunmwonwina ancestral land.

The elders described the development as shocking, insisting that the Igbekhue community has no direct boundary with Idunmwonwina.

They maintained that the activities amounted to an unlawful invasion of their ancestral land.

Speaking on behalf of Idunmwonwina community, the Odionwere, Pa Daniel Osunde, alongside elders and women leaders, expressed concern over what they described as attempts by individuals from Igbekhue community to sell

portions of the disputed land.

They warned members of the public against purchasing land in the area from anyone claiming ownership on behalf of Igbekhue, stressing that prospective buyers risk losing their money if they proceed with such transactions.

Also speaking, the Okaighele of Idunmwonwina community, Comrade Sylvester Evbuomwan, alleged that land sales were already taking place in the disputed area.

He urged prospective buyers to exercise caution, adding that the community had visited the Edo State Geographic Information Service (EdoGIS) to verify official records and maps, which, according to him, show that Igbekhue does not share a boundary with Idunmwonwina.

Poor nutrition, major challenge facing children — Commissioner

LAGOS

The Ogun Commissioner for Health, Dr Tomi Coker, has identified poor nutrition as one of the major challenges affecting Nigerian children, warning that it undermines brain development and limits their future potential.

Coker spoke on Thursday in Lagos during a fireside chat organised as part of the 20th anniversary celebration of Green Pastures Kiddies, a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

The Child Impact Summit has the theme: "Closing the Gaps: Strengthening Systems for Better Outcomes."

According to Coker, many women enter pregnancy malnourished and are unable to maintain adequate nutrition during pregnancy, with adverse consequences for the health and development of their children.

She explained that poor maternal nutrition affects a child's brain development, making it difficult for children to fully benefit from educational opportunities later in life.

"And then the product that we are actually giving to you, the educationists don't actually have the child with a well-nourished brain to take in the education."

"This is because a child is alive does not mean the child is intact mentally. A lot of times, where care given during labour is inadequate and the child suffers oxygen shortage, the brain is not going to develop," she said.

Coker added that children affected by malnutrition and birth-related complications often failed to achieve their full

potential as adults.

She identified poor nutrition and oxygen deprivation during childbirth as two major factors affecting children's development in Nigeria.

The commissioner questioned the quality of future workforce the country was producing, emphasising the need to invest in child health to ensure children could contribute meaningfully to national development.

"What sort of children are we churning out, and they will be major contributors to the labour workforce?" she asked.

JED distributes 109,000 free meters under DISREP scheme

JOS

Jos Electricity Distribution (JED) Plc has commenced the distribution of 109,000 free prepaid electricity meters to customers across its franchise states under the Distribution Sector Recovery Programme (DISREP) Scheme.

The Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) of JED, Dr Abubakar Ibrahim, on Thursday in Jos, at the company's 2026 Customer's Consultative Forum, said the initiative would improve metering, eliminate estimated billings, enhance billing transparency, improve revenue collection and boost customer satisfaction.

He said that band A customers in its franchise states of Plateau, Gombe, Benue and Bauchi would be the first beneficiaries.

According to him, the band A clients will be the first beneficiaries as they pay one per

cent electricity tariff.

He further said that over 20,000 meters were earlier distributed under its Meter Acquisition Fund (MAF).

Ibrahim said the meters were absolutely free and called on its clients to report any one, who asks for charges under the DISREP scheme.

Responding to complaints by some customers that deductions of about N2,000 were made whenever they purchased electricity tokens, the company's CCO, explained that many prepaid meters were supplied with initial energy units, which were not free and would be paid for by customers.

He advised customers dissatisfied with their bills or account balances to visit any JED office at its customers care office to obtain their account statements and seek clarification or resolution of any billing concerns.

Adeleke varsity IAB chairman pledges stronger academia-Industry collaboration

ABUJA

Ede (Osun) Mr Ibraheem Bello, the Chairman of the Industry Advisory Board (IAB), Faculty of Engineering, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun, has pledged to strengthen collaboration between academia and industry to enhance the quality of engineering education in Nigeria.

Bello made the pledge in a statement on Thursday in Osogbo, saying the initiative would produce graduates equipped to meet the demands of the global workplace.

According to the statement, Bello, the immediate past Chairman of the Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), Ibadan Branch, spoke during his acceptance speech at his inauguration as chairman of the board.

He described his appoint-

ment as "a call to service" and expressed appreciation to the university management for the confidence reposed in him.

Bello pledged to discharge his responsibilities with diligence, professionalism, transparency and integrity.

Speaking on the theme of the inauguration, "Bridging Industry Gaps, Advancing Educational Excellence, and Celebrating Academic Milestone," he said sustainable partnerships between universities and industry were critical to technological advancement, innovation and national development.

He noted that the IAB would serve as a strategic platform for linking classroom learning with practical industry experience.

Bello added that he would ensure engineering graduates acquire skills required to compete globally.

NEWS

Public trust remains greatest asset, Disu tells Police

ABUJA

Tunji Disu, Nigeria's Inspector-General of Police (IGP), has urged global law enforcement leaders to ensure that technological innovations strengthen public trust, transparency and human rights.

Disu made the call while addressing the Fifth United Nations Chiefs of Police Summit (UNCOPS 2026) on Innovation and New Technologies in

UN Policing on Wednesday.

The Nigeria's police chief warned that embracing technological advancement should never diminish the confidence citizens place in policing institutions.

"Technology can enhance policing but it can never replace public trust. The legitimacy of every police institution rests on the confidence of the people it serves," he said.

The IGP said technology would continue to transform

policing but trust would remain the defining pillar of every credible law enforcement institution.

"Together, through responsible innovation and visionary leadership, we can build policing institutions that are not only smarter but more trusted, more inclusive and better equipped to secure a peaceful world," he said.

The IGP said the Nigeria Police Force, serving over 230 million people, was navigating rapid

digital transformation, making innovation "no longer a choice" but "an operational necessity."

"Criminal networks now exploit artificial intelligence, encrypted communication and cyber-enabled fraud to operate across borders with high sophistication," Disu said.

"This challenges traditional policing models and forces us to rethink how we protect vulnerable communities."

Disu, however, said the

same technologies exploited by criminal networks also presented "extraordinary opportunities" for law enforcement agencies worldwide.

"Artificial intelligence, digital forensics and geospatial intelligence are transforming how we anticipate threats and conduct investigations," he said.

According to him, innova-

tion must strengthen transparency, accountability and respect for human rights rather than undermine democratic policing principles.

"Innovation must therefore strengthen transparency, accountability and respect for human rights. Technology should complement human judgment, not replace it.



POLICE SUMMIT:

IGP Tunji Disu (3rd left) flanked by the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the UN, Amb. Jimoh Ibrahim and other members of Nigeria's delegation during the 5th UN Chiefs of Police Summit at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Lagos Assembly Endorses State Police

LAGOS

The Lagos State House of Assembly has endorsed the establishment of state police, urging nationwide constitutional reforms to strengthen Nigeria's security architecture.

Lawmakers also called on the 36 State Houses of Assembly to expedite consideration and approval of the Constitution Alteration Bill on state policing.

The resolution followed the adoption of a motion titled, 'Support for the Establishment of State Police in Nigeria,' moved by Majority Leader, Noheem Adams.

Adams said the proposed legislation aligned with Federal Government efforts to decentralise policing, strengthen security architecture and better protect lives and property nationwide.

"Lagos Assembly had consistently supported the establishment of state police to enhance community policing and address the country's growing security challenges," Adams said.

He noted Nigeria's police-to-population ratio of about one officer to 600 people limited effective policing and reinforced the need for a decentralised policing system.

He said state police would improve local intelligence

gathering, faster responses and more effective security operations within communities.

Speaker, Mudashiru Obasa, said ongoing security measures had strengthened efforts against kidnapping, terrorism, banditry and other violent crimes.

Obasa argued that state gov-

ernments should administer their police services, including recruitment, appointments, promotions, discipline and operational responsibilities.

He proposed that governors should appoint Commissioners of Police, subject to confirmation by their respective State Houses of Assembly.

Value chain development programme trains 100 Ebonyi youths on digital agricultural marketing

ABAKALIKI

The Ebonyi Value Chain Development Programme (VCDP) has trained 100 youths in digital literacy and electronics-agri-

cultural marketing system.

The training, organised on Wednesday in Abakaliki, is aimed at equipping them with skills to leverage online platforms for the marketing of

agricultural produce and agribusiness development.

The participants were selected across eight local government areas in Ebonyi.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the State Programme Coordinator of the VCDP, Mr Sunday Ituma, represented by the Agriculture Production Officer, Mr. Darlington Onele, described the training as a unique opportunity designed to empower young people with digital agricultural marketing skills.

He urged the participants to regard their selection as a privilege and make the most of the opportunity by applying the knowledge gained to improve their livelihoods.

Also speaking, Dr Victor Chukwu, the Management Information System Officer (MISO) for the programme and a lecturer in the Depart-

ment of Agricultural Economics, Management and Extension at Ebonyi State University, said the training focused on enhancing digital literacy.

"The initiative complements the agricultural development efforts of Ebonyi State Governor, Francis Nwifuru.

"The training was made possible through the state government's prompt payment of counterpart funds for the programme.

"The governor had recorded notable achievements in the agricultural sector, including the distribution of about 31,000 bags of fertiliser, improved seed varieties, herbicides and other agrochemicals to farmers across the state.

"There is need for Ebonyi, as an agrarian state, to expand markets for its agricultural products through digital platforms.

A'ibom Assembly organises quiz competition for staff intellectual growth

UYO

Akwa Ibom House of Assembly has organised a quiz competition for its staff in its efforts to enhance intellectual growth for efficient service delivery. The competition held in Uyo was part of the activities for assembly's 3rd anniversary celebration.

Declaring the competition open, Dr Nsibibe Akata, Deputy Leader, Akwa Ibom House of Assembly, urged the

staff to continue to study and improve themselves for better performance.

Akata, also the Chairman, 3rd Anniversary Planning Committee, said the quiz reflected the commitment to promoting continuous learning, team work, healthy competition and professional excellence within the legislative institution.

"Legislation thrives not only on the contributions of the elected members but on the dedication, competence and institutional knowledge of

their staff.

"This competition celebrates the invaluable roles of the staff, strengthening the legislative process and sustaining the effectiveness of the Assembly," he said.

Akata encouraged the participants to compete with confidence, integrity and the spirit of sportsmanship.

He noted that while prizes would be won, the greatest reward would be the opportunity to learn and deepen the knowledge of the institution they work in.

He thanked the House lead-

ership, especially the speaker and everyone who made the competition a success and Gov. Umo Eno for the support given to the assembly members in the last 3 years.

"It is my hope that this initiative will be a permanent feature in the future legislative week celebrations to inspire excellence," Akata said.

Administration and Welfare department scored first with 13 points, Legislative department took the second position with 11 points, and Budget, Finance and Supply came third with nine points.

JUSUN hails Uba Sani for judiciary reforms, ₦2bn court renovation project

ABUJA

The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN), Kaduna State branch, has commended Governor Uba Sani for what it described as

unprecedented support for the judiciary through improved workers' welfare and major infrastructure investment.

The union said the governor's interventions had strengthened the administra-

tion of justice, enhanced staff welfare and reinforced the independence of the judiciary in Kaduna State.

The commendation is contained in a statement jointly signed by the Chairman of the

union, Auwalu Sarki, Assistant Secretary, Nasir Haruna, and Treasurer, Hygienus Aka'ahs, on Thursday in Kaduna.

The statement said the governor approved and paid out-fit allowances for all categories

of judiciary staff in the state and also cleared two months' withheld salaries for April and May 2021, which had remained unpaid by the previous administration.

It added that the governor had also approved the payment of Leave and Transport Grants for judiciary workers from the time he assumed office up to 2025, noting that the payments were expected to commence soon.

According to the statement, the state government had awarded and commenced the renovation of the Kaduna State Judiciary Headquarters, including the High Court of Justice, the Shari'a Court of Appeal, the Customary Court of Appeal and the Judicial Service Commission, at a cost exceeding N2 billion.

It further said the governor approved the payment of oth-

er outstanding entitlements due to judicial officers and judiciary staff across the state.

He described the interventions as a demonstration of the governor's commitment to strengthening the justice delivery system, safeguarding judicial independence and improving the welfare of judicial personnel.

"The Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria sincerely appreciates these unprecedented interventions and assures the governor of the continued support and cooperation of judiciary staff in promoting efficient, effective and timely administration of justice in Kaduna State."

The statement prayed for God to grant the governor wisdom, strength and good health to continue delivering democratic dividends to the people of Kaduna State.



UBA MONEY EXPLORERS BOOK:

L-R: Senior Programmes Manager, Slum2School Africa, Adekunle Idowu; Managing Director, UBA Foundation, Bola Atta; and Segment Executive, Children and Youth Banking, UBA, Ozioma Obi, with pupils at the financial literacy workshop convened by UBA Foundation and Slum2School Africa, where the children received the UBA Money Explorers Book, in Lagos, recently.

Okpebholo mourns archbishop Augustine Akubeze, condoles Catholic faithful

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has expressed deep sorrow over the death of Most Rev. Augustine Obiora Akubeze, Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Benin City, describing his passing as a painful loss to the Christian community, Edo State and Nigeria.

Governor Okpebholo, in a condolence message, said the late Archbishop devoted his life to the service of God and humanity,

leaving behind an enduring legacy of faith, compassion, integrity and selfless leadership.

The Governor noted that Archbishop Akubeze distinguished himself as a humble shepherd and courageous advocate for justice, peace and good governance throughout his ministry, both as Metropolitan Archbishop of Benin City and as former President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria.

"Archbishop Akubeze was a man of deep faith, wisdom and uncommon humility. He ded-

icated his life to serving God and uplifting humanity. He was a strong moral voice who consistently spoke for justice, peace, unity and the welfare of the poor.

"His passing is a great loss not only to the Catholic Church but also to Edo State and the nation. We have lost a respected spiritual father whose counsel and commitment to truth inspired many within and outside the Church," the Governor said.

Governor Okpebholo extended his heartfelt condolences to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, the priests, religious and lay faithful of the

Benin Archdiocese, as well as the family of the late Archbishop.

He assured the Catholic community of the solidarity and support of the Edo State Government during this period of mourning and urged all Edo people, irrespective of their religious beliefs, to pray for the peaceful repose of the departed cleric.

The Governor prayed that Almighty God would grant the late Archbishop Augustine Akubeze eternal rest and comfort all those grieving his passing, while urging them to uphold the enduring values of faith, love, service and integrity that defined his life and ministry.

Alleged abuse of office: Court remands Ex-CCT Chairman in Kuje

ABUJA

An Abuja High Court on Thursday remanded the former Chairman of the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT), Danladi Umar, in the Kuje Medium Security Custodial Centre.

Justice Peter Kekemeke gave the order after the Federal Government arraigned the erstwhile CCT boss on four-count corruption charge.

The judge adjourned the case until July 15 for hearing im Umar's bail application.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) charged Umar with abuse of office.

It was alleged that in 2021 he used his wife's bank account to collect N5.5 million from a contractor engaged to paint the headquarters of the CCT in Abuja.

The anti-graft agency further alleged that on Jan. 25,

2024, the defendant also used his wife's account to collect N6 million from a contractor who handled the digitisation of the CCT's records.

Also, the defendant was accused of directing another contractor to pay N2.43 million for the tuition fee of his daughter at Baze University, Abuja.

He was said to have committed offences punishable under section 19 of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000.

Umar, however pleaded not guilty to the charge.

Earlier, the EFCC Counsel, Christopher Mshelia, prayed the court to reman Umar and urged the judge to set a date for the commencement of trial.

However, the defendant, through his legal team, urged the court to release him on bail pending the determination of the case.

Justice Kekemeke then adjourned until July 15, for the hearing of the bail application.

Bakery worker docked for allegedly stealing 4 bags of flour

KADUNA

A 28-year-old bakery worker, Sarah Amos, was on Thursday docked in Magistrates' Court in Kaduna for allegedly stealing four bags of flour.

The defendant, who resides

in the Malali area of Kaduna, is charged with theft.

The Prosecution Counsel, Insp Chidi Leo, told the court that the defendant committed the offence on June 28 in Kawo, Kaduna.

Leo said the defendant who works in a bakery belonging to Garba Haruna, located along

NEPA roundabout, Kaduna stole four bags of flour worth N350,000.

The prosecution said the offence contravened the provisions of Section 217 of the Kaduna State Penal Code, 2017.

Amos pleaded not guilty to the charge.

Section 217 stipulates five

years jail term for stealing.

Magistrate Ibrahim Emmanuel admitted the defendant to bail in the sum of N200,000, with one surety in like sum.

He said that the surety must be gainfully employed and must present evidence of one years tax payment to the Kaduna State Government.

Woman seeks divorce over husband's abandonment for 1 year

KADUNA

A nursing mother, Fatima Muhammad on Thursday prayed to a Shari'a court II sitting at Magajin Gari, Kaduna to dissolve her union with one Zakari Abdulkarim, her husband over alleged abandonment.

The complainant told the court that her husband had left her with pregnancy in his parents house with no care or love and came back when their baby clocked seven months.

"I'm not saying he doesn't send money but his brother's wife who is in charge of cooking in the house starved me for two weeks simply because we had a misunderstanding.

"I gave birth with no proper care or love from him and he doesn't have a tangible job; I

want divorce", she said.

On his part, the defendant said he loved his wife and usually sent money to her for feeding and other expenses.

He explained that due to the nature of his mining job in Nasarawa State, he was not able to be with his family when she gave birth.

Abdulkarim prayed court to give him time to try and settle the matter out of court and also get an apartment where his wife would stay.

Earlier, the defendant had presented a witness in court who testified that he worked for two months in Nasarawa with Abdulkarim and during that period, he had seen and heard him sending money home.

The Judge, Malam Yakubu Abdullahi, adjourned the case to July 20 for ruling.

Court remands man, 27, over alleged criminal conspiracy, theft

KADUNA

A Life Camp Chief Magistrates' Court, Abuja, has ordered the remand of a 27-year-old businessman, Adamu Yahaya, over alleged criminal conspiracy and theft.

The police charged the defendant with criminal conspiracy and theft, contrary to Sections 96 and 287 of the Penal Code.

Although the defendant pleaded not guilty to the charges preferred against him, he could not give a satisfactory account of his actions before the court.

The Chief Magistrate, Musa Jobbo, ordered that the defendant be remanded in a correctional centre pending his formal bail application.

Jobbo ordered the defendant to bring a formal applica-

tion for bail and adjourned the case till Aug. 12 for mention.

Earlier, the Prosecution Counsel, Mrs Charity Nwachukwu, told the court that the complainant, Mr Abu Abubakar of No. 1, Haruna Gadzama Close, Life Camp, Abuja, reported the case at Life Camp Police Station.

Nwachukwu said that on June 30, 2025, at about 12:25 p.m., the defendant conspired with one Ibrahim (surname unknown), now at large, to snatch and break into cars belonging to members of public within Life Camp Junction.

She further stated that the defendant removed the complainant's Android phone and in the process of removing his laptop, he was caught.

The prosecutor told the court that during police investigation, the defendant made a confessional statement.

NEWS

UNFPA urges Nigeria to stop population size speculation, embrace data-driven planning

ABUJA

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has urged Nigeria to end speculation over its population size, stressing that credible demographic data remains essential for effective planning and investment.

UNFPA Nigeria Resident Representative, Ms Muriel Mafico, made the call in Abuja at a news conference ahead of the 2026 World Population Day commemoration.

Mafico said Nigeria already possessed the expertise and tools required to generate reliable demographic information and should leverage existing initiatives to strengthen evidence-based planning.

"We should not be guessing. Are we 240 million? Are we 250-some-million? Are we going to be 450 million in 2050? We should not be guessing," she said.

She said demographic profiles being produced across states and the 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey provided rich information that could guide development planning at national and sub-national levels.

"That is why we remain committed to investing in data so that we are evidence-driven," he said.

Mafico said the 2026 World Population Day theme, "Realising the Hopes and Aspirations of Young People — Today and for the Future," reflected findings from UNFPA's Global Demographic Futures Survey.

She said the survey, involving more than 100,000 young adults across 73 countries, showed young people still valued relationships, family and parenthood but faced economic and social barriers.

According to her, young people identified financial security, stable employment and emotional readiness as major conditions for starting families, alongside concerns over unequal caregiving responsibilities.

She said Nigeria's estimated 73.1 million young people aged 10 to 24 represented more than 30 per cent of the population and remained central to the country's demographic future.

Mafico said Nigeria's youthful population presented an opportunity to reap the demographic dividend through sustained investments in health, education, skills development and employment.

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CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION:

From left: OGI Consultant, Alfa Design Nigeria Limited, Mr Farouq Butu-Onakoya; Procurement officer, Miss Obulum Mercy; Business Developer, Augusta Awana; Research Development officer, Mubarak Abdul; Asset Integrity Engineer, Miss Victory Emma, Engineering Department representative, Opute Peter and Business Development Officer, Onyeabor Ugochi, during the closing of NOG Energy week, Conference and Exhibition at the Bola Ahmed Tinubu International Conference Centre in Abuja on Thursday.

World Skin Health Day: Dermatologist, Kano residents advocate safe skincare habits

KANO

A Dermatologist and some Kano residents have called for healthy skincare practices to prevent skin diseases as the world marks World Skin Health Day.

Speaking with our correspondent, a cross section of residents said maintaining healthy skin required consistency, good hygiene and healthy lifestyle choices, not expensive cosmetic products.

Mrs. A'isha Adamu, a civil servant, said she deliberately avoided bleaching creams and

other harsh skincare products.

"I drink plenty of water daily, use mild soap and moisturise my skin regularly. I also apply sunscreen whenever I have to stay under the sun for long because our weather can be very harsh," she said.

According to her, many people damage their skin in pursuit of a lighter complexion without understanding the long-term consequences.

Mr. Henry Mark, a gym instructor, said skincare was not limited to women.

"I sweat a lot because of the nature of my job, so I bathe regu-

larly, wear clean clothes, use deodorant and avoid sharing towels.

"Those simple habits help prevent skin infections and body odour," he said.

Mark urged men to pay more attention to personal hygiene, noting that "healthy skin reflects overall wellbeing."

Also speaking, Miss Farida Abubakar, a university student, said she had stopped following every skincare trend on social media.

"I now use products suitable for my skin type and avoid experimenting with creams because what works for someone

else may not work for me.

"If I notice any unusual changes, I rush to see a dermatologist," she said.

According to a dermatologist, Mrs. Ruth Zakka, the skin serves as the body's first protective barrier and deserves proper care.

Zakka advised people to identify their skin type before buying skincare products and to avoid creams containing harmful substances without expert guidance.

"Drink enough water, maintain good hygiene, eat a balanced diet, get adequate sleep, moisturise when necessary and protect your skin from excessive sunlight.

WHO warns global cancer cases may hit 35m by 2050

ABUJA

The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for urgent global action against cancer, warning annual new cases could reach 35 million globally by 2050.

WHO said that cancer causes more than 26,000 deaths daily, with 20.6 million new cases yearly worldwide.

The organisation said reversing the trend required a people-centred approach prioritising health needs and experiences of affected individuals globally.

The warning is contained in the WHO Global Status Report on Cancer 2026, developed jointly with the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

The report assessed progress in political commitment, cancer prevention, tobacco control, vaccination programmes and treatment investments across countries.

"It however found persistent and widening inequalities in access to cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment and supportive care globally."

According to the report, 87 per cent of women diagnosed with breast cancer survive five

years in wealthy countries.

In low-income countries, only about 42 per cent of women diagnosed with breast cancer survive at least five years.

The report also revealed that fewer than one-third of countries include comprehensive cancer care in universal health coverage.

WHO Director-General, Tedros Ghebreyesus, said cancer survival should never depend on birthplace or income level.

Ghebreyesus said disparities highlighted in the report resulted from policy choices and could be reversed through coordinated action.

He noted that most people would experience cancer personally or through a close family member during their lifetime.

"Beyond its health consequences, the report described cancer as one of the most financially and socially devastating diseases."

WHO's first global survey showed at least 45 per cent of people affected by cancer experienced financial hardship.

Regionally, Asia recorded the highest cancer burden in 2024, accounting for more than half of cases globally.

Ebola: Nigeria strengthening preparedness for public health emergencies – NCDC

ABUJA

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) says Nigeria is strengthening its preparedness for public health emergencies through enhanced collaboration, coordination and strategic planning.

The agency said this on its official x handle on Thursday.

According to it, the agency convened stakeholders sessions for a National Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) Preparedness Tabletop Simulation Exercise aimed at testing national and sub-national readiness for a potential Ebola outbreak.

It said that the exercise assessed coordination mechanisms, incident management

systems, risk communication, healthcare worker protection, and multi-sectoral response strategies through progressive simulation scenarios designed to strengthen decision-making under evolving public health risks.

It also said that the engagement provided an opportunity to identify preparedness gaps, reinforce partnerships, and develop actionable improvement plans to enhance Nigeria's capacity for early detection and rapid response to EVD and other public health threats.

The Bundibugyo Ebola outbreak has become the largest ever recorded, with more than 1,400 confirmed cases and more than 400 deaths across Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda.

Don advocates more health financing to reduce medical tourism

ABUJA

Prof. Taiwo Adebayo, an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, has called for increased financing of Nigeria's health sector to reduce medical tourism and improve access to quality healthcare.

Adebayo made the call in Abuja while delivering the inaugural lecture in honour of Maj.-Gen. Obashina Ogunbiyi, organised by the Intensive and Critical Care Society of Nigeria

(I-CCSN).

Speaking on the theme, "Oxygen as Lifeline: Building Resilient Critical Care Systems in Nigeria," Adebayo said the country's critical care units required urgent revitalisation to respond effectively to medical emergencies.

According to him, Nigeria's healthcare system remains under pressure in spite of the growing healthcare needs of its population.

"We have sick people seeking care from a sick healthcare system. We need to improve

healthcare financing, and government must invest more in healthcare infrastructure.

"Government must also address the factors driving Nigerians abroad for medical treatment and encouraging healthcare professionals to leave the country," he said.

Adebayo stressed the need to expand oxygen access beyond federal tertiary hospitals to primary and secondary healthcare facilities, where most Nigerians receive treatment.

"Unless we improve oxygen

access at the primary and secondary healthcare levels, more people will continue to die in local communities.

"Critical care should be regarded as an essential health service, and the National Health Insurance should cover intensive care so that patients do not delay treatment because of cost," he said.

He also called for increased intensive care unit (ICU) bed capacity nationwide and greater investment in training personnel to manage oxygen systems and critical care facilities.

NEWS

NOA, EDSIEC hold road walk to mobilise voters for LG elections

BENIN CITY

The National Orientation Agency (NOA), Edo State, in collaboration with the Edo State Independent Electoral Commission

(EDSIEC), has intensified voter sensitisation through a road walk ahead of Saturday's local government elections.

Speaking at the event, the State Director of NOA, Bar. Osahon Woghien, said the agency remains committed to mobilis-

ing citizens for active participation in the electoral process.

He urged residents to turn out en masse, vote peacefully and ensure that the elections reflect the will of the people.

The exercise, which took participants through major

streets in Benin City, was designed to encourage eligible voters to turn out peacefully and fulfil their civic responsibilities.

Officials also used the opportunity to educate residents on the importance of credible elections and the need to reject violence, vote-buying and other electoral offences.

Foundation takes Uwasota erosion advocacy to Edo govt

EDWARD OSEGHE

The Leadership Dynamics Empowerment Foundation (LDEF) has pledged to formally engage the Edo State Government over the worsening erosion and flooding menace along Uwasota Road and adjoining communities in Egor Local Government Area, with a view to securing urgent government intervention.

The Founder of LDEF, Mr. Andrew West-Ebi, disclosed this on Wednesday during an inspection visit and community engagement with residents and youths of Uwasota.

West-Ebi, a Nigerian in the diaspora based in Canada, said the visit marked the beginning of a structured advocacy cam-

paign aimed at ensuring that the environmental challenges confronting the community receive the attention of the state government.

He explained that the advocacy was driven by a genuine concern for community development.

West-Ebi commended Governor Monday Okpebholo for what he described as his visionary leadership and people-centred governance under the SHINE Agenda, particularly highlighting the administration's strides in security, education and infrastructure development. He also praised the governor for the ongoing construction of Mechanic Road in Egor Local Government Area.

He stressed that Uwasota

Road serves as a critical link to Uwelu Market, one of Edo State's major commercial hubs that contributes significantly to the state's Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), making its rehabilitation an economic necessity.

West-Ebi said LDEF would professionally document the environmental challenges in the area through technical assessments before presenting a comprehensive report and practical recommendations to the Edo State Government.

"Our message is focused on

trust, transparency, and realistic commitments. We will professionally advocate on Uwasota community's behalf and support the process.

"We are committed to supporting communities affected by erosion and flooding through professional environmental assessment, advocacy, and technical solutions," he said.

He added that the foundation possesses the technical expertise required to assess the environmental degradation and develop sustainable intervention strategies.

CORRECTION OF NAME/DATE OF BIRTH

The general public is here by notified that my correct name is **OMOZUSI DIVINE KEN** and not **OSAGIE DIVINE OSAWESIE** as was wrongly written in my international passport. Also my correct date of birth is 13th day of November 2012 and not 13th day of November 2010 as it was wrongly written on her international passport. Hence this publication concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

ADDITION OF NAME

The general public is here by notified that my correct name is **EZINANANDO-UGORJI CHINAZOM LAWRENCIA**, and not **EZINANADO CHINAZOM LAWRENCIA**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

ADDITION OF NAME

I, formerly known as **ABURIME COLLINS** now wish to be known and addressed as **ABURIME COLLINS OSEHIGEMENFA**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

REARRANGEMENT OF NAME

The general public is here by notified that my correct name **PETER AYENI** and not **AYENI PETER**, which was wrongly written on my BVN. Henceforth now wish to be as **PETER AYENI**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CHANGE OF NAME/CORRECTION OF DATA OF BIRTH

I, formerly known and addressed as **ERIC ROSEMARY** now wish to be known and addressed as **JOY GODWILL** and my correct date of birth is September 6th, 1991 not June 15th, 1983. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MRS NOSAKHARE OSAGIEDE**, I now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS IZEGAEGBE NOSAKHARE**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CORRECTION OF NAME/DATE OF BIRTH

The general public is here by notified that my correct name is **OMOZUSI DESTINY KEN**, and not **OSAGIE DESTINY OMOZUSI** as was wrongly written in my international passport and his correct date of birth is 5th march 2011, and not 5th of December 2012. as was wrongly written on his international passport. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **AGBONBAYE FERDINAND**, now wish to be known and addressed as **OSAGBONBAYE FRED**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

ADDITION OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MTOM ELISHA**, now wish to be known and addressed as **MTOM ELISHA TORLUMUN**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **AKHAREGHEN EJEILOMON FAITH**, now wish to be known and addressed as **OHIOKHAI EJEILOMON FAITH**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS PERPETUAL INEGBEDION** now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS PERPETUAL AHUSIMEN AKPOJEDJE**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **PATIENCE ORIAKHI**, I now wish to be known and addressed **OBAAZEE PATIENCE**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CORRECTION OF NAME ON NIN

The general public is here by notified that my correct name is **EDOSOMWAN JULIET IGHAREHON** and **OLUWOLE JULIET IGHAREHON** are one and same person as appeared on my NIN. Now wish to be known and addressed as **EDOSOMWAN JULIET IGHAREHON**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS BEAUTY NOSAKHARE EVBUOMWAN** now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS BEAUTY NOSAKHARE EGHAREVBA**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS OSEMWOTA IMWONGHOMWEN BEATRICE**, now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS OYEGUE IMWONGHOMWEN BEATRICE**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

ADDITION /REARRANGEMENT OF NAME

The general public is here by notified that my correct name is **AKANDE ADEKUNLE JOSHUA**, and not **JOSHUA ADEKUNLE**. All former documents remain valid, concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

ADDITION OF NAME

The general public is here by notified that my correct name is **LOUIS ODIANSEN OJOMOH** and not **LOUIS OJOMOH**. Henceforth now wish to be known and addressed as **LOUIS ODIANSEN OJOMOH**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

CORRECTION OF SURNAMES

I, **AKHERE EBEHIWELE UDUOGIE** wish to bring for the information of the general public that my correct surname is **UDUOGIE** and not **UDOJIE** as was erroneously written in my Bank verification number registration (BVN). Hence this publication for record purpose, concerned authorities and the general public should please take notes.

5 YEARS
REMEMBRANCE

In loving remembrance of our beloved mother and grandmother, Agnes Akonmarengian Itua (née Odi-gie), who went to be with the Lord five years ago.

She was an embodiment of grace, faith, wisdom, and selfless love. Though she is no longer with us in body, her legacy of love and kindness continues to inspire us every day.

"To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." — 2 Corinthians 5:8

Forever cherished.

Forever in our hearts.

*Fondly remembered
by her children
and grandchildren.*

Signed:

Dr. Bright Ikponmwonsa
AIRHUMWUNDE

LEGAL NOTICE

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
EDO STATE OF NIGERIA
PROBATE REGISTRY
BENIN CITY

WHEREAS the person whose name is set out in the first column hereunder died intestate on the date and at the place stated in the column;

AND WHEREAS the persons whose names, addresses and claimed relationship to the deceased are set in the second column hereunder have applied to the Probate Registrar, High Court of Justice, Edo State of Nigeria for a grant of Letters of Administration of the real and personal property of the deceased.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that Letters of Administration will be granted to such persons unless a NOTICE to prohibit the grant is filed in this Registry within Twenty-One (21) days from the date of the publication of this notice.

1. **DR. GODDEY ODIOWAYA**, late of Egbeta, Ovia North East L.G.A., who died on the 15th day of December, 2025 in Benin City.

PED/491/2026
Mr. Abel Osazuwa Odiowaya and **Mrs. Evelyn Ediketin Enehizena** of No 14, Amadin Street, Isihor, Benin City, son and daughter respectively of the deceased.

DATED THIS 9TH DAY OF JULY, 2026.

B. O. OSAWARU ESQ.
Probate Registrar

PUBLIC NOTICE

Missing Documents

The general public is here by notified that I, **ONOME AUGOYE TANTUA** had taken lawful possession of the documents relating to **IGUOSA HOUSING ESTATE ALLOCATION OF FLAT 210 RE: IDENTIFICATION OF FLAT COLLECTION OF MATERIALS and FITTINGS** which belonged to my late mother **Mrs. Catherine E. Augoye**. That the documents have been in my custody since my mother's demise and that I last saw the said documents on the 4th day of May, 2026 in my resident at Plot 122 Eagle Island off Ikechi Chinda Street, Port Harcourt, River state. The said documents have gone missing. All efforts to trace it has proven abortive. Hence this publication for record purposes. The property is not for sale Buyers Beware! concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

Signed: **ONOME AUGOYE TANTUA**



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA FEDERAL MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

IFAD Assisted LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT FAMILY ENTERPRISE – NIGER DELTA (LIFE–ND) PROJECT EDO STATE PROJECT COORDINATING OFFICE (SPCO)

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS FOR THE POSITIONS OF STATE INTERNAL AUDITOR, STATE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION OFFICER, STATE MONITORING & EVALUATION OFFICER, STATE RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OFFICER AND STATE PROCUREMENT OFFICER FOR EDO STATE PROJECT COORDINATING OFFICE OF THE LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT FAMILY ENTERPRISE – NIGER DELTA (LIFE–ND) PROJECT

Introduction/Background

The Federal Government of Nigeria (hereafter called the borrower) has received a credit of 60 million USD from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with additional financing of 30 million USD from the Niger delta Development Commission (NDDC) towards the cost of implementing a FGN/IFAD/ NDDC assisted Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprise – Niger Delta (LIFE–ND) Project in six states of the Niger Delta region. IFAD financing will focus on the six states of Abia, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers, Imo, Akwa Ibom, and Ondo, while NDDC financing will cover three states of Akwa Ibom, Imo and Rivers. The LIFE–ND is planned with a financing gap of six years in the first instance and additional six years to be financed in future by other partners and or an additional IFAD loan. The project targets establishing over 38,250 agri business enterprises.

The objective of the project is to enhance income, food security and job creation for youths, women using sustainable agri business development in the Niger Delta. To facilitate implementation of the project in Edo state, it is a requirement to have qualified and competent personnel from the state to fill the five vacant positions.

1. Position Title: State Procurement Officer (SPO)

Main Responsibilities

The State Procurement Officer will be responsible for the management of project procurement activities at the state level in accordance with relevant National and IFAD Procurement Guidelines. The SPO will ensure that all procurement processes are carried out in a transparent, efficient, and compliant manner to support timely and effective project implementation.

Specific Duties

- a. Ensure that procurement is conducted with transparency, integrity, economy, fairness, competition, and accountability.
- b. Facilitate the preparation, update, and review of the annual procurement plan to align with the approved Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWPB).
- c. Prepare and submit the State Quarterly Procurement Tracking Plan.
- d. Maintain and regularly update the contract register and No-Objection tracker.
- e. Establish and periodically update the state database of vendors, suppliers, and consultants.
- f. Facilitate the preparation of technical specifications and Terms of Reference (TORs) for procurement of goods, works, and services.
- g. Prepare bidding documents, tender notices, and invitations for bids.
- h. Manage bid reception, opening, and evaluation processes, and finalize contracts in accordance with guidelines.
- i. Administer contracts to ensure compliance with contractual terms and payment conditions.
- j. Maintain accurate and complete procurement records and documentation.
- k. Handle issues relating to contract negotiation, bidder complaints, and debriefing as necessary.
- l. Prepare procurement implementation and performance reports in accordance with the reporting requirements of IFAD and the Government.
- m. Provide training, guidance, and supervision to beneficiaries and service providers on procurement procedures.
- n. Strengthen the procurement capacity of beneficiaries, service providers, and relevant stakeholders.

Qualifications and Experience

- a. A minimum of a university degree in Engineering, Finance, Management, Purchasing, or a related field.
- b. Minimum of 4 years of relevant post-qualification experience.
- c. Demonstrated experience in successfully carrying out procurement using similar methods, systems, and specifications.
- d. At least 2 years of experience applying internationally accepted procurement best practices, with sound knowledge of the Nigerian Procurement Laws and Guidelines and familiarity with IFAD or other donor-funded projects.
- e. Excellent writing and computer literacy skills.
- f. Strong interpersonal, teamwork, and conflict management skills.
- g. Demonstrated integrity, confidentiality, and professionalism in handling procurement activities.

2. Position Title: State Project Internal Auditor (SPIA)

Main responsibilities

The State Project Internal Auditor shall ascertain and evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of the financial management and internal control framework; ensure compliance with the IFAD and Federal Government project Financing Agreement, IFAD disbursement procedures, Project Implementation Manual, etc; identify critical weaknesses if any, and areas for improvement; and provide the project coordination team at the national and state levels with timely information and recommendations on financial management aspects of the project to enable timely corrective actions.

Specific Duties

- a. Carry out audit in accordance with international standards of auditing, including such tests and controls as the auditor considers necessary. The audit will cover implementing partners and the beneficial level.
- b. Ensure that the accounting and financial management systems remain reliable and effective in design and assess the extent to which they are being followed. Ascertain the reliability of integrity, controls, security and effectiveness of the operations of the computerized accounting system.
- c. Identify constraints, if any, in the timely updating of the accounting system and in adhering to the internal control procedures including the Project Implementation Manual and the Financial Procedures Manual.
- d. Review the adequacy of the systems established to ensure compliance with policies, plans procedures, laws, and regulations and establishing whether the project at the state level is in fact in compliance. Check and report on compliance with the IFAD Financing Agreement covenants.
- e. Review the efficacy, adequacy and application of accounting, financial and operating controls and thereby ensure the accuracy of the books of accounts; Review the accuracy and timeliness
- f. of the quarterly Financial Reports produced by the project and confirm whether these are used by the management for decision making.
- g. Verify that the system of internal check is effective in design and operation in order to ensure the prevention of and early detection of defalcations, frauds, misappropriations and misapplications.
- h. Evaluate the Internal Control System in operation to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and economy.
- i. Check the segregation of duties in the project such as: i) authorization and approval, ii) recording, iii) documentation on the following operating costs: maintenance of vehicles/equipment, fueling, motor license/insurance, utilities (water, electricity, telephone), office rent and rates, salaries and allowances of project support staff, Insurance.
- j. Check that the Statements of Expenditure (SOE) submitted to IFAD reconcile with the
- k. expenditures reported under the quarterly and yearly financial reports. Duly record any ineligible expenditures noted during the review.
- l. Ensure reconciliation of bank statements and accounts is regularly carried out on a monthly basis and necessary corrections on accounts of banks/debits and state transactions accounted for concurrently.
- m. Conduct an independent appraisal of all the project's activities. Consider the adequacy of controls to ensure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of project activities.
- n. Confirm that IFAD No-objections given to the NPCO and the SPCO for incurring expenditure under the project are used for purpose intended.
- o. Undertake procurement audits to ensure procedures are done transparently as per procedures/thresholds. Verify that all the goods, works and services procured and issues are supported by valid receipt and documents including IFAD no-objection and that a Register of Contracts and contract monitoring forms are maintained and up-to date.
- p. Ensure that adequate records are maintained regarding the assets created and assets acquired by the project, including details of cost, identification and location of assets; and that the physical verification of assets is being carried out with due diligence and an annual inventory report is duly issued. Physical verification of assets and other inventories would be taken up as deemed necessary by the auditor in respect of all goods.

- q. Ensure disbursement between NPCO and the SPCO are reconciled and accounted for.

Qualification and experience

- A minimum of first degree or Higher National Diploma in Accounting with a minimum working experience of 8 years, 4 years in IFAD-assisted project.
- A Professional Certificate in Accounting or Auditing is an added advantage.
- Good communication and training skills.
- Proven track record in internal auditing.
- Working experience of the Niger Delta area is a plus.
- Ability to motivate, inspire and achieve results will be an added advantage.

3. Position Title: State Monitoring and Evaluation Officer (SMEO)

Main Responsibilities:

The State Monitoring and Evaluation Officer (SMEO) will be responsible for operating, coordinating, and facilitating the planning and implementation of all project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities at the state level. He/she will oversee the operationalization of the project's Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (PME) system and ensure its full integration with other information and knowledge management systems to enable flexibility and responsiveness to evolving project realities.

The SMEO will also assess the M&E capacity needs of staff and stakeholders at the state and LGA levels and design appropriate capacity-building interventions. The Officer will work closely with the LGA Desk Officers to ensure coherence and collaboration in M&E implementation across the state.

Specific Duties:

- Develop M&E activities for inclusion in the Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWPB).
- Organize and supervise baseline surveys and assessments of project beneficiaries, in collaboration with consultants.
- Prepare an M&E Plan, including standardized monitoring formats and reporting templates.
- Establish and track indicators for outputs, outcomes, and impacts, ensuring alignment with government and IFAD ORMS (Operational Results Management System) guidelines.
- Promote participatory planning and M&E by training and involving stakeholders and beneficiaries in data collection and feedback processes.
- Compile and analyze data for inclusion in quarterly, semi-annual, and annual reports.
- Monitor both financial and physical progress of project activities and report findings to relevant stakeholders to enhance learning and adaptive management.
- Capture both the intended and unintended impacts of project interventions, documenting key lessons, successes, and challenges.
- Develop and implement reporting formats to ensure uniformity and compatibility of reports from service providers and implementing partners with the project's results framework.
- Organize and oversee state-level annual review and planning workshops and contribute to the preparation of AWPBs.
- Participate in supervision missions by screening and analyzing reports and providing relevant M&E data and insights.
- Select service providers where necessary, develop their TORs and scope of work, supervise and certify their outputs and deliverables.
- Contribute to the preparation and consolidation of periodic project progress reports at the state level.

Qualifications and Experience:

- Master's or higher degree in Agricultural Economics, Economics, Statistics, Social Sciences, or other related fields.
- Proven proficiency in the use of databases, spreadsheets, and statistical software packages for both quantitative and qualitative analysis.
- Experience in analyzing complex programmes, policies, and data systems.
- Minimum of 8 years' relevant experience in M&E, results-based management, or project management within agriculture, rural development, or natural resource programmes.
- Excellent written and spoken English, with strong analytical and communication skills.
- Solid understanding of modern information and communication technology (ICT) applications for data management, including mobile and web-based platforms.
- Demonstrated ability to facilitate learning processes and capacity development initiatives.
- Fluency in a major local language of the state will be an asset.

4. Position Title: State Rural Infrastructure Officer (SRIO)

Main Responsibilities

The State Rural Infrastructure Officer will manage market infrastructure development in the state, working closely with relevant stakeholders and ensuring timely and quality implementation.

Specific Duties

- Monitor preparatory and implementation activities for infrastructure interventions.
- Identify cost-efficient and sustainable market infrastructure in collaboration with relevant agencies.
- Supervise the preparation of LGA-level action plans.
- Oversee construction and rehabilitation of feeder roads, agro-processing centers, and markets.
- Ensure timely procurement of agro-processing equipment.
- Coordinate capacity building on infrastructure management.
- Develop and implement asset maintenance procedures.
- Supervise LGA Engineers and technical staff.

- Provide technical guidance on infrastructure design and execution.
- Prepare work measurements and payment certificates.
- Undertake other related duties as directed by the SPC.

Qualifications and Experience

- Minimum of a B.Sc. in Civil Engineering.
- COREN certification is mandatory.
- At least 5 years of experience in agricultural or rural infrastructure projects.
- Strong experience in civil works and agro-processing infrastructure.

5. Position Title: State Knowledge Management and Communication Officer (SKMCO)

Main responsibilities

The Knowledge Management and Communications Officer will be responsible for coordinating, supporting and facilitating Knowledge Management and Communication (KMC) activities related to project implementation at the state level. The Officer will work closely with the KMC Coordinator at the RPCO and the KMC Advisor at the Central Communications Unit in implementing KMC activities.

Specific duties

- Manage the implementation of the KMC strategy of the project at the state level.
- Develop KMC activities for the annual work plan and budget (AWPB).
- Prepare an annual KMC plan of actions for enhancing institutional culture of learning and knowledge-sharing.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing events and policy dialogues among project stakeholders.
- Ensure that innovative experiences, learning and good practices are captured, synthesized, documented and shared continuously within the project, within the relevant stakeholders.
- Play a leading role in knowledge capitalization, develop evidence based knowledge products and ensure wider dissemination.
- Develop and update project stakeholders contact list and mailing lists for dissemination of project knowledge products.
- Guide staff on information collection, processing, and information dissemination methods.
- Play a leading role in external relations, building relations with media and communications personnel, liaison and public relations.
- In close collaboration with the State M&E Officer, ensure results from various studies including quality management, reporting, and monitoring and evaluation are translated into evidence based knowledge products.
- Establish information technology requirements for effective implementation of the KMC strategy using social media and internet tools.
- Plan and coordinate communication and advocacy campaigns through mass media, newsletters, stakeholder meetings, and other communication channels as appropriate.
- Assist in developing integrated information systems to enable M&E of project activities.
- Monitor and evaluate performance of the project's KMC strategy at the state level.
- Contribute to the drafting of periodic project progress reports.
- Maintain updated cataloguing of the project's knowledge assets/online resource materials.
- Undertake other KMC tasks as required.

Qualification and experience

- Higher level university degree or equivalent in a field related to communications, journalism, development or a related discipline.
- Minimum of three years of experience in information, knowledge management, and/or development communication, preferably in the agriculture and rural development sector. Experience in media relations, ICT and extension will be an advantage.
- Proven ability in documentation and advocacy; demonstrated capacity to develop and oversee implementation of documentation of programme results, presentations, communication and reporting skills.
- Strong oral and written communication skills; experience of interacting with a variety of internal and external stakeholders.
- High degree of motivation, initiative, independence, reliability, adaptability, and professional maturity; and places a premium on "getting things done".
- Strong project management and coordination skills; able to handle multiple tasks and balance priorities with various stakeholders

Reporting and Location

The positions will be based at the State Project Coordinating Office (SPCO) Benin City, Edo State. The prospective State Officers will report directly to the State Project Coordinator (SPC).

Duration

The duration of the assignment will be on 2-year renewal contract following a successful completion of a 1-year probation period. Subsequent contract renewal will be based on satisfactory performance review.

METHOD OF APPLICATION

Interested persons should submit applications with detailed CV electronically to the email address: info@life-nd.org.ng on or send by post to the address below on or before 21st July, 2026.

**The National Project Coordinator,
LIFE-ND Project,
6 Woji Road,
Port Harcourt,
Rivers State**

ArtsWorld

with Francis Odupute
08023680030

NAFAAS' 2026: Where creativity meets culture

EJEMOGO REBECCA ANWURI

The department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin on Monday, 6th July, 2026, commenced the 2026 National Association of Fine and Applied Art Students (N.A.F.A.A.S) week, an event organized to bring students, lecturers, and expert key stakeholders for a week-long interface and celebration of creativity and artistic expressions.

The event themed "Where Creativity Meets Culture" which featured cultural day exhibition, drawing competition, mural paintings, seminar, workshops, fashion runway and other interesting recreational activities like



N. A. F. A. A. S WEEK RED CARPET.

table tennis, photo booth sessions, sip & paint, etc.

This year's edition of NAFAAS' Week began with a seminar and for-

mal opening of the Art exhibition, setting the tone for a week filled with creativity, interactions, learning and artistic interfaces.



WA0205: The Senior Secretary to the Edo State Government, Barrister Musa Ikhilior, represented by his Executive Assistant, Miss Boya Ojeisemi (Left); and The Senior Special Assistant to the Executive Governor of Edo State and CEO of Arose Cultural Hub Limited, Ambassador Uwa Imadiyi (Right); assisting the Director-General of the Edo State Tourism Agency, Lady Vivian Elabor (Centre) in performing the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the 2026 National Association of Fine and Applied Arts Students (N. A. F. A. A. S) Week inside the Professor John Ogene Drawing Studio, University of Benin, Ekehan Campus, on 6th July, 2026.

Present at the event were important personalities and dignitaries, such as the Senior Secretary to the Edo State Government, Barrister Musa Ikhilior, who was ably represented by his Executive Assistant, Miss Boya Ojeisemi; the Director-General of the Edo State Tourism Agency, Lady Vivian Elabor; and the Senior Special Assistant to the Executive Governor of Edo State and CEO of Arose Cultural Hub Limited, Ambassador Uwa Imadiyi.

Also, present at the NAFAA's Week were seasoned speakers and experts, including Mr. Azage Enoch, an emerging Nigerian Contemporary Visual Artist; and Artsvocabulary Benin Chapter, a vibrant youth-led creative movement that uses the arts to drive social change, encourage civic participation, and address development challenges.

According to the 2026 NAFAA's Week chairman, Peter Elijah, the success of the event was as a result of the ideas and concerted efforts from the planning committee, as well as some sponsorships received. He however expressed some of the challenges which included funding, difficulty in getting sponsors for the event as well as setting up the collections for the art exhibition from various artists.

The day-two of the event, Tuesday,

7th July, 2026, was particularly dedicated to workshops being carried out in the various sections of fine art, such as painting, graphic design, fashion, sculpture, textile, Art-history, Ceramics and Metal design. The workshops took place in the studios of each section of UNIBEN's Fine and Applied Arts department, anchored by students in higher levels, giving their junior colleagues hands-on practical knowledge and skills in their chosen areas of study before delving into their area of specialization in 300 Level.

In the height of this, the Professor John Ogene drawing studio remained opened as students trooped in at intervals to submit their artworks in addition to other art collections for exhibition and auctions to prospect buyers. One of such students, David Oyinloya, a 200 Level student of the prestigious Fine and Applied Arts department, expressed his happiness and sense of fulfilment in the event organized by his association, N.A.F.A.A.S, noting that he counted it a privilege to have his artwork among various talented artist's pieces, as seeing them makes him feel motivated to strive for improvement. He commended the association for pulling up the wonderful initiative.



PARTICIPANTS AT THE EVENT.

African Canadian International Film Festival (ACIFF) to Hold in Ottawa and Benin City

The African Canadian International Film Festival (ACIFF) has announced its highly anticipated upcoming edition, scheduled to run from August 4 to August 7, 2026. In a groundbreaking move to bridge the global cinematic landscape, this year's festival will take place simultaneously across two continents: in Ottawa, Canada, and at the 500LT, Mass Communication Department, University of Benin (UNIBEN), Benin City, Nigeria.

Under the visionary leadership of ACIFF Chairman Austine Odigie, and Festival Director Davidson Izegaegbe, the festival serves as a cultural and economic bridge, celebrating rich storytelling while fostering international collaboration between African and Canadian film industries.

CONNECTING THROUGH CINEMA

The four-day simultaneous event is designed to create a vibrant space for filmmakers, industry executives, students, and film enthusiasts to connect, learn, and celebrate African and diaspora cinema.

"This dual-continent approach is a testament to the power of film to erase geographical boundaries," says Davidson Izegaegbe, Festival Director. "By hosting ACIFF in both Ottawa and Benin City concurrently, we are opening unprecedented avenues for cross-cultural dialogue and creative commerce."

ACIFF has curated a robust lineup of activities designed to elevate emerging talent and provide deep in-

dustry insights:

*Selected Movie Screenings: A diverse showcase of compelling feature films, shorts, and documentaries highlighting African and African-diaspora narratives.

*Cross-Border Film Commerce Panel Sessions: High-level panel discussions focusing on the business of film, co-production opportunities, distribution networks, and navigating international film markets.

*Industry Master Classes: Intensive, hands-on training sessions led by industry veterans covering essential cinematic disciplines like Directing; Cinematography; Acting; Screenwriting; Cartooning and Animation.

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GEN-

ERATION

By anchoring the Nigerian leg of the festival at the University of Benin's Mass Communication Department, ACIFF underscores its commitment to academic enrichment and youth empowerment. Students and local filmmakers will have direct access to global industry standards, training, and networking opportunities that are typically restricted by travel and geography.

"ACIFF is more than just a celebration of film; it is a catalyst for economic and artistic growth," states Austine Odigie, ACIFF Chairman. "Through our master classes and commerce panels from two continents, we are equipping creators with the practical tools and networks required to take their craft to the global stage."

Attendance details, screening schedules, registration and accreditation links for both the Ottawa and Benin City venues will be made available on the official ACIFF website. Filmmakers, the press, and the general public are invited to join this historic celebration of global cinema. The event is also open for partnership and sponsorships.

The African Canadian International Film Festival (ACIFF) is a premier cultural event dedicated to promoting diversity, fostering cross-continental partnerships, and showcasing the brilliance of African and international cinema since 2022. Through festivals, workshops, and markets, ACIFF has built sustainable pathways for filmmakers to celebrate black emancipation and thrive globally.

Film Festivals as catalyst to power Edo State's economy

DAVIDSON IMOSIME IZEGAEGBE

Benin City came alive on a humid November evening in 2023, as Nollywood celebrities were driven to

their various hotels where staff and management were positioned for quick selfies with them.

While the city was already lit up with presence of Nollywood greats, women were seen in various parts

of the city setting up stands popularly known as mama put, the barbecue fish and chicken sellers were

not left out of this preparation for the biggest event in Nigeria as that was the date given to Edo State to host Edo State International Film Festival (ESIFF).

The organizers, who already intimated the fast food owners and other business partners about the

event, also ensured there were enough publicity as well as the readiness of the Victor Uwaifo Creative

Hub to accommodate guests from within and outside Nigeria. It was a beauty to behold as Edolites were

looking forward to an eventful outing.

The following day, the kicking of the film festival witness the opening ceremony and opening the door to

screening of films. Film owners, film/content buyers, thronged into the dimly lit cinema halls filled with

film lovers, students and government officials for the maiden Edo State International Film Festival. The

screening room buzzed like a beehive: deals were quietly being discussed, young filmmakers nervously

rehearsed pitches, and a small army of technicians hustled between panels and workshops. It was a

beauty to behold.

The question that many within or outside the government circle may ask is: what is the relevance or

economic value of film festival to a state or nation? If this question is viewed from an economic or

cultural standpoint, one would realize that film festivals are not just cultural highlights or avenues for

paparazzi, they are engines for systematic creative-economy growth. Italy, France, Germany and the

United States of America are countries among others who knew this and dug into exploring film festivals

to their nations benefits. Canada is today doing quiet well with Cannes

Across Nigeria, it is believed that the creative industries already contribute billions to its GDP; in Edo

State the push is explicit. The state previously started to invest in film festival and had its maiden edition

in 2022, opened Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub and launched business-enabling reforms which were aimed

at attracting investment into film, arts, culture and tourism — moves

that align festivals with an industrial strategy, not just a cultural calendar. That public backing

within Edo State at that moment turned Benin City, Fugar, Ososos into a magnet for film productions,

movie screenings, film workshops and co-productions conversations that would once have happened only

in Lagos.

Film festivals are far beyond the spotlight and spectacle of red carpets and paparazzi. It is the bridge that

connects talents, capital, ideas and the diverse heterogeneous audiences together for economic and

cultural benefits. It is where the creatives learn to monetize culture and content. These played out in the

Edo State International Film Festival as gains were transformed structurally into a sustainable creative

industry. Upskilling, by cast and crew are achieved through detailed compressed film curriculum called

"master classes" with positive ripple effects in world class film productions.

Film Festivals are processed for recognizing productive efforts via awards as well as encouraging the

advancement of production value-chain. This is noticeable in a film production where a crew may have a

least between 50 to 100 persons employed for it. Same with the cast depending on the type of story to

be filmed. Let us not forget the gains from the presence of celebrities and other guests from different

states and countries. Their presence will rub, economically, on the carpenters, painters, security,

transport, food vendors, bars, clubs, printing, hotel and tourism as well as marketing. Not leaving out

the print and broadcast media in terms of contents. Film festivals encourages economic and social

growth. The Edo State International Film Festival was already attracting attention beyond local circuits,

opening pipelines for funding, cultural and film exchange programs and film export just within two years

of its existence. Some other state's government were already sponsoring teams to Edo State to study

how the state suddenly became the fastest growing film/creativity hub in Nigeria.

Film industries in developed countries didn't just happened, intentionally and deliberately efforts were

injected into the process to make filmmaking an industry unlike Nigeria. Government of these

developed and fast developing countries, has National and state level policies that rubbed on

entertainment legislation, film infrastructural investments, tax incentives, trainings and grants, export

and cultural diplomacy where foreign revenues would be gotten from

well articulated monetization

structures. Festivals are a practical, testable lever for economic development. They convene people,

surface projects, and create temporary demand that — with the right policy scaffolding — becomes

permanent industry. Edo State has internationally and deliberately begun to place its film road map like

round pegs in round holes. This was already noticeable in a visible festival calendar, a creative structural

edifice like the Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub, an already furnished Edonimose apartments for

accommodation for filmmakers, a two-storey building for film editing, rebranded tourist sites for

filmmaking, easy access to government facilities including the usage of Airport, police stations, uniforms

and guns, and state-level reforms that invite film business men into the sector. I strongly feel that the

present government need to deliberately knit these pieces together into a long-term strategy that

would make the film industry in Edo State meet global standards, link festivals to continuous training,

supply chains and distribution, that would in turn make Edo State an exporter of culture, talent, tourism,

hospitality in monetized structure which would therein build an economy that would become the

cynosure of all eyes.



EDO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

NEWS

FOREIGN

Mixed reactions in Zimbabwe to sweeping constitutional changes

There have been mixed reactions in Zimbabwe's capital Harare, a day after President Emmerson Mnangagwa signed into law constitutional changes that will extend his term to 2030 and scrap direct presidential elections.

"It's now law and we can't change it but if you look around the most important and basic things are not being taken care of," says Harare resident Allen Isam.

"For instance unemployment is very high and there are now many vendors and touts even beggars on the streets. Yet now they talk about extending the term to seven years when we are suffering like this, they are only passing this law to suit themselves and we are not comfortable with this law at all."

But resident Enerst Karo sees it differently: "We don't have a problem with the new law, all we need is the current

leadership as it is and for the president to continue ruling."

The raft of amendments includes giving parliament the power to appoint the president. The ruling ZANU PF say the changes will enhance political stability.

But human rights lawyer Doug Coltart says the bill should have been submitted to a referendum:

"The bill is no longer a bill, it is part of our law but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is lawful or that it can't be challenged. It can be challenged and one of the many grounds on which that it will be challenged is that the process by which the constitution was amended was not done lawfully."

Mnangagwa came to power in 2017 in a military-backed coup that ousted long-time leader Robert Mugabe. He's since been elected to two five year terms, the constitutional limit for a president.



ZIMBABWE PRESIDENT:
Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa

Russian FM meets with counterparts from Sahel alliance

Russia will continue to provide military backing to the junta-led governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which have formed a breakaway regional alliance that has strained ties with the West, the countries have said.

In a joint statement during a visit to Niger by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and Russia said Moscow would "continue its support for strengthening the operational capacities of AES member states' armed forces."

Lavrov was in Niamey to attend a "high-level" meeting with the foreign ministers of

the three west African countries, following up on a similar format meeting in April 2025 in Moscow.

The three Sahel region countries are ruled by military regimes that came to power through coups between 2020 and 2023, then turned their backs on former colonial power France and drew closer to Russia.

Russia and its Africa Corps paramilitaries are helping the AES countries fight jihadist groups that have killed tens of thousands of people across much of their territories.

Moscow is also seeking closer ties with AES countries in the energy and mining sectors.

They grabbed me from behind and started punching me, hitting me with spades and machetes," says Daniel Uyirwothi Welo, one of four Red Cross volunteers injured when a crowd tried to open a coffin carrying someone who had died from Ebola.

The 27-year-old and his colleagues were attempting to carry out a safe burial at a cemetery in Bunia, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, last month when they were attacked. The assault was triggered by rumours - circulating locally and online - that the coffin was empty.

Some in the crowd said, "No Ebola doesn't exist," Welo told BBC Verify, adding that others believed the Red Cross team

was there only "to get money".

The attack is one of a series of incidents linked to misinformation during the latest Ebola outbreak, which has infected more than 1,750 people and killed 600 in DR Congo since mid-May, according to government data.

False claims circulating in affected areas include allegations that Ebola doesn't exist, that health workers are deliberately infecting people or harvesting their organs, and that the Ebola response is a money-making scheme.

These include attacks on treatment facilities, assaults on health workers, and repeated attempts to interfere with safe burial procedures for people who died from the disease. The true number is likely to be

higher as incidents may happen in remote areas and go unreported.

Most recently, on 1 July, people set fire to an Ebola treatment centre in Bafwabango, Ituri province, the epicentre of the outbreak. Local media reported that a police officer was killed following clashes over the body of a person suspected to have died from the virus.

Ebola spreads through direct contact with infected bodily fluids and victims' bodies can remain highly infectious after death. Health workers had wanted to bury the victim safely - though this measure has repeatedly faced resistance during the outbreak amid baseless claims that Ebola is not real.

The current outbreak is linked to the Bundibugyo species. While there is still no approved vaccine or treatment for this species, the World Health Organisation (WHO) says a trial has begun of two potential treatments - though experts caution that it could take months to complete.

Response teams from aid organisations and the Congolese authorities have been carrying out safe burials, preventing practices such as washing or touching bodies that can spread infection. Funeral rites involving contact with the deceased have played a major role in the spread of Ebola during previous outbreaks, making safe burials a key way of limiting further spread of the disease.

But health officials say misinformation is undermining those efforts.

In late May, rioters set fire to equipment and two isolation tents at an Ebola treatment centre in Rwampara after relatives of a young man believed to have died from the virus were prevented from taking his body away for burial.

Funerals - often a multi-day affair in DR Congo - are among the most important communal and cultural ceremonies in the country, with deep social, cultural, and spiritual relevance.

"Women are dressed in a wedding dress with make-up... They sing, they celebrate that person, because it's a journey, it's not the end of the life," Julienne Anoko, an anthropologist working with the WHO as a community engagement officer, told the BBC last month.

Since then, medical facilities have reportedly been attacked or vandalised at least three more times.

Ebola responders in Ituri told the BBC that misconceptions about the virus and fears about what happens in treatment centres have discouraged some patients from seeking care promptly, often leaving them with little chance of recovery by the time they arrive for medical help.

Dr Aimé Mbonda Noulou of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said some families had fled their homes when a relative died from Ebola, abandoning the body rather than notifying authorities because they feared being taken into quarantine.

"Most of the people in [these] communities think that these treatment centres are places where, when you go, you die," he said. "So, you usually run away from these places and run away from the health workers".

Others resisted changes to funeral practices.

"They don't believe that safe, dignified burials could really help," says Dr Babou Rukengeza from the charity Save The Children. "They say: 'this is my family member, I need to honour him... this is the last time that I can touch him'."

India is adding biofuels to petrol – but many drivers are unhappy

India's decision to increase the share of biofuels blended with petrol is facing ire from motorists who question its viability in a market where a majority of vehicles are not yet designed for it.

The world's largest two-wheeler market and third-largest car market, is trying to reduce its dependence on imported oil and cut carbon emissions. It began blending ethanol - made from crops such as sugarcane and maize - into petrol in the mid-2000s and has steadily increased the proportion ever since.

Complaints intensified in April this year when India made E20 - petrol blended with 20% ethanol - the standard fuel at every pump, replacing the 10% blend that most vehicles are designed to use.

Although unblended petrol is still available, it is often 40-50% more expensive than E20, depending on the state, and many motorists are unaware

they can ask for it.

Over the past few months, consumers have flooded social media with complaints of engine wear, lower fuel efficiency and reduced performance.

Last week, several motorists joined a protest in Delhi, organised by an entrepreneur who often backs the opposition Congress party in TV debates, accusing the government of unilaterally imposing E20 and leaving them with higher servicing costs and little choice at fuel stations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has dismissed the complaints as "misleading" and "social media misinformation".

In a statement last month, the government said the fuel was rolled out after extensive testing and does not damage engines. It has also issued statements on the benefits of E20 and to bust what it called the "more colourful myths that have circulated on social media".

There have been protests

against rollout of E20 fuel blend in Delhi

The government has also enlisted experts and automakers to defend E20.

Last weekend, in an unusual show of unity, six automakers joined a government press conference to say that years of testing and service data showed no evidence of widespread vehicle damage from the mandatory 20% ethanol blend.

Rahul Bharti, senior executive officer for corporate affairs at Maruti Suzuki, said that India's largest carmaker had serviced more than 15 million older vehicles which were not E20 compliant but found no fuel-related fault.

The automakers did admit that the use of E20 had led to a 3-3.5% drop in fuel efficiency due to lower energy content in ethanol. Some estimates, however, say the actual drop in efficiency could be higher, between 4-12%.

From a broader perspective, the government's biofuel push

aims to cut India's oil import bill, support farmers and reduce emissions, as ethanol burns cleaner than petrol and is produced domestically from crops such as sugarcane and maize.

Government data suggests it has largely delivered on those goals.

India imports most of the crude oil it consumes, and the disruption to global oil markets during the Iran conflict has strengthened the case for producing more fuel at home. Other oil-importing Asian countries, including Indonesia and Vietnam, are also accelerating plans to expand ethanol-blended and flex-fuel programmes.

Brazil, the model Indian officials often cite, built its ethanol-ready vehicle fleet gradually over four decades before mandating higher blends. Consumers there can choose between E27 petrol and 100% ethanol, with pump prices often making ethanol the cheaper option.

FOREIGN

NEWS

US launches more strikes on Iran with blasts reported in south of country

The US has launched a new round of strikes on Iran after President Donald Trump signalled he would "hit them hard again tonight" following an exchange of attacks on Tuesday.

Explosions have been reported by Iranian state media in parts of the country's south, including Sirik and Bandar Abbas - port cities on the Strait of Hormuz.

After the latest strikes, Trump said in a post on Truth Social: "This is in retribution for yesterday's bombing of ships by Iran. If it happens again, it will get much worse!"

Gulf nations reported Iranian attacks following the US strikes, with explosions in Bahrain's capital Manama, Kuwait intercepting missiles and

drones, and Qatar issuing a security alert.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has confirmed that it launched retaliatory strikes on US military bases in Kuwait and Bahrain overnight, and called them the "first phase of the punitive response against the American treaty-breakers".

Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who is also the country's chief negotiator with the US, said on X that America "still hasn't learned that bullying and breaking promises are no longer cost-free".

"Let me put it plainly: if you strike, you'll get hit," he wrote, adding that the Strait of Hormuz will only open un-

der Iranian arrangements - not "American threats".

US Central Command (Centcom) said the most recent round of strikes was carried out to "further degrade Iran's ability to attack commercial shipping and innocent civilian mariners" in the vital waterway.

In a statement it said it had struck 90 Iranian military targets, which included air defence systems and military logistics infrastructure along Iran's coastline.

"The latest strikes follow successful execution of offensive strikes in Iran the night before," Centcom added.

Several explosions have also reportedly been heard in other parts of the Iranian coast, including the cities of Konarak

and Chabahar.

Iranian state TV reported eight explosions in Bandar Abbas, and said two missiles had hit the ports of both Sirik and Jask - also in southern Iran.

It added that two projectiles had hit the island of Abu Musa, which has been the subject of a longstanding ownership dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

Air defence systems have been activated in Bandar Abbas, according to reports in Iranian state media.

The extent of damage from the US strikes is not yet known, but Iranian media have reported power cuts in Chabahar and a fire at an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) barracks in Bushehr.

Starmer gifted gun and ammunition by Turkish president at Nato

Sir Keir Starmer was given a personalised revolver with live ammunition as a gift by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the Nato summit.

The firearm, engraved with the prime minister's name, was one of a series of similar gifts presented to the leader of each country who attended the event in Ankara.

Sir Keir's revolver has not been brought back to the UK and remains with British officials in Turkey.

It is expected to be decommissioned before it is returned, meaning it will no longer be capable of firing live ammunition.

Erdogan waived export controls on the gift but it was left in Turkey because it is illegal to im-

port a live firearm into the UK.

Downing Street has not released a picture of the revolver.

At the summit, Sir Keir signed a defence agreement with Erdogan which will pave the way for closer intelligence sharing between the countries.

Speaking after the summit, Sir Keir said he believed the alliance was stronger and more united following the gathering.

"This has been a good summit. We achieved what we wanted to achieve, which is unity."

"So important we have that, particularly with the conflicts going on in Ukraine and the conflicts in Iran," he added.

It will be Sir Keir's last major international event, after he announced his resignation last month.



IRAN SHIPS:

Trump said the new strikes were "retribution for Wednesday bombing of ships by Iran" in the Strait of Hormuz shipping lane.

Democrat Graham Platner suspends campaign for key US Senate race after assault allegation

Democrat Graham Platner has suspended his campaign for US Senate in Maine, following a series of scandals that included a woman accusing him of sexual assault.

In the days since the accusation was made, Democrats have called on him to drop out of the race considered pivotal to their chances of gaining control of the US Senate.

In a video posted online, Platner said his decision was not an admission of guilt but due to Democrats' threats to cut off campaign support. He called the assault allegation "false".

He said he would officially file to withdraw from the race once he's assured his replacement in the race against Republican Susan Collins is selected in a "transparent and

democratic" way.

"We're suspending campaign operations," he said in an 11-minute video posted to X, adding that he would file his paperwork to withdraw only after he was assured the process to replace him would be "open and democratic moving forward".

Platner added that he is not "trying to dictate to anyone who it should be or how we get there".

"But I will say this: it needs to be open, transparent, and democratic. It needs to be reflecting the will and the values of the people that built this movement," he said.

Under state law, Platner has to officially drop out by 13 July for a replacement name to be put on the ballot.

The race is one of several pivotal to Democrats eyeing a

longshot bid to flip control of the Senate in November's congressional elections, commonly called the midterms.

Maine is considered a must-win state for Democrats to take the majority in the Senate. But it's an uphill battle. The party must flip Collins' seat, hold on to all their existing seats and gain three more in the November midterm election.

Who is Graham Platner?

Platner, an oyster farmer and military veteran, rocketed to the top of the Democratic field with a message of plain-spoken populism.

He championed progressive policies like universal health care and affordable housing, and won over many frustrated Democratic voters with his critique of the party's establishment.

Endorsements from two lib-

eral leaders, Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, bolstered his candidacy. His momentum was so strong that his opponent for the nomination, Maine Governor Janet Mills, suspended her campaign.

The assault allegation was made public on Monday. By that night, Warren and other top Democrats called for him to withdraw and three of his strongest supporters in Congress - Representatives Ro Khanna and Senators Ruben Gallego and Martin Heinrich - had rescinded their endorsements.

The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, which provides millions of dollars in support to the party's candidates, and the Maine Democratic party had both ended their backing, too.

Ukraine to get licence to produce Patriot missiles, Trump says

US President Donald Trump has offered to give Ukraine the right to produce Patriot interceptor missiles, which could help Kyiv defend against Russia's ballistic missile attacks.

"We are gonna give you a licence to make Patriots," Trump told Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky during Wednesday's Nato summit in Ankara. "I think they can produce them very quickly once we explain it."

He said he had not yet informed defence manufacturers Lockheed Martin and Raytheon of his decision, "but that'll work out alright".

Patriots detect and intercept missiles and are regarded as one of the world's best air defence systems - and the most expensive: a single battery, with missiles, is worth around \$1bn (£740m).

It also has lengthy production times, with only 600 missiles produced per year, according to the US Department of Defence.

The US is reluctant to part with any, given that it used more than half of its stockpile during its war with Iran earlier this year, according to the US-based think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

"We have Patriots, but we don't have that many. We need them for ourselves too," Trump said.

Yet Ukraine needs them urgently. In recent months Moscow has increased its ballistic missile strikes on Ukraine, causing dozens of deaths in Kyiv alone over the course of the last week.

In late May, Zelensky confirmed Ukraine had formally asked the US to authorise licensed production of Patriots.

After four-and-a-half years of war the fighting on the front line has mostly stalled, the Black Sea is at a standstill,

and Ukraine has by and large learned to counter the hundreds of drones Russia fires at it on a nightly basis.

But ballistic missiles - which Zelensky called Russia's "last major advantage" - travel at high velocity and a steep path which makes them difficult to stop.

Many manage to pierce through Ukraine's depleted air defences.

Earlier this week the Ukraine Air Force said a "serious shortage" of interceptor missiles meant none of the 23 ballistic missiles fired by Russia on Sunday night were shot down. More than 20 people died in that attack.

Trump said the US would give Kyiv the licence to produce Patriots so that it couldn't "complain that we're not giving them enough".

In Kyiv, there was some degree of scepticism that the interceptor missiles could be produced on Ukrainian territory at this stage.

Military expert Ivan Stupak, an ex-security service officer, told the BBC that while the Patriots were vital for Ukraine's defence: "Unfortunately, Ukraine is not able to produce such kinds of advanced munition, because it's really sophisticated, cutting-edge equipment."

"Technically and legally, I think this will be deployed to European soil instead - and supervised," he said, adding that the process could take many months.

"It's a matter of security. We have no safe place on the entire Ukrainian territory," Stupak said.

During the news conference, Trump acknowledged that Ukraine had been recently having significant success in launching long-range strikes on Russia, which have hit targets thousands of kilometres away from the frontline.

Opinion

July 11th LGA Election in perspective And Okpebholo's Resolve to deepen grass root administration



EUBALDUS ENAHORO

On Saturday, July 11th 2026, Edo people will be coming out to cast their votes for local government chairmen, and councilors across the state.

They will be voting for the person who fixes the drainage on their street, maintains markets, and provides primary health care facilities, immunization, maternal care,

Basic Education, Primary schools, adult literacy, Rural roads, waste and streetlights in the communities

That is why local government elections are the most personal elections we have and very important to deliver the dividends of democracy at the grassroots.

Interestingly, the people at the local government areas and the villages are the ones who really need government attention

As Edo goes to the polls in all eighteen Local Government Areas and 192 wards, the question voters should be asking is not "which party will win?" The real question should be, "will this election get the government closer to the people?" For example when the borehole in Efundion

village, in Esan North East local government works, that's the local government's responsibility. When waste is not picked up for two weeks in Uromi, that's the fault of the local government and not the state government.

Even though the presence of the state government must be felt at the grass root, the state government cannot fix a pothole in Ikpoba Okah or Afuze from Benin City. That is the Chairman's job.

The Chairmen and his councilors control the relationship with vigilantes and community policing. With the 2025 Anti-Kidnapping Law of the state government, local governments must help identify hideouts and support intelligence gathering.

Now, with direct allocation to local governments in force, Edo local governments will receive more money and the voters should be mindful that those to be elected will build, and not come to only use the money for themselves

The Questions Every Edo Voter Should Ask before they cast their votes is that why should they vote for party logo alone instead of a credible candidate

Any candidate that cannot convince the people of working towards providing light, health and rural roads for the people should not be taken seriously because they have no plan to uplift the living standard of the people

Those who believe in giving the people fish to eat, instead of teaching them to fish, should be examined properly because it is an indication that they do not have a plan.

This is the time to demand regular income and expenditure from those elected. No more secret budgets. Direct allocation means we must watch the money.

The local government Chairman cannot succeed in fighting traditional Rulers, Chiefs and youth leaders because governance at that level is teamwork.

The Edo State Independent Electoral Commission must ensure the process is free, fair, and credible. Materials must arrive on time. Results must be pasted at polling units. The Political Parties must sell candidates, not thugs. No vote buying. No intimidation.

The Security Agencies must protect voters, especially in Edo Central and North flashpoints. We cannot have another election where fear keeps people at home.

Those to be elected should have a contract with the people. They should be ready to grade their road, fumigate their market, and make sure that the public health care facilities have adequate staff and drugs.

Edo people are known to be politically aware. This is the time to prove it. Let everyone Come out with their voters card to Vote. Stay and watch the vote count. The vote must count for a credible candidate to emerge victorious

If we elect the right Chairmen and Councilors, few months from now Edo people will feel it on their street with good service delivery, but on the other hand If they elect the wrong ones, they will only complain for the next three years.

We must not forget that the Heartbeat of the Nation starts at the ward level. Let's make it beat strong on July 11th.

Meanwhile, Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo has consistently assured Edo people of his administration's development agenda at the grassroots by ensuring improved infrastructure, better service delivery and responsible management of local government resources.

The governor's confidence is anchored on tangible steps already taken to strengthen local government administration.

On February 23, 2026, in one of the boldest investments in grassroots governance in recent

years, Governor Okpebholo officially handed over 54 heavy-duty construction equipment—including bulldozers, excavators, graders and rollers—to the 18 local government councils.

The equipment, according to the governor, was procured to enable councils undertake rural road construction, drainage projects, environmental sanitation and other community-based infrastructure without unnecessary dependence on the state government.

Describing the initiative as a practical demonstration of his SHINE Agenda, Governor Okpebholo stressed that development must extend beyond Benin City to every village, community and ward across Edo State.

Beyond infrastructure support, the governor has repeatedly reaffirmed his commitment to local government autonomy, maintaining that his administration does not interfere with statutory allocations due to local governments, thereby allowing elected councils the financial independence required to execute projects that directly benefit their people.

This approach reflects a governance philosophy built on collaboration rather than control, with the state government providing strategic support while allowing local councils to discharge their constitutional responsibilities effectively.

For Governor Monday Okpebholo, the election represents more than a political contest. It is an opportunity to deepen grassroots governance, consolidate the gains of his SHINE Agenda and ensure that development reaches every community across Edo State through capable and responsive local government leadership.

• *Eubaldus Enahoro is former Editor of the Nigerian Observer Newspaper.*

Urgent need to regulate underage social media use



OBOH SYLVESTER

The debate over restricting underage access to social media is no longer a theoretical one.

It has become an urgent public policy issue that governments, parents, educators, technology companies, and civil society can no longer afford to ignore.

As social media continues to shape the lives of millions of young people, its devastating consequences on children and adolescents are becoming increasingly evident.

The time has come for decisive action to protect the next generation.

Social media has undoubtedly revolutionized communication, education, and commerce.

It has democratized access to information and given millions a platform to express themselves. However, these benefits should not blind society to the grave dangers posed by unrestricted access for children who lack the emotional maturity and critical judgment required to navigate the digital world safely.

Across Nigeria, children below the recom-

mended minimum age for most social media platforms routinely operate accounts, often with little or no parental supervision.

Many parents, either through ignorance or necessity, provide smartphones and internet access without adequate safeguards, inadvertently exposing their children to a digital ecosystem that is increasingly hostile to youthful innocence.

The consequences are alarming. Cases of cyberbullying, online sexual exploitation, identity theft, internet fraud, exposure to pornography, violent content, gambling, drug promotion, and dangerous online challenges are steadily increasing. Equally disturbing is the growing evidence linking excessive social media use to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor academic performance, sleep deprivation, and social isolation among adolescents.

Perhaps the greatest danger lies in the invisible algorithms that drive these platforms. Designed primarily to maximise user engagement and advertising revenue, they continuously feed young users with content based on previous interactions, regardless of whether such material is healthy or harmful. Children, whose cognitive and emotional capacities are still developing, become easy targets for manipulation, misinformation, and unhealthy behavioural patterns.

Nigeria is not immune to these realities. Reports of young people being lured into criminal activities, blackmailed through intimate images, recruited into cybercrime, or manipulated by online predators are becoming disturbingly frequent. Social media has become a fertile ground for criminal networks seeking vulnerable victims.

This is a national security concern as much as it is a child protection issue.

It is against this backdrop that calls for a ban—or, more appropriately, stringent age-based restric-

tions—on underage social media use deserve serious consideration. Such measures are not intended to isolate children from technology or deny them access to information. Rather, they seek to ensure that digital participation occurs within an environment that prioritises children's safety, emotional well-being, and healthy development.

Several countries have already begun implementing stricter age verification requirements, mandatory parental consent mechanisms, and legal obligations on technology companies to protect minors.

These initiatives demonstrate that protecting children online is both achievable and necessary. Nigeria should not lag behind in adopting robust legislative and regulatory frameworks that hold social media companies accountable for enforcing their own age restrictions.

Legislation alone, however, will not solve the problem. Parents remain the first line of defence.

They must become more digitally literate, monitor their children's online activities responsibly, establish clear rules on screen time, and foster open conversations about internet safety. Schools should equally integrate digital citizenship, cyber ethics, and online safety into their educational programmes, preparing students to become responsible digital citizens.

Technology companies also have a moral and legal obligation to place children's welfare above commercial interests. Age verification systems must become more robust. Privacy settings for minors should be stronger by default. Harmful content should be removed swiftly, while algorithms that amplify addictive or dangerous material must be subjected to greater regulatory scrutiny.

Critics argue that a ban may be difficult to enforce and that determined children will simply find ways around restrictions. While enforcement

presents undeniable challenges, imperfection is not an excuse for inaction. Society does not abandon laws against child labour, underage driving, or the sale of alcohol to minors simply because some individuals violate them. Laws establish standards, deter misconduct, and provide mechanisms for accountability. The same principle applies to protecting children in the digital environment.

The Nigerian government, through the National Assembly and relevant regulatory agencies, should therefore initiate comprehensive legislation that establishes enforceable minimum age requirements for social media use, compels technology companies to verify users' ages effectively, imposes meaningful penalties for non-compliance, and strengthens online child protection mechanisms. Such legislation should be complemented by sustained public awareness campaigns and investments in digital literacy for parents, teachers, and children alike.

The future of any nation rests upon the well-being of its children. In an age where digital technologies increasingly influence values, behaviour, and mental health, safeguarding young minds is not censorship; it is responsible governance. Society has a collective duty to ensure that technological advancement does not come at the expense of childhood.

A carefully crafted ban on underage social media use, backed by effective regulation, parental responsibility, and corporate accountability, is therefore not only desirable but imperative.

Nigeria must act now before another generation of children pays the price for our collective hesitation.

• *Sylvester Oboh is the Assistant General Manager (Admin) Nigerian Observer Newspaper*

Feature

The Cost of Godfatherism: How political patronage is stalling Nigeria's development

MARTHA OBI-DIKE

In Awka, Anambra State, a first-term member of the House of Assembly spends three days every month in Abuja. He is not lobbying for federal projects. He is paying homage. On his agenda: greet the "godfather," report constituency activities, and collect instructions for the next vote.

Two thousand kilometers away in Kano, a commissioner's budget for rural clinics sits on a desk. It will not move until the party chairman, who bankrolled the governor's campaign, appends his signature.

This is Nigeria in 2026. Democracy is practiced every four years. But development is rented, traded, and mortgaged between elections.

Godfatherism — the informal system where powerful individuals handpick, fund, and control political candidates — has evolved from a campaign strategy into Nigeria's single biggest developmental bottleneck. It is why we have budgets without roads, policies without implementation, and leaders without answers.

How Patronage Kills Policy:

A government that owes its existence to one man cannot serve 200 million people. The math does not work.

When a governor emerges from a godfather's pocket, the first 48 months are not for governance. They are for repayment. The repayment comes in three currencies: contracts, appointments, and silence.

The 2024 BudgIT "State of States" report tracked capital projects in 18 states. 62% of contracts above N500 million went to companies linked to governors, party leaders, or their families. Not because they were the best bidders. Because they were the safest



debtors.

In Borno, primary healthcare centers lack basic drugs. In Benue, IDP camps have no water. In Oyo, public schools have 120 pupils to one teacher. Yet in the same period, we see flyovers, convention centers, and "smart city" proposals with no feasibility studies.

Why? Because policy is no longer driven by data. It is driven by debt. A commissioner who proposes a N2 billion primary health program will be asked: "What about the road contract for our boss?" A civil servant who insists on due process is labeled "not loyal" and redeployed.

This is how patronage kills policy. It replaces public interest with private obligation.

The Youth and the Ballot: A Generation Opting Out

Nigerians under 35 make up 70% of the population. They are the largest voting bloc in history. They are also

the most disillusioned.

INEC data shows voter turnout among 18-25 year olds dropped from 34% in 2019 to 22% in 2023. That is not apathy. That is calculation.

"My vote won't count if Abuja has already chosen," said Chinedu Okafor, 24, a corps member serving in Enugu. "By the time we get to the primaries, the godfather has already picked his boy. The election is just to make it look real."

Social media is full of "Obidients," "Atikulors," and "BATists." But inside political parties, internal democracy is dead. Primaries are auctions. Delegates are bought for N500,000 to N5 million per vote.

Until parties democratize how candidates emerge, we will keep recycling the same names with new faces. And the youth will keep watching from the sidelines, or leaving the country entirely. Japa is not just about jobs. It is about hope.

Case Study: From "Go and Sell Akara" to Austerity:

In 2024, a senior public official told frustrated Nigerians to "go and sell akara" if they could not afford food. The statement went viral for the wrong reasons.

But beyond the insensitivity, it revealed a deeper governance mindset: shift responsibility to citizens instead of fixing systems.

That mindset is born in godfather politics. When loyalty matters more than competence, you get ministers who can campaign for 18 hours but cannot read a budget. You get advisers who know how to mobilize thugs but not how to manage inflation.

The result is what we now call "austerity without strategy." Remove subsidy, float the naira, raise taxes — but without a plan to protect the poor, create jobs, or grow production. Because the people making the decisions are not accountable to the market. They are accountable to the man who

funded them.

Godfatherism rewards performers, not builders. It produces politicians who can win elections but cannot govern.

What Works Elsewhere: Lessons Nigeria Is Ignoring:

This is not an African curse. It is a Nigerian choice.

RWANDA, 2003: After the genocide, the RPF government banned political godfathers and monetized politics. Campaign financing is public. Parties must have women and youth quotas. Result: 15 years of 7% average GDP growth and universal health coverage.

KENYA, 2010: The new constitution devolved 30% of national revenue to 47 counties. It also mandated that parties hold real primaries. Local projects increased by 40% in 5 years because governors now answer to voters, not just to party bosses in Nairobi.

GHANA: The Office of the Special Prosecutor and public asset declaration laws have made it harder for godfathers to operate in the dark.

Nigeria's 1999 Constitution already gives us the tools. Section 223 mandates internal democracy in parties. The Electoral Act 2022 mandates electronic transmission of results. The problem is not law. It is will.

The Economic Cost:

Godfatherism is expensive. Very expensive.

When contracts go to loyalists instead of competent firms, projects cost 40-60% more and deliver 50% less. The World Bank estimates Nigeria loses \$15 billion annually to procurement inefficiencies.

Beyond the Kitchen: Why Nigeria cannot develop without women in power

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

Nigeria is 50.4% female, according to UNFPA's 2025 estimates. That's 110 million women and girls.

Yet in the 10th National Assembly, women are 4.2% of Senators and 3.9% of House of Representatives members. In the Federal Cabinet, they are 15%. In boardrooms of Nigeria's top 50 companies, they are 8%.

We are trying to run a 21st century economy with one leg.

You cannot develop a country by ignoring half its brainpower, half its labor, and half its leadership.

The "akara seller" is not a punchline. She is the economy. And until we move women from the kitchen to the cabinet, from the market to the ministry, Nigeria's development will remain incomplete.

Consider the pipeline problem:

Where do the girls go?

Girls are not failing. The system is failing them.

WAEC 2024 results: Girls outperformed boys in 6 out of 9 core subjects. JAMB 2025: 52% of candidates scoring above 250 were female.

So what happens between secondary school and leadership?

There is the issue of Cultural pressure: In 15 states, the average age of marriage for girls is still below 18. UNICEF says 1 in 3 girls in Nigeria is married before 18.

Cost: A sanitary pad now costs N1,500. For many girls in rural areas, that means 5 days out of school every month.

STEM gap: Only 22% of engineering students and 18% of computer science students are female. No mentors, no role models, no labs.

By the time we get to university, we've lost thousands of potential doctors, engineers, and policymakers.

As Dr. Oby Ezekwesili said: "Nigeria is suffering from a massive leak in its talent pipeline. And the leak has a gender."

Politics Is Still a "Man's Game":

Running for office in Nigeria is expensive. Very expensive.

A House of Assembly seat: N50m - N80m

A House of Reps seat: N100m - N200m

A Governorship: N1 billion and above.

Party structures are male. Primaries are violent. Thuggery targets women more because the assumption is "she won't fight back."

In 2023, 28 women ran for governor in party primaries. Only 7 got tickets. Zero won.

Compare that to Rwanda: 61% of parliamentarians are women. Result: Maternal mortality dropped by 70%. Primary school enrollment for girls is 98%.

Compare to Ethiopia: Women make up 50% of the cabinet. Result: Faster rollout of health insurance and education programs.

This is not coincidence. When women are in the room, different priorities get funded.

The Economic Case: It's About GDP, Not Just Justice:

McKinsey Global Institute estimates that closing the gender gap in Nigeria could add \$229 billion to GDP by 2030. That's 12% growth.

Why?

Because women reinvest. World Bank data shows women reinvest 90% of their income into family health, education, and nutrition. Men reinvest 30-40%.

Because women dominate the informal sector. 60% of Nigeria's traders, farmers, and artisans are women. They employ other women.

Because women stabilize communities. During COVID-19, women-led cooperatives kept food moving in 14 states when supply chains broke.

The "akara seller" in Mile 12 wakes at 3am, feeds 4 children, pays school fees, and still pays tax. She is not a burden. She is the backbone.

Yet she has no access to credit, no business registration support, and no representation when market policies are made.

Violence, Online and Offline:

A woman who runs for office in Nigeria faces 3 enemies: money, thugs, and the internet.

During the 2023 elections, the Centre for Democracy and Development recorded that 67% of female candidates faced online harassment, threats, and sexualized attacks.

Offline, 1 in 3 Nigerian women has experienced physical violence, according to NBS 2022.

The Ebira People: A Heritage of Culture, Leadership and Enterprise

SALIHU MARYAM SAIDU

The Ebira people are one of Nigeria's prominent ethnic groups, renowned for their rich cultural heritage, strong communal values and enduring traditions. Predominantly found in central Nigeria, particularly in Kogi State, the Ebira also have communities in Nasarawa, the Federal Capital Territory, Edo, Kwara and other parts of the country. Over the years, they have preserved their unique identity through language, customs, festivals and traditional institutions while contributing significantly to Nigeria's social, political and economic development.

The history of the Ebira people is largely preserved through oral tradition. Historical accounts trace their migration to the ancient Kwararafa Confederacy around present-day Wukari in Taraba State before they gradually settled in their present homeland. The hills and fertile plains of Ebiraland provided security and supported farming, trade and community life. Over time, the people established closely knit settlements bound by shared ancestry, language and customs, laying the foundation for a resilient and united society.

Traditionally, the Ebira operated a decentralized system of governance in which clan heads and councils of el-

ders administered community affairs through consultation and consensus. With the advent of colonial administration, the institution of the Ohinoyi (king or Emir) of Ebira emerged as the paramount traditional authority, serving as a symbol of unity among the various Ebira clans. Today, the Ohinoyi (king or Emir) continues to play an important role in preserving cultural values, promoting peace, resolving disputes and fostering development across Ebiraland.

Agriculture remains the traditional backbone of the Ebira economy. Farmers cultivate yam, cassava, maize, millet, guinea corn and vegetables, while many families also engage in fishing, trading and animal rearing. The Ebira are equally recognized for their craftsmanship, particularly in weaving, pottery, blacksmithing and other indigenous occupations that have been passed down through generations. These economic activities have continued to sustain livelihoods while preserving valuable indigenous knowledge.

Traditional Cuisine and Lifestyle

Food occupies a special place in the culture of the Ebira people, especially during festivals, weddings and other communal celebrations. One of the most celebrated traditional delicacies is Apapa, a steamed bean pudding



Ebira Heritage Culture

prepared from unpeeled beans and traditionally wrapped in leaves before cooking. Other popular meals include Iya (pounded yam), Epete (beans porridge), Asharo (yam porridge), Uka (cassava or yam flour swallow) and Eba, which are commonly served with indigenous soups such as Epeza (beans soup), Gorigo (beniseed soup), Ipapara (melon soup), Irueru (scent leaf soup) and Oyoyo (draw soup). These traditional dishes reflect the Ebira people's agricultural heritage and are commonly prepared during family

gatherings and cultural festivals.

One of the defining features of Ebira culture is its colourful festivals and masquerade traditions. The famous Ekuechi Festival, celebrated annually, combines music, dance, storytelling and masquerade performances to honour ancestors, entertain communities and reinforce moral values. The festival attracts visitors from different parts of Nigeria and remains one of the strongest expressions of Ebira cultural identity. Oral traditions, proverbs and folk songs also continue to

serve as important tools for transmitting history and educating younger generations.

The Ebira language, belonging to the Nupoid branch of the Niger-Congo language family, remains central to the people's identity. Despite increasing urbanisation and the influence of modern lifestyles, many families continue to teach the language and traditional customs to younger generations. Cultural associations and traditional institutions have also intensified efforts to preserve Ebira heritage through festivals, community gatherings and educational programmes.

Beyond their homeland, the Ebira have distinguished themselves in public service, business, education, entertainment and politics. Their contributions reflect the values of diligence, resilience and communal responsibility that have long characterized the people. As Nigeria continues to embrace its cultural diversity, the preservation of Ebira history and traditions remains essential not only for future generations of the ethnic group but also for strengthening the country's rich multicultural heritage.

"The institution of the Ohinoyi (king or Emir) continues to unite the Ebira people while preserving their rich cultural heritage, promoting peace and strengthening communal identity in an ever-changing society."

Budgets Without Bedrock: Why Nigeria's annual rituals fail to deliver services

CLARETH SOLOMON

Every November, the President walks into the National Assembly with a thick book. Cameras flash. Lawmakers clap. Analysts on TV break down the figures.

Every December, the budget is "passed" — often with billions quietly added for "constituency projects."

Every January, Ministries, Departments and Agencies, MDAs, hold retreats to "hit the ground running."

By December, 40% of capital projects are unexecuted. Roads are abandoned. Hospitals have no equipment. Schools have no teachers.

This has been Nigeria's governance cycle for 20 years.

The problem in 2026 is not lack of money. In 2025, Nigeria's budget hit N35 trillion. The problem is lack of bedrock — institutions, data, and accountability. We are building budgets on sand.

The Implementation Gap: Where Does The Money Go?

Nigeria is not poor. Nigeria is leaky.

The Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, NEITI, reported that N15.3 trillion in oil and gas revenue was unaccounted for between 2019 and 2024. That is almost half of one year's budget.

Meanwhile, UBEC says 20,000 public primary schools in Nigeria have no classrooms. The National Primary Health Care Development



President Bola Ahmed Tinubu presenting the Budget to House of Assembly

Agency says 70% of PHCs lack basic equipment.

So where did the money go?

It went into "overhead," "consultancy," "security votes," and "special interventions" — budget lines with no receipts, no audits, and no outcomes.

The 2023 Auditor-General's report indicted 32 MDAs for spending N1.1 trillion without documentation. No one was prosecuted.

A budget is supposed to be a plan. In Nigeria, it has become a ritual. We perform it every year and hope development will appear.

Data Poverty: You Cannot Plan What You Cannot Count

In 2025, the Federal Government announced a plan to build 10,000 housing units. Good policy. But where? For whom? At what cost per unit?

No one knows, because Nigeria does not have current data.

Our last credible census was in 2006 — 20 years ago. The NBS poverty data is often 2 years late. The Ministry of Education does not know how many teachers are actually in classrooms. The Ministry of Health does not know how many doctors we have.

So we build schools where there are no children. We post doctors to LGAs that don't exist. We budget for roads in communities that have been displaced by flooding or banditry.

Ghana conducts annual population

surveys. Rwanda has a digital registry of every citizen. Kenya's Open Data portal updates monthly.

Nigeria is still budgeting with 2006 numbers and 2026 problems. That is governance malpractice.

The Collapse of Local Government: Governance Without Roots

Section 8(3) of the 1999 Constitution created 774 Local Government Areas to bring governance close to the people. That was the idea.

The reality: most LGAs are now PA offices to governors.

Because of the Joint State-LGA Account, a council chairman cannot fix a borehole without the governor's approval. In 24 states, caretaker committees — not elected officials — run LGAs.

Result: Primary healthcare, basic education, and rural roads — all constitutionally LG responsibilities — have collapsed.

A mother in Sokoto walks 8km to a PHC only to meet a locked gate. A farmer in Kogi cannot sell tomatoes because the 3km road to the market has been bad for 7 years.

When governance is not local, development is not real. You cannot develop Nigeria from Abuja alone.

The Budget Padding Industry

Every December, "budget padding" trends.

Lawmakers insert projects into the budget. Sometimes they are real. Sometimes they are "zombie projects" — repeated every year with no completion.

The 2024 budget had over 7,000 constituency projects worth N2.1 trillion. Tracka, BudgiT, and other CSOs found that 60% had no location, no bill of quantity, and no contractor.

This is not representation. This is legalized looting.

And because there is no consequence, it happens again every year.

What Works: Three Reforms That Can Fix This

Other countries were here before. They fixed it. We can too.

Reform 1: Open Budget, Open Data

Publish every budget line online within 30 days of passage. In machine-readable format. Let citizens, journalists, and CSOs track it in real time.

Mexico did this and cut corruption in procurement by 25% in 3 years.

Reform 2: Quarterly Audits and Sanctions

Every MDA must publish a quarterly report: money received, money spent, projects completed. The Auditor-General must audit and the results must be public. Officials indicted must be suspended and prosecuted.

No more reports that gather dust.

FEATURE

US vs Them: How economic anxiety is fueling Xenophobia in Nigeria

AMADI JOSEPH

In March 2026, traders shut down a section of Balogun Market, Lagos. Their placards read: "Foreigners are taking our shops." "Nigeria for Nigerians."

Three months later in July, a 30-second video of a fight between a Nigerian bus conductor and a Cameroonian trader trended on X for 3 days. The comments: "They are stealing our jobs." "Send them back."

The irony is thick. Nigeria has always been a nation of migrants. We hosted 3 million refugees during the Liberian and Sierra Leone wars. Our musicians, pastors, and traders live in every country in Africa.

But in 2026, with inflation at 24% and youth unemployment at 38%, frustration is looking for a face. And that face is increasingly "the other."

Economic anxiety is fueling xenophobia. And if we are not careful, it will tear the fabric of ECOWAS apart.

For decades, Nigeria practiced what scholars call "strategic hospitality."

We absorbed Ghanaians in the 80s during "Ghana Must Go." We sheltered Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in the 90s. We opened our markets to ECOWAS citizens because the treaty promised free movement of people and goods.

That hospitality was built on two assumptions: 1. Our economy was big enough for everyone. 2. Our government would protect citizens first.

Both assumptions are cracking. When a welder in Oshodi cannot pay N500,000 annual rent, it's easier to blame a Ghanaian shop owner than a broken economy.

When a graduate drives Bolt 14 hours a day and still cannot save, it's easier to say "Cameroonians are taking Bolt jobs" than to ask why there are no factories.

Hunger is not looking for policy papers. It is looking for a target.

X, TikTok, and Facebook have be-



XENOPHOBIA PROTESTERS

come accelerants.

A video of one fight between a Nigerian and a Malian gets 2 million views in 12 hours. A story of 200 Nigerians and Togolese running a joint rice farm in Kebbi gets 200 views.

Algorithms reward outrage. Politicians reward scapegoats.

Influencers now monetize "expose" videos: "See how foreigners are selling fake drugs." "See how they don't pay tax." Most of the claims are unverified. But by the time fact-checkers respond, the damage is done.

The NIMC and CAC data tells a different story. Foreigners own less than 3% of registered SMEs in Nigeria. Most "foreigners" people complain about are ECOWAS citizens who have lived in Nigeria for 20+ years. They have Nigerian wives, Nigerian children, and Nigerian tax IDs.

But data does not trend. Anger

does.

Let's be blunt. Kicking out "foreigners" will not fix Nigeria.

Fact 1: The informal sector in Nigeria is 65% of GDP. Most of it is run by Nigerians. The competition is Nigerian vs Nigerian.

Foreign Direct Investment from ECOWAS countries into Nigeria was \$1.2 billion in 2024. Nigerian businesses in Ghana, Togo, and Benin repatriated \$3.1 billion. We benefit more from the trade.

When you attack a "foreign" shop in Lagos, you are also attacking the 5 Nigerian staff who work there, the Nigerian landlord, and the Nigerian suppliers.

Xenophobia destroys markets. It does not create them.

Nigeria should study South Africa carefully.

In 2008 and 2015, South Africans attacked "foreign" shop owners — mostly Nigerians, Zimbabweans, and Somalis. Over 600 people died. Billions in property were lost.

What happened after?

1. No South African got those "taken" jobs.

2. Township economies collapsed because the shops were the only source of cheap goods.

3. 600 Nigerians were evacuated home. Many never returned.

Today, South Africa is begging Nigerian banks and telecoms to come back and invest.

When you turn on your neighbor, you eventually turn on yourself.

Nigeria is the biggest economy and biggest population in ECOWAS. We pushed for free movement. We host the ECOWAS Parliament and

Commission.

But now our citizens are saying "close the borders."

This is dangerous. 70% of Nigeria's informal cross-border trade is with Benin, Niger, and Cameroon. Closing borders will kill that trade and increase smuggling.

A trader in Seme Border told me: "Government should not fight us and fight our customers at the same time."

People don't hate foreigners when they are employed. The government must deliver on power, credit, and security so Nigerians can compete fairly.

If a foreigner commits a crime, arrest and prosecute. If a foreigner evades tax, CAC and FIRS should act. Don't burn shops. Use institutions.

We in the media must stop amplifying one-sided videos. Report context. Report joint businesses. Report success stories of integration.

Most Nigerians don't know what ECOWAS means for them. NTA, radio, and schools should teach it. Our future is regional, not isolationist.

Aisha, a Nigerian, and Mariam, a Cameroonian, have run a joint tailoring shop in Kano for 12 years. They employ 6 Nigerians.

"When customers hear we are fighting online, they stop coming," Aisha said. "But we have never fought. We are sisters."

That is the Nigeria that works. The one we are in danger of losing.

A nation that turns on its neighbors will eventually turn on itself.

Development requires trade. Trade requires trust. Trust requires tolerance.

Nigeria cannot claim to be the "Giant of Africa" and behave like a frightened dwarf in our own market.

The problem is not the Ghanaian shop owner. The problem is the Nigerian economy that is not working for Nigerians.

Fix that, and the "us vs them" talk will disappear.

Until then, we will keep fighting the wrong enemy.

From Tokenism to Transformation: What real development looks like in Nigeria

SEGIRU AHMED

When leaders have no policy, they give us palliatives.

When they have no jobs, they give us grants of N50,000.

When they have no vision, they give us hashtags like #RenewedHope and #Agenda2050.

This is tokenism. And it is killing Nigeria's future.

Real development is not rice sharing during Sallah and Christmas.

Real development is not commissioning a project 3 times.

Real development is systems building — boring, slow, unglamorous systems that work whether the governor is in town or not.

In 2026, Nigeria stands at a fork. One road leads to more tokenism. The other leads to transformation.

The choice we make in the next 24 months will decide the next 24 years.

The Symptoms: We Keep Treating Fever With Cold Water

The numbers are brutal, and they are familiar.

- *133 million Nigerians* live in multidimensional poverty — NBS 2024. That's 63% of us.

- *10.5 million out-of-school children* — UNICEF. The highest in the world.

- *4-hour daily power average* despite N7 trillion spent on power since 2015.

- *38% youth unemployment.* One in three graduates has no job 2 years after NYSC.

We keep announcing "interventions." TraderMoni. N-Power. School feeding. Conditional cash transfers.

They help people survive for 3 months. They do not help a nation develop for 30 years.

Because we are treating symptoms. We are not treating causes.

The Root Causes: 4 Cancers Eating One Body

Development in Nigeria is failing for 4 connected reasons:

Cancer 1: Politics — Godfatherism

When leaders owe their seats to one man, they govern for that man. Contracts, appointments, and policy all go to repay debt. See Article 1.

Cancer 2: Governance — No Data, No Accountability

We budget N35 trillion without knowing how many citizens we have. We spend billions with no audits. LGAs exist on paper only. See Article 2.

Cancer 3: Society — Division and Xenophobia

When the economy fails, we turn on each other. Nigerian vs Cameroonian. North vs South. Christian vs Muslim. A divided people cannot build. See Article 3.

Cancer 4: Gender — Excluding Women

110 million women are sidelined from policy, credit, and leadership. That's half our talent wasted. See Article 4.

You cannot fix power without fixing politics.

You cannot fix jobs without fixing gender.

You cannot fix poverty without fixing governance.

They are one problem wearing 4 faces.

What Tokenism Looks Like

Tokenism is easy. It photographs well.

Token Education: Distribute 10,000 tablets and call it "digital learning" while 20,000 schools have no roof.

Token Health: Launch 1 "mega hospital" in Abuja while 500 PHCs have no nurse.

Token Jobs: Give 500 youths POS machines and call it "empowerment" while factories close.

Token Infrastructure: Cut ribbons on roads that wash away in the first rain.

Tokenism is about optics. Transformation is about outcomes.

What Transformation Looks Like: A New Compact

Transformation is harder. It takes 8 years, not 8 months. But it lasts.

COLUMN

When governance becomes stranger than fiction

I had no intention of meddling in the current imbroglio involving the Chief of Staff to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Rt. Honourable Femi Gbajabiamila, and the purported 'fake' Director-General of the Presidential Foreign Interventions Promotion Council (PFIPC), Prince Adeniyi Adeyemi Matthew—who allegedly headed the agency.

The agency reportedly operated from a lofty office in the Federal Secretariat in Abuja's Federal Capital Territory, yet it was declared fake. Ordinarily, I would have remained on the sidelines and allowed those directly involved to disentangle the web of allegations and counter-allegations.

However, there is a timeless saying that the hottest place in hell is reserved for those who, in moments of moral crisis, choose the comfort of neutrality. While the authenticity of the allegations remains for the appropriate authorities to determine, the issues raised are too significant to be dismissed as mere political theatre. They go to the very heart of governance, accountability and public trust.

The story is almost beyond belief. That an organisation reportedly employing about 300 staff, receiving substantial budgetary allocations, operating more than 30 bank accounts, maintaining an account with the Central Bank of Nigeria, and functioning openly from the Federal Secretariat could allegedly turn out to be non-existent or fraudulent is nothing short of astonishing. If ultimately established as true, it would rank among the most extraordinary episodes in Nigeria's public administration.

It immediately recalls those implausible official explanations that have become part of Nigeria's political folklore. Nigerians can hardly forget the infamous claim that a snake allegedly swallowed millions of naira in a government office. Neither have many forgotten the explanation that rats invaded the office of former President Muhammadu Buhari, necessitating extensive repairs before he could resume work after a medical vacation abroad. Such stories generated widespread disbelief because they appeared to stretch credulity beyond reasonable limits.

Now, another narrative has emerged—one that appears equally incredible. The troubling question is not merely whether one individual allegedly occupied an office unlawfully. The more fundamental issue is this: where were the systems that ought to have prevented such a development in the first place?

Modern governance is built on procedures rather than personalities. Every appointment into a sensitive public office passes through several stages of documentation, verification, approval and authentication. Personnel files are maintained. Salaries are processed through established channels. Identity records are verified. Financial approvals require multiple authorisations. Internal auditors, accountants, administrative officers and supervising ministries all play defined



roles.

How, then, could such an elaborate arrangement allegedly escape detection for months or even years? That question deserves answers.

If indeed someone could allegedly function as the head of a federal agency without lawful authority, then Nigeria's administrative architecture may be more fragile than many citizens had imagined. It would suggest that institutional safeguards exist more on paper than in practice.

Even more troubling is the implication for public finance. Every appropriation approved by the National Assembly is expected to be tied to legally recognised institutions. Every kobo appropriated ought to be subject to rigorous accounting procedures. If a supposedly non-existent agency could receive public funds, operate numerous bank accounts and execute official functions, Nigerians deserve to know who authorised the releases, who supervised the expenditures and who certified the agency's legal existence.

This is no longer merely an administrative matter. It becomes a question of fiscal responsibility. Taxpayers have every right to know how their hard-earned resources are utilised. Public funds are not private inheritances to be dispensed without accountability. Every naira belongs to Nigerians and should be traceable from appropriation to expenditure.

One cannot help but wonder how many government institutions truly know the exact status of the agencies under their supervision. Bureaucracies are supposed to maintain meticulous records. They thrive on documentation. Every letter carries a reference number. Every appointment has an approval date. Every office has an establishment history. If those basic records become questionable, confidence in the entire system inevitably suffers.

Sadly, this is not the first time Nigerians have been confronted with stories that appear stranger than fiction. Over the years, the country has witnessed numerous official explanations that have left citizens bewildered.

Rather than strengthening confidence in governance, such episodes have deepened public cynicism.

Many Nigerians now instinctively doubt official narratives because previous experiences have taught them that the truth often emerges only after persistent public scrutiny. This growing distrust is dangerous.

Governments derive legitimacy not merely from elections but also from credibility. Citizens are more willing to obey laws, pay taxes and cooperate with public institutions when they believe those institutions operate honestly and transparently.

Conversely, when unbelievable stories become recurring features of governance, public confidence gradually erodes.

Trust, once lost, is exceedingly difficult to rebuild. This is precisely why transparency must never be treated as an optional virtue.

Every serious democracy depends on open government. Questions should never be viewed as acts of hostility. Rather, they are essential instruments of accountability.

The media, civil society organisations and concerned citizens perform indispensable democratic functions when they ask uncomfortable questions. Their responsibility is not to embarrass government but to ensure that public institutions remain faithful to the principles upon which they were established.

Silence, after all, has never exposed corruption. Silence has never corrected administrative failures. Silence has never strengthened democracy.

Some may argue that the matter should simply be left to the relevant investigative authorities. Certainly, due process must be respected, and no one should be pronounced guilty without evidence or a fair hearing.

Yet allowing investigations to proceed does not require citizens to suspend legitimate curiosity.

Indeed, public vigilance often compels institutions to act more diligently. One lesson emerging from this controversy is the urgent need to strengthen institutional verification mechanisms across the public service.

Government agencies should be subjected to periodic independent audits—not merely financial audits but comprehensive institutional audits that verify their legal status, personnel records, operational mandates and compliance with statutory requirements.

Digital governance also offers enormous opportunities. In an era of integrated databases, it should be virtually impossible for uncertainty to exist regarding the legal identity of any federal agency or its chief executive. Public records ought to be easily verifiable across relevant ministries, departments and agencies.

Technology should make government more transparent, not more mysterious.

Equally important is the need to cultivate a culture of personal responsibility within the civil service. Too often, accountability becomes diffused until no one accepts responsibility for obvious failures. Whenever controversies arise, officials point fingers at one another while the public remains confused.

Institutional accountability requires identifiable responsibility. Someone must sign approvals. Someone must verify credentials. Someone must authorise payments. Someone must supervise compliance. If everyone claims innocence, then accountability becomes an illusion.

The Tinubu administration has repeatedly pledged to combat corruption, improve governance and restore confidence in public institutions. Allegations of this nature therefore present an opportunity—not merely a challenge.

A transparent, impartial and thorough investigation would demonstrate that no office is above scrutiny and no individual enjoys immunity from accountability.

Conversely, if the matter fades into silence without convincing explanations, public suspicion will inevitably deepen.

Government should recognise that Nigerians are no longer satisfied with vague assurances.

They demand facts. They demand documentation. They demand evidence. Above all, they demand accountability.

The era when official statements alone settled public controversies has long passed. Today's citizens are more informed, more connected and more

inquisitive. Information circulates rapidly, and unanswered questions often generate even greater speculation.

That reality requires greater openness from public institutions. For the Chief of Staff, whose office occupies a strategic position within the Presidency, the controversy underscores the importance of rigorous oversight. Whether directly or indirectly connected to the allegations, every office associated with the Presidency carries the burden of maintaining the highest standards of administrative diligence.

Public confidence in the Presidency depends significantly on the integrity of those entrusted with its daily operations.

Ultimately, however, this controversy transcends personalities. It is not fundamentally about one Director-General. It is not solely about one agency. Neither is it exclusively about one administration. It is about the quality of governance Nigerians deserve.

Strong institutions are built on transparency, professionalism and accountability. Weak institutions survive on ambiguity, secrecy and complacency. Nigeria must decide which path it wishes to follow.

The country cannot continue normalising extraordinary administrative anomalies. Stories that should provoke outrage too often become objects of humour. What ought to trigger urgent institutional reform frequently degenerates into another episode of political entertainment before fading into collective amnesia. That cycle must end.

Whether these allegations are eventually substantiated or disproved, the investigation should leave behind stronger institutions than those that existed before the controversy emerged.

That would be the real victory. For democracy flourishes not because governments never make mistakes, but because institutions possess the courage to confront those mistakes honestly and correct them transparently.

The ultimate casualty of poor governance is not merely wasted public funds—it is public trust. Once citizens lose confidence in official institutions, rebuilding that confidence requires years of consistent integrity.

Nigeria cannot afford to squander any more of that precious commodity. One can only hope that, when all the facts finally emerge, this astonishing saga will reinforce rather than diminish confidence in our public institutions. Until then, Nigerians are justified in asking questions, insisting on answers and demanding accountability.

After all, democracy is not sustained by silence. It is sustained by informed citizens who refuse to accept that the unbelievable has become the new normal.

• Dr. Odaro is a columnist and lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi.

Institutional accountability requires identifiable responsibility. Someone must sign approvals. Someone must verify credentials. Someone must authorise payments. Someone must supervise compliance.

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FG signs games hosting agreement with ANOCA for 2027 African School Games

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

The leadership of the National Sports Commission (NSC) has signed the Games Hosting Agreement for the 2027 African



Mallam Shehu Dikko with the committee on 2027 African school Games

School Games with the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA).

The signing ceremony, which took place in Abuja on Wednesday, marked a significant step in Nige-

ria's quest to stage a successful second edition of the African School Games, tagged "Abuja 2027."

According to the press statement signed by

Dr. (Mrs.) Kehinde Ajayi, FCAI, ANIPR

Director, Information and Public Relations of the NSC, the Chairman of the National Sports Commission, Mallam Shehu Dikko, said hosting the African School Games is a huge milestone for Nigeria and aligns with the goal of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, to reset Nigerian sports. He reassured ANOCA that the second edition of the African School Games would set a new standard for future editions.

"Developing Nigerian sports from the grassroots level is one

of our mandates, and at that grassroots level, the foundation should be school sports, which is why we are having strong collaborations with the Federal Ministry of Education.

"To emphasize how aggressive we are with our grassroots drive, the DG and I created the Invited Junior Athletes (IJA) initiative for the National Sports Festival as the 38th state, and that programme has been a huge success.

"We also have a mandate to revamp our sporting infrastructure around the country, and hosting these Games clearly aligns with this. Therefore, we are very excited to host the rest of Africa next year, and I can assure ANOCA that, with their collaboration, Nigeria will deliver a world-class Games.



WAHID OSHODI

LSSTF chairman hails Africa's World Cup Impact

Wahid Oshodi, Chairman of the Lagos State Sports Trust Fund (LSSTF) says African football has reached a higher level after impressive performances at the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Oshodi told journalists in Lagos on Wednesday that Africa had every reason for pride after nine of its 10 representatives reached the Round of 32.

He said the achievement reflected steady progress, with many African footballers now competing regularly in Europe's leading leagues alongside the world's finest players.

"I think it has been a very good

tournament for Africa. Our teams have shown African football is coming of age, and it has to.

"Many of our players compete in the best leagues abroad. That experience is showing in the confidence and quality of their performances," he said.

Oshodi, also president of the International Table Tennis Federation Africa, said African football still had areas requiring significant improvement despite encouraging tournament displays.

He said several teams matched stronger opponents but failed to protect winning positions, ultimately missing opportunities to progress further in the competition.

Horse racing federation targets nationwide expansion, anti-doping reforms – Coordinator

The Horse Racing Federation of Nigeria (HRFN) says it is expanding horse racing across the country while introducing stricter anti-doping measures to curb horse abuse and other unethical practices.

The National Coordinator of the federation, Alhaji Abubakar Mustapha-Bida, disclosed this on Wednesday at the opening ceremony of the Renewed Hope 2nd Edition of the West African Horse Racing Derby at Murtala Muhammed Square, Kaduna.

Mustapha-Bida said the opening day of the 2025/2026 season finale went as anticipated, with no major surprises, describing it as largely ceremonial.

He said attendance on the first day was modest but expressed optimism that larger crowds, including President Bola Tinubu and other dignitaries, would attend the remaining days of the tournament.

"There was nothing that happened today that was not envisaged. We expected new winners, and we expected the opening day to be largely ceremonial.

More guests are expected from tomorrow and Saturday," he said.

The National Coordinator said the federation was intensifying efforts to eradicate horse abuse, particularly the use of performance-enhancing substances.

According to him, the federation is collaborating with the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA),

the National Sports Commission (NSC) and the proposed Sports Anti-Doping Agency to establish standards that will eliminate doping and other unethical practices.

"There has been a lot of abuse of horses in Nigeria, particularly in terms of doping and other unethical practices. We are determined to end this, and by next year we hope to have closed that gap," he said.

On the concentration of



HORSE RACING

Biker president reaffirms commitment to responsible motorcycling

The President of Bikers with Attitude and Determination (B.A.D.), Kayode Kosile-Palmer, says the association remains committed to promoting responsible motorcycling, road safety, tourism and humanitarian service across Nigeria.

Kosile-Palmer said this while speaking with journalists on the activities, achievements and plans of the association yesterday in Lagos.

He said B.A.D was found-

ed on June 23, 2016, and had grown into one of Nigeria's most respected superbike riding communities.

According to him, the association started with an inaugural ride of more than 50 bikers in Lagos State and has expanded to nearly 200 registered members from different professions.

He said they share a passion for motorcycles, friendship, adventure and community service.

He said about half of the as-

sociation's members now live in the diaspora, with active members in the U.S. Canada and the United Kingdom.

Kosile-Palmer said the association was created to change the wrong perception many people have about motorcycle riders.

"Our goal is to show that bikers are responsible citizens, successful professionals and people who are committed to making positive contributions to society.

"We achieve this through organised programmes, public engagement and activities that promote safety, unity and service while celebrating the freedom that comes with riding motorcycles," he said.

The president said the association also works to build stronger relationships between bikers and the public.

He said its objectives include promoting peaceful relationships between motorcycle riders and other road users, partnering with organisations on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects.



KAYODE KOSILE-PALMER

South Africa names 36-member squad for Lagos Commonwealth Fencing Championships

South Africa has unveiled a formidable 36-member squad for the 2026 Commonwealth Fencing Federation Championships scheduled for Lagos.

The squad blends experienced campaigners with emerging talents expected to challenge strongly throughout the competition.

The announcement is contained in a statement issued on Wednesday by the Media Department of the Nigeria Fencing Federation.

The statement outlined South Africa's preparations and expectations ahead of the

championships in Lagos.

Experienced épée fencers Sergey Losevskiy and Alexandra Lancaster will lead the South African contingent.

Both represented South Africa at the 2025 African Fencing Championships held in Lagos.

Losevskiy, who previously represented Russia before switching allegiance to South Africa, has become a key figure in the men's épée team.

Based at TFS Johannesburg/Blues Fencing Club, he has captained South Africa at major continental competitions, bringing leadership and valuable experience.



LAGOS COMMONWEALTH FENCING CHAMPIONSHIPS

African Teams and 'Near Success Syndrome'

- Poor Coaching or Low Self-Esteem?

DOUGLAS BAYE- OSAGIE

Every four years, the FIFA World Cup is staged with a familiar script for African football. Hope rises, talents shine, and for 70, 80, even 88 minutes, the continent representatives usually show strength and belief. Then the final whistle comes, and what we take home is heartbreak. The story is no longer just about losing. It is about how we lose.

This is the "Nearly Syndrome." African teams are now known for. They do not just get beaten. They lead; they raise hopes, they control; they dominate, and then they let it slip. They come agonizingly close to history, only to watch it evaporate in the dying minutes.

The question that keeps resonating in the minds of people is painful but necessary: Is this a failure of coaching, or a deeper issue of self-belief?

This is not a new wound. We have been here before. In Italia '90, Cameroon's Indomitable Lions, led by the iconic Roger Milla, were 2-1 up against England in the quarterfinals and eight minutes from a World Cup semi-final. The dream of an African team in the last four was alive. Then came defensive errors, and the dream died when Gary Lineker buried the hopes of an expectant continent with two well-taken penalties. That was the very first time I cried after a football match. Four years later in USA 94, Nigeria led Italy 1-0 in the Round of 16 with two minutes to go.

A famous victory was seconds away. Then Roberto Baggio happened and plunged a dagger into the heart of every Nigerian watching. Extra time, elimination. I am yet to get that defeat out of my head three decades later. That Super Eagles team was unbelievably smooth in its movement, and it was in that game that Okocha set a dribbling record in the FIFA World Cup which still hasn't been broken: 15 successful one-on-one dribbles.

The 2026 World Cup has brought out the worst of this "Near Success Syndrome." This was the tournament we thought our continent would use to tell the rest of the world that we had arrived. Nine out of 10 African teams, with the exception of Tunisia, made it past the group stage — the best record of any continent. South Africa began the capitulation in the Round of 32 by losing to Canada, an ice hockey nation with a lesser footballing pedigree than Bafana Bafana.

Look at Senegal. Against a broken and disjointed Belgium team, they were cruising. The structure was sound, the midfield was winning duels, and the attack looked dangerous on the break, with Ismaila Sarr scoring one of the best goals of the tournament. For most of the game they played like the team that wanted it more. Then came the collapse. A lapse in concentration, a poor substitution, a tactical naivety in seeing out a game, and victory turned to dust.

That Senegal capitulation was not an isolated incident. It was a mirror. DR Congo did the same against England. For long stretches they matched one of football's traditional powers. They defended with discipline and countered with pace. But as the clock



XENOPHOBIA PROTESTERS

ticked toward 90, the organization fell apart. The lead was gone, and with it, a result that would have shaken the world. Harry Kane pounced, and the aircraft that was heading towards Heathrow turned for Kinshasa.

Ivory Coast and Cape Verde told a similar story. Both teams showed flashes of brilliance, technical quality, and athleticism that can match anyone. But football matches are 90 minutes plus. And it was in those last 10-15 minutes that concentration wavered. Defensive lines dropped too deep. Midfielders stopped tracking runners. The composure that defines tournament teams simply vanished.

The most painful example was Egypt. To be leading Argentina, the world champions, in a game where Lionel Messi had missed a penalty, with just 12 minutes to go, is the stuff of dreams. The stadium was theirs. They had silenced a legion of Argentina supporters and Messi worshippers worldwide. The momentum was theirs. Twelve minutes from one of the greatest upsets in World Cup history. Then, in a blur, the lead was gone. Egypt did not lose to Argentina over 90 minutes. They lost in the final 12.

When you stack these moments together, a pattern emerges. African teams are not outclassed from kickoff. They are not tactically lost for 90 minutes. They are competitive, often superior, for the majority of the game. The failure comes at the end. And that is where we must look at coaching first.

Poor game management is a coaching problem. At the highest level, World Cup football is about managing moments. It is about knowing when to slow the game down, when to make cynical fouls, when to change shape to a 5-4-1, and which players to bring on

to kill a game. We saw how England held their slim lead against Mexico in the quarterfinals with a man down and 30 minutes to go. Too often, African benches react late, or make changes that invite pressure instead of relieving it.

European and South American coaches grow up in systems where "seeing out a game" is taught from academy level. There are specialists for it. There are rehearsed patterns. African teams frequently lack that. The substitutions feel emotional rather than strategic. The tactical instructions in the last 15 minutes are vague. "Just defend, kick the ball out" is not a game plan. What happened to the attacking verve that secured the lead? Cape Verde were waiting for Argentina to score before they started attacking. That was a game they were creating openings in, but again it happened.

We also see a lack of squad depth used intelligently. Coaches sometimes stick too long with tired legs because of reputation, or they make like-for-like changes that do not alter the tempo. Against teams like Argentina and England, that is fatal. They smell blood when legs get heavy and minds get anxious. Good coaching anticipates that and kills the game before it starts.

But to blame only the coach is to tell half the story. Because even with perfect instructions, players have to execute. And here we get to the second part of the syndrome: low self-esteem, or perhaps, a lack of tournament mentality.

There is a psychological hurdle that African teams have to clear. For decades we have been told the narrative: "African teams are talented but naive. They can compete but they don't win." Players internalize that. When you are

1-0 up against Argentina with 12 minutes left, part of your brain whispers, "This is not supposed to happen to us."

That doubt manifests on the pitch. Passes that were crisp in the 60th minute become rushed in the 85th. Defenders start clearing the ball to nowhere instead of keeping possession. Teams drop 20 yards deeper for no tactical reason, inviting wave after wave of pressure. It is fear. It is the fear of believing you truly belong.

Compare this to Morocco in 2022 and 2026. What made them different was not just talent. It was bold belief. They played every minute like they deserved to be there. They managed games, they suffered, they saw it out. That was coaching, yes. But it was also a squad with a mentality that refused to accept the "nearly" tag.

Low self-esteem in football is not about players lacking confidence in their skills. African players are in the biggest clubs in Europe. They know they are good. It is about collective belief. Do 11 players plus 5 substitutes truly believe they can hold Argentina, England, or France for 12 minutes? If one player doubts, the whole structure cracks.

The media and fan pressure does not help. In African countries, football is religion and politics combined. One mistake in qualifiers or a World Cup game can lead to death threats. That creates players who play not to lose, instead of playing to win. Pierre Womes home was burnt when he lost a penalty that stopped Cameroon from going to the 2006 Germany World Cup. Yakubu Aiyegbeni is not remembered for the 21 goals in 58 games he scored for Nigeria, but for his two-yard miss against South Korea in the World Cup. Maduka Okoye despite his heroics in Italian football

is still judged by the goal that he conceded against Tunisia in AFCON in Cameroon in 2022. When players play with the fear of being demonised a tendency to make mistakes happen.

So which is it? Poor coaching or low self-esteem? The honest answer is both, and they feed each other. Poor coaching fails to install the mechanisms to see out games. That leads to more collapses. More collapses reinforce the belief that "we always find a way to lose." That belief makes the next collapse even more likely.

Breaking the cycle requires work on both fronts. Federations must invest in elite, tournament-experienced coaches who understand game management at the World Cup level. Not just big names, but teachers. Coaches who will drill a team for eight weeks on how to waste time, how to keep the ball in the corner, how to take a tactical yellow, all under pressure.

At the same time, we need sports psychologists, leadership groups within squads, and a cultural shift. African teams must stop going to the World Cup to "represent well and try" and start going to win it. Until the players believe that in their bones, the last 10 minutes will always be dangerous.

Senegal cruising. DR Congo holding England. Ivory Coast and Cape Verde switching off. Egypt 12 minutes from glory. Cameroon in 90. Nigeria in 94. These are not just losses. They are lessons spanning three decades. The talent is there. The world can see it. The "Nearly Syndrome" will only end when African football decides it is tired of being nearly. That decision starts with better coaching and ends with unshakeable belief. The next World Cup cannot be another story of what could have been.



World Cup: Analyst urges African teams to improve on game management

Sports analyst, Monday Ahanmisi, has urged African teams to improve their game management to be able to compete favourably with their

counterparts across the globe.

He said that it is a key reason many African teams failed to advance further at the ongoing 2026 FIFA World Cup in spite

of their strong performances.

Ahanmisi made the call in an interview with journalists in Lagos yesterday.

He said African teams have shown many times that they have the talent, strength and confidence to compete with the best football nations in the world.

Ahanmisi said many African teams found it difficult to hold on to their lead after scoring first.

According to him, poor game management has stopped many African teams from achieving more success at the FIFA World Cup.

He said that the ability to manage a game from start to finish was a quality that separates successful teams from those that fall short in major tournaments.

According to him, several African countries have performed well at the ongoing World Cup, creating chances and even taking the lead against top European and South American opponents.

However, he said that many of them failed to protect those leads, allowing their opponents back into the game before eventually losing.

"Africa needs game management. Our teams must learn how to manage matches better. "If you look at the performances of Senegal, DR Congo and Egypt against their European and South American opponents, they took the lead in those games but allowed their opponents to come back and defeat them."



SOUTH AFRICA PLAYERS

Michael Olise may Miss World Cup Semi-final, as FIFA rejects France's appeal against his yellow card

Another Nigerian-born player is in the news regarding controversial cards issued by referees at the ongoing FIFA World Cup, as Michael Olise stands to miss the semi-finals with France – if his country scales the hurdle against Morocco on Thursday, Sports247 reports.

In contrast with the saving grace that saw Folarin Balogun cleared to play for USA against Belgium in the round of 16, despite having received a red card after scoring in the USMNT's 2-0 victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina, Olise has been denied a reprieve for the booking he got versus Paraguay.

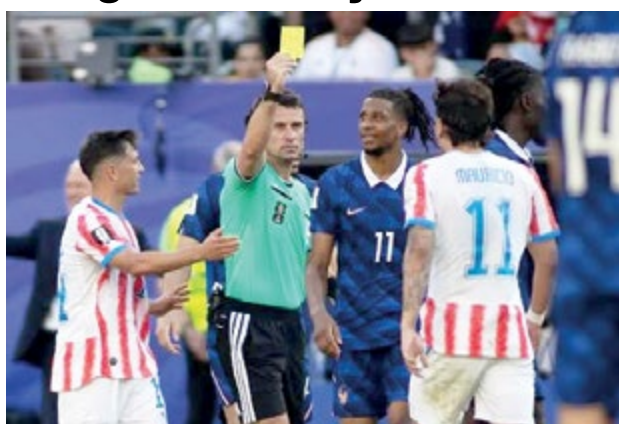
The yellow card that was brandished in Olise's face during that round of 16 tie came under fishy circumstances, but FIFA rejected an appeal by France on behalf of the Bayern Munich of Germany dazler, which means he must not get another booking in Thursday's quarter-finals fixture versus Morocco.

Should Olise go into the ref's bad book during Thursday's game, he will automatically miss out of the semi-finals if his team gets that far, as FIFA's decision to stick with the original decision leaves him hanging on a thin string of accumulated cards that could automatically rule him out of the next game.

"FIFA has officially denied France's appeal to overturn the controversial yellow card issued to Michael Olise. Head coach Didier Deschamps confirmed the governing body chose to maintain the original decision despite the French federation's formal protest.

"This disciplinary decision means that, if Olise receives another yellow card, he will face an automatic suspension from a potential semi-final. It follows an on-field altercation with a Paraguayan player that saw the Bayern Munich star booked and now treading a disciplinary tight-rope.

"The disputed yellow card was handed to the winger deep into stoppage time in the 97th minute of play. The caution was triggered by an aggressive on-field altercation with Paraguayan player, Matias Galarza," a report by UK's Mirror revealed



MICHAEL OLISE

FIFA World Cup quarter-finals promise blockbusters

The 2026 FIFA World Cup reaches its decisive quarter-final stage starting Thursday, with eight nations chasing semi-final places and football's biggest stars taking centre stage.

The quarter-finals feature Argentina, France, Morocco, Spain, Belgium, Norway, England and Switzerland, with every fixture expected to shape the tournament's destiny.

Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappé, Erling Haaland and Harry Kane headline a star-studded cast pursuing both World Cup glory and the Golden Boot.

Action begins on Thursday when France face Morocco in a quarter-final between one of the favourites and Africa's last

remaining representatives.

Morocco eliminated the Netherlands and Canada to reach the last eight and remain unbeaten as they pursue an historic first African World Cup triumph.

France, however, arrive inspired by Mbappé, whose seven goals and two assists have powered Les Bleus into the quarter-finals.

Friday's contest pits unbeaten Spain against Belgium in a meeting between two of the tournament's most consistent performers.

Spain remain the only team yet to concede, while Belgium advanced after convincing knockout victories over Senegal and the United States.

Saturday's quarter-final sees Norway face England after the Scandinavians stunned Brazil to reach the last eight.

Haaland has scored seven goals during Norway's impressive run, while Kane has contributed six goals and one assist for England.

The final quarter-final begins early Sunday, with defending champions Argentina meeting surprise package Switzerland.

Argentina survived thrilling encounters against Cape Verde and Egypt, while Switzerland shocked Colombia through a dramatic penalty shoot-out victory.

The Golden Boot race also remains fiercely contested as



RT HON COMRADE PHILIP SHAIBU

NIS DG seeks greater private sector investment in sports development

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Director-General, National Institute for Sports (NIS) Rt Hon comrade Philip Shaibu has called for increased private sector participation in sports development, insisting that government funding alone is no longer sufficient to meet the country's sporting programmes demands.

The NIS DG made the call on Wednesday during the handover of badminton equipment donated by the Badminton Association of Japan to the

Badminton Federation of Nigeria (BFN) at the Moshood Abiola National Stadium, in Abuja.

Shaibu said to ensure sustainable sports development, particularly in the area of infrastructure, requires greater collaborative effort between government, the private sector and foreign development partners.

"I have consistently called for collaboration and support from the private sector in any form and will continue to do so.

"Relying solely on government funding, especially with the state of our infrastructure, is not sustainable," he said.

16 clubs battle for NWFL Premiership promotion in Calabar

Excitement is building ahead of the 2026 Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) Championship in Calabar, with clubs expressing confidence of securing promotion to the premiership cadre.

The championship will hold from July 9 to July 16, featuring 16 clubs competing for two promotion tickets to the country's top-flight women's league.

The teams are divided into four groups of four, with the winners of each group advancing to the semi-finals.

The two finalists will gain

promotion to the 2026/2027 NWFL Premiership.

Ahead of the competition, players and officials of Unification FC, Fortress Ladies and Ghetto Tigers Ladies expressed optimism about their chances of securing promotion.

Captain of Unification FC, Success Odey, said the team's primary objective was to earn promotion while providing a platform for players to showcase their talents.

"Our major target is to secure promotion to the premiership and give our players the opportunity to display their abilities.

