FG defends $21bn borrowing plan, says it's investment not debt

KEBONKWU RUTH

ABUJA

The Federal Government on Wednesday defended its $21.7bn supplementary external borrowing plan submitted to the National Assembly, describing it as a strategic investment programme rather than debt accumulation.

The Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Taiwo Oyedele, made this known while briefing State House correspondents after the Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting presided over by President Bola Tinubu at the State House, Abuja.

Oyedele, who presented 10 memos which were approved by the council, said the $21.7bn plan covers 46 projects across 11 sectors and has an average lifespan of five years.

He said, "Altogether, if you convert the euro amount and add it to the dollar amount, it comes to $21.7bn. First and foremost, this is a plan. It doesn't even mean that we have borrowed all of it. This qualifies as investment."

According to the document, $10.6bn of the plan is for transportation infrastructure, including sections of the Lagos-Calabar and Sokoto-Badagry highways and the Kano-Kaduna Metro Rail. About $7.9bn will come from multilateral and bilateral development partners, led by the World Bank with $5bn at an average rate of 2.1 per cent.

The minister said $4.8bn of the total is for subnational and agency borrowing, with $3.3bn going directly to states and $1.45bn channelled through agencies.

Among the approved memos are a €155.9m credit facility from Deutsche Bank for upgrade of 132/33kV substations under the Presidential Power Initiative Phase One, a $970m syndicated term loan for rolling stock on the Karu-Maradi rail line, a €76.8m credit from the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development to Bauchi State for transport infrastructure, and non-intrusive inspection scanners for the Nigerian Customs Service.

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The Nigerian OBSERVER

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Okpebholo gets Muslim Inclusion Award, pledges action on hijab, Islamic studies

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has pledged to address concerns over Islamic religious education, the wearing of hijab in public schools and access to prayer facilities for Muslim civil servants in the state.

The governor gave the assurance while receiving an award for outstanding leadership and Muslim inclusion in governance from the Edo State Council for Islamic Affairs (EDSCIA) at Government House, Benin City.

The award, presented by the council's leadership led by its chairman, Alhaji Abdulaziz Igbinidu, was in recognition of what the Muslim body described as an unprecedented level of Muslim participation in the Okpebholo administration.

Speaking on behalf of the council, Alhaji Bako Yusuf commended the governor for appointing Muslims to strategic positions, including Secretary to the State Government, Chief of Staff, commissioner and Special Adviser on Islamic Religious Matters.

"The level of Muslim inclusiveness, from the position of the SSG to the Chief of Staff, commissioner and Special Adviser on Islamic Religious Matters, is unprecedented," the council stated.

While expressing appreciation for the appointments, the council appealed to the governor to address issues affecting Muslim pupils and students, particularly reports that some were being compelled to study Christian Religious Studies (CRS) instead of Islamic Religious Studies (IRS).

The council disclosed that more than 50 qualified Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers were available within the Muslim community and could be considered for employment to strengthen religious education in public schools.

It also called for the enforcement of existing legal provisions on hijab rights, alleging that some teachers continued to harass Muslim female students for wearing the Islamic head covering.

According to the council, the matter had been brought to the attention of the Commissioner for Education, who promised to issue a statement on the issue.

The Muslim leaders further requested a designated prayer facility at the State Secretariat to enable Muslim civil servants to observe their daily prayers.

They also sought the governor's support for the completion of the council's secretariat project along Lucky Way, Benin City, where a school is already operating.

The delegation informed

CONTINUES ON PG 2»

Omobude commends Okpebholo on security, urban renewal

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

The General Superintendent of New Covenant Gospel Church (NCGC), Rev. Dr. Felix Omobude, has commended Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for his administration's urban renewal drive and efforts to tackle insecurity, saying the initiatives have enhanced residents' sense of safety and improved movement within Benin City.

Omobude, a former President of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), gave the commendation at the church's Bible Alive Believers International Convention 2026, held under the theme, "Stir It Up," at the Peniel Convention Centre, Ohovbe Road, opposite Agbor Park, Benin City.

The cleric described Okpebholo as a Christian who believes in Jesus Christ and praised the transformation of Benin City through the administration's urban renewal projects.

He particularly commended the flyover at Ramat Park, noting that it had helped ease traffic congestion and made movement around the city more convenient.

According to him, the infrastructure development has also made it easier for church members and other participants to commute to and from the convention venue.

"We have held this convention a few times, but navigat-

CONTINUES ON PG 2»



INCLUSION AWARD:
Gov. Monday Okpebholo of Edo State (r) receiving an award for Outstanding Leadership and Muslim Inclusion for the State Council for Islamic Affairs (EDSCIA) in Benin City yesterday.

FG pays ₦1.2trn power debt, targets 19,000MW transmission capacity —Pg 2

Court sacks Uzodimma as APC Imo West Senatorial Candidate, declares Okorocha winner —Pg 3

El Salvador sends 2,000 troops to Haiti to rescue four missing soldiers —Pg 15

Youth Football and no policy direction: —Pg 21
The price of a system without a structure

NEWS

FG pays ₦1.2trn power debt, targets 19,000MW transmission capacity

ABUJA

STORIES BY AGHEDO IYOBOR

The Federal Government has paid N1.2 trillion out of the N2.3 trillion outstanding power sector debt to ease liquidity pressures and improve electricity supply.

The Minister of Power, Joseph Tegbe, disclosed this on Wednesday while briefing State House correspondents after the Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting presided over by President Bola Tinubu at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Tegbe said the payment was part of broader efforts to address liquidity challenges in the sector, particularly those affecting gas supply to electricity generation companies.

He said government was also pursuing measures to stabilise the national grid, strengthen transmission infrastructure and improve electricity delivery to consumers.

According to him, Lagos and its adjoining areas account for about 50 per cent of national electricity demand, while Abuja, Kano and other locations require infrastructure upgrades.

He said government plans to expand national transmission capacity from the current 5,000 megawatts to over 19,000 megawatts to bridge infrastructure gaps and accommodate the country's generation capacity estimated at over 13,000 megawatts.

The minister added that prolonged detention of consignments at the ports had affected availability of essential materials needed for electricity infrastructure development, noting that efforts were underway to resolve the clearance issues.

Tegbe revealed that construction has commenced on a modern National Control Centre in Osogbo, Osun State, to replace the existing facility which has operated for 64 years.

He said the new centre would be equipped with advanced monitoring and control systems to improve grid coordination, operational efficiency and nationwide transmission management.



NCGC INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION:
Rev. Felix Omobude, General Superintendent of New Convenant Gospel Church (left) and Edo State Governor, Sen. Monday Okpebholo (right) speaking at the church's Bible Alive Believers Int'l Convention Centre, Ohovbe Road, Benin City, yesterday.

Okpebholo gets Muslim Inclusion...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

the governor of plans to convene a Muslim summit in Auchi on November 21, 2026, to unite members of the community and communicate its position on civic and political participation.

It also pledged to intensify efforts to keep Muslims informed about the policies and programmes of the Okpebholo administration.

Responding, Governor Okpebholo thanked the council for the award and assured the delegation that its concerns would be examined.

"I have heard your requests. We will look into them," the governor said, adding that the issues would be considered individually.

On the question of Islamic Religious Studies in public schools, he promised to seek a resolution that would accommodate the concerns of all parties.

"We will see how we can resolve it so that everybody will be happy. We will look at them one by one and see how we can make it up. We are one," he said.

The governor also referenced the Quran's mention of Jesus Christ, underscoring common ground between Islam and Christianity.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilor, Esq.; Chief of Staff, Hon. Yakubu Musa; Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kassim Afegbua; Special Adviser on Islamic Religious Matters, Hon. Ahmed Musa Momoh; and Executive Secretary of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Alhaji Eranga Abdulkabir Muhammadkabir, among others.

Omobude commends Okpebholo...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

ing Ikpoba Hill has always been very difficult. This time, your infrastructural development has made it easy for us," he said.

Omobude also praised the governor's efforts to combat crime and criminality, stressing that a secure environment was essential for large gatherings such as the convention.

"We also thank you for the fight against crime and criminality. It is in an atmosphere of safety that we can gather like this. It is God who put you in office, and God will protect and guide you," the cleric said.

However, he appealed to the governor to extend the urban renewal and infrastructure drive to Ohovbe, the community hosting the church, which he said was grappling with serious erosion challenges.

He urged the state government to dispatch officials to assess the affected areas and determine appropriate measures to address the problem.

"It is as if some elders of this community knew you were coming today, and they asked me to appeal to you to extend your developmental stride to the area. Erosion has almost driven them out. Please, my governor, send your people to assess the place and find out how to help them. The church will stand in prayers for you," he appealed.

In his remarks, Governor Okpebholo called on the church and residents of Edo State to sustain their prayers for his administration, saying the fight against cultism, kidnapping and other forms of criminality required both effective security measures and spiritual support.

He assured residents that his administration would sustain the fight against criminal activities until the state was safe.

"I am here to receive prayers from our father. The work we are doing in the state is huge. The fight against kidnapping and cultism needs prayers. I will continue to fight them, and I will never be afraid, because He that is in me is greater than he that is in them," the governor said.

FEC approves ₦631.3bn for 9 road projects nationwide

AGHEDO IYOBOR

ABUJA

The Federal Executive Council (FEC) has approved N631.3 billion for the construction, reconstruction and rehabilitation of nine major road projects across the country.

The Minister of Works, David Umahi, disclosed this on Wednesday while briefing State House correspondents after the FEC meeting presided over by President Bola Tinubu at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Umahi said the projects are aimed at improving connectivity, easing transportation and boosting economic growth by enhancing accessibility and movement of goods and people.

He said the largest allocation of N209 billion was approved for the reconstruction of the 81.1-kilometre Ado–Ilawe–Ilumaba–Ikole Road in Ekiti State, including construction of a bridge.

The Council also approved N167 billion for the reconstruction of the 95-kilometre Etuke–Okeni–Ankpa–Otopa Road in Kogi State.

Other approvals include N89.2 billion for the construction of the 47-kilometre Bichi Ring Road with a flyover, and about N62 billion for the Tungo–Karamti Road linking Adamawa and Taraba States, which will include five bridges.

Umahi said N30 billion was approved for remedial works on deteriorated sections of the East–West Road, while N28.218 billion was approved for rehabilitation of a 17-kilometre section of the Sokoto–Illela Road, Route A1.

The Council further approved N20.257 billion for an 18-kilometre road linking Asiago to the Port Harcourt–Enugu Expressway, and N11.33 billion for a road project previously undertaken by the Abia State Government which required federal intervention after its funding under the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited's tax-credit scheme was discontinued.

Umahi disclosed that FEC commended President Tinubu on the completion of the first 118-kilometre section of the Abuja–Kaduna–Zaria Road, completed in 30 months with 81 kilometres built using reinforced concrete pavement.

He said work on the second section covering 164 kilometres is nearing completion with only 16 kilometres left, adding that solar-powered streetlights will be installed along the entire 375-kilometre Abuja–Kaduna–Zaria–Kano corridor.

On the Lagos–Abidjan coastal highway, the minister said ministers from participating countries will meet on Friday to discuss funding arrangements, under which the African Development Bank will provide loans to countries to finance their sections.

₦264bn UBEC grants lie Idle as public schools decay nationwide

AGHEDO IYOBOR

ABUJA

State governments across Nigeria have left N264.12 billion in Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) matching grants unspent, even as public schools battle dilapidated classrooms, overcrowding and lack of learning materials.

The revelation is contained in the 2025 UBEC Annual Report obtained on Tuesday in Abuja, which showed that the funds had been disbursed to State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) but remained unexpended in state government accounts as of July 21, 2025, when the commission conducted financial monitoring visits across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.

Benue State topped the list with the highest unspent balance of N19.18 billion, followed by Imo with N14.12 billion, Osun with N14.02 billion, Kwara with N13.99 billion and Delta with N13.40 billion. The five states accounted for N74.72 billion, about 28.3 per cent of the total unutilised funds.

Other states with high balances include Borno with N13.20 billion, Anambra N12.67 billion, Kano N12.15 billion, Adamawa N11.38 billion and Gombe N11.09 billion.

A breakdown shows that in North-Central, Kogi recorded N7.60 billion, Plateau N6.98 billion, Nasarawa N6.75 billion, Niger N3.62 billion and FCT N5.67 billion.

In South-East, Abia had N8.64 billion, Enugu N5.03 billion and Ebonyi N2.81 billion.

In South-West, Ekiti recorded N8.40 billion, Ogun N5.26 billion, Oyo N5.09 billion, Ondo N3.48 billion and Lagos N1.85 billion.

In South-South, Akwa Ibom had N8.09 billion, Edo N2.48 billion, Cross River N2.47 billion, Bayelsa N1.60 billion and Rivers N329.28 million.

In North-East, Yobe recorded N4.37 billion and Taraba N168.48 million, while in North-West, Jigawa had N7.92 billion, Kebbi N7.21 billion, Kaduna N7.09 billion, Zamfara N7.03 billion, Katsina N6.15 billion and Sokoto N1.96 billion. Bauchi recorded N825.99 million.

The development is occurring despite worsening conditions in public schools, where pupils learn in dilapidated buildings and overcrowded classrooms. The Federal Ministry of Education's Nigeria Education Statistics 2024 portal puts the national learner-to-classroom ratio at 60.1, above the benchmark of 35.

Human rights lawyer, Femi Falana, SAN, criticised the failure to utilise the funds, accusing governors of neglecting children of the poor, and called for greater accountability in line with a Federal High Court judgment on free, compulsory basic education.

Court sacks Uzodimma as APC Imo West senatorial candidate, declares Okorocha winner

AGHEDO IYOBOR

ABUJA

Justice Obiora Egwuatu of the Federal High Court, Abuja, on Thursday, ordered the Governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma, to immediately stop parading himself as the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) for the Imo West Senatorial election slated for January 16, 2027.

Justice Egwuatu issued the order after holding that Uzodinma did not win the May 18 primary election conducted by the APC and monitored by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Delivering judgment, the judge held that evidence presented before the court proved that former Governor Rochas Okorocha actually won majority of the votes cast at the poll.

The court subsequently ordered the APC to forward Okorocha's name as the party's candidate for the 2027 general elections for Imo West Senatorial District.

Justice Egwuatu also restrained Uzodinma from further presenting himself as the senatorial candidate of the party.



COURTESY VISIT:
Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (4th left) in a handshake with the European Union's Seconded National Expert and Liaison officer, Franklin Nguendia (3rd left) during the courtesy visit of the European Union delegation to the Governor in Government House, Benin City, yesterday.

Okpebholo seeks EU support to curb irregular migration, reintegrate returnees

RICHARD EWEKA

ABUJA

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has called on the European Union (EU) and other international partners to support the state government's efforts to curb irregular migration, combat human trafficking and facilitate the reintegration of returnees.

Okpebholo made the call on Wednesday when he received a delegation of EU representatives on a courtesy visit to the Government House, Benin City.

The governor said his administration was committed to protecting Edo residents from the dangers of irregular migration, stressing that relocating abroad was not necessarily the best option for everyone.

He said the government was addressing the factors driving migration by engaging relevant stakeholders and exploring ways to expand opportunities for residents within the country.

"Each time I travel, I see Nigerians in the diaspora, and something comes to my mind. If these people were in Nigeria, they could have contributed significantly to the country's development.

"For me, I do not believe leaving your country for another is necessarily the best thing to do. That is why we take the protection of our people seriously," he said.

Okpebholo explained that the establishment of the Edo State Migration Agency (EDMA) and the Edo State Diaspora Agency was part of efforts to engage relevant stakeholders and develop strategies for managing migration.

He noted that migration from the state appeared to be declining but expressed concern over the difficulties Nigerians encounter while living abroad.

The governor cited the return of some families from South Africa as an example, urging returnees to regard Nigeria as a place where they could rebuild their lives and contribute to national development.

He, however, acknowledged that government alone could not adequately address the challenges confronting returnees, hence the need for stronger collaboration and increased support from international partners.

Earlier, the Director-General of the Edo State Migration Agency, Mr Lucky Agazuma, commended the governor for his administration's efforts to improve migration management and tackle human trafficking.

Agazuma said the state's approach to migration management had attracted attention beyond Edo, noting that other states had expressed interest in learning from its strategies.

He called for stronger engagement with the European Union and other international partners to develop collaborative approaches to migration management and address its associated challenges.

Similarly, the Director-General of the Edo State Diaspora Agency, Dr Loretta Ogboro-Okor, called for intensified efforts to curb irregular migration and promote safe labour migration.

Ogboro-Okor commended the governor for supporting the agency, noting that his commitment reflected an understanding of the need to protect Edo indigenes both at home and in the diaspora.

In his remarks, the European Union's Seconded National Expert and Liaison Officer, Franklin Nguendia, said the delegation was in Edo State to engage government officials on migration-related challenges.

Nguendia explained that the visit would enable the delegation to assess the state's migration situation, identify existing gaps and explore areas for improved cooperation with the state government.

The engagement, he said, was aimed at strengthening collaboration between the EU and Edo State in addressing irregular migration and related concerns.

No Nigerian asset sold to US, Alake clarifies $700bn claim

KEBONKWU RUTH

ABUJA

The Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dr. Dele Alake, has dismissed reports that Nigeria sold $700 billion worth of solid minerals to the United States, insisting that no national asset has been sold or transferred.

Alake stated this on Tuesday in Abuja while inaugurating the Nigeria-United States Committee on Strategic Cooperation in the Solid Minerals Sector.

He described the reports as false and clarified that the agreement was designed to attract investment and promote partnerships between American investors and Nigerian operators. "There is no sale of any Nigerian asset. There's nothing exchanging hands," he said.

The minister explained that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by both countries was a government-to-government platform intended to facilitate business-to-business engagements, not transfer ownership of Nigeria's mineral resources.

"We created a platform to facilitate mingling of US investment ventures with Nigeria's local operators. It is in the public domain. We signed it in public and published it in four or five national newspapers," he added.

Alake said the committee's inauguration followed the strategic cooperation framework established during the 81st United Nations General Assembly in New York.

He also dismissed claims that the US intended to take over Nigeria's mineral resources and security architecture.

According to him, the partnership aligns with President Bola Tinubu's economic diversification agenda to reduce dependence on crude oil.

"We have the resources, the critical elements the world needs to transit to clean energy. So we are creating a new paradigm - you bring your capital, expertise and technology, to match with our natural resources and create a win-win situation. The investor gains, Nigeria gains," he said.

Alake lamented that Nigeria had operated a mono-product economy while much of its solid minerals sector remained informal, with ores transported "from pit to port" without adequate local processing.

He said the Federal Government has made local processing a condition for granting mineral titles, noting that investors must demonstrate a clear pathway for processing within the country.

He said the policy has encouraged processing facilities across the country, including West Africa's largest lithium processing plant recently commissioned in Nasarawa State.

CBN to consider banks' challenges over data localisation deadline

AGHEDO IYOBOR

LAGOS

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) says it will consider challenges faced by financial institutions in meeting the January 2027 data-localisation deadline, as a survey shows gaps in implementation readiness across the sector.

The Director, Payments System Supervision Department, CBN, Dr. Rakiya Yusuf, gave the assurance at an Executive Regulatory Dialogue on the National Sovereign Cloud Initiative and Data Localisation Implementation held in Lagos on Wednesday.

Yusuf said the apex bank is prioritising engagement and guidance to help institutions comply with its June 15 circular requiring payment transaction data generated in Nigeria to be stored and managed within the country.

She urged institutions experiencing difficulties to write to the Payments System Supervision Department, stating their challenges and proposed compliance plans for consideration on a case-by-case basis.

She said the CBN would use feedback from the dialogue to develop further guidance, including frequently asked questions.

2027: INEC warns electoral officers against costly errors

OLIVER IJIOGBE

BENIN CITY

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has urged electoral officers in Edo State to strengthen risk management, anticipate operational challenges and put effective contingency measures in place to prevent avoidable errors and security breaches during the 2027 general elections.

The Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) in Edo State, Mr Obo Effanga, gave the charge on Thursday in Benin City at a sensitisation workshop on Electoral Risk Management (ERM) for electoral officers from the state's local government areas and members of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES).

Effanga cautioned electoral officers against complacency arising from their experience in previous elections, stressing that every electoral exercise presents unique challenges requiring meticulous planning, vigilance and strict adherence to established procedures.

He urged the officers to approach the 2027 general elections with renewed commitment, regardless of their years of experience in election administration.

"If you think all the elections you've done in the past meant you are an expert in it, please look at this next election as very important, more important than all the other elections you have carried out," he said.

To illustrate the consequences of operational lapses, the REC recounted an incident during an off-cycle election in which more than 30 people reportedly voted at a polling unit, while the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) recorded no accreditation.

According to him, the discrepancy was discovered at the ward collation centre, putting the polling unit's result at risk of cancellation.

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SPECIAL EDITION

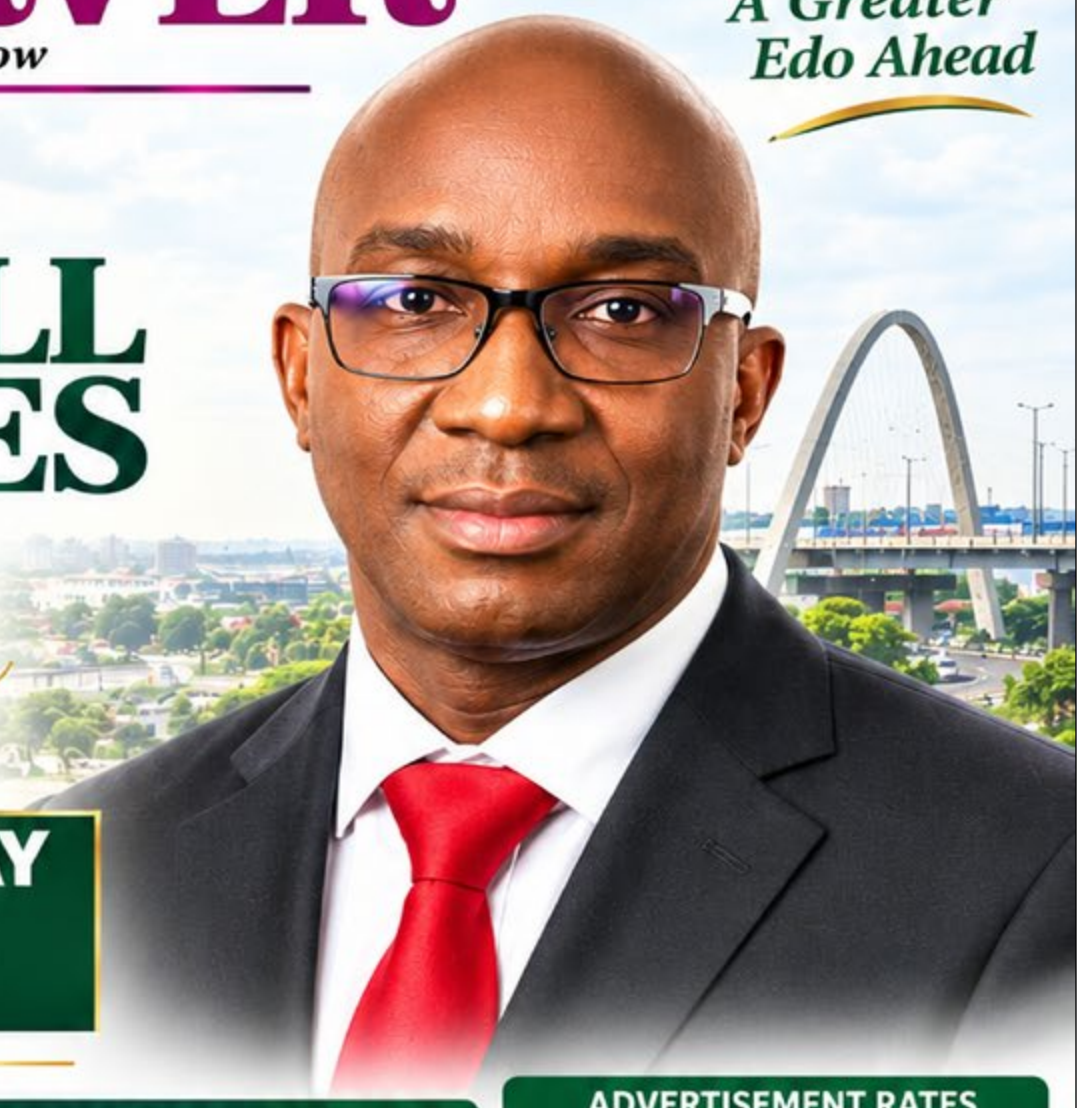
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IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

2ND Years ANNIVERSARY OF

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EDO STATE



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NEWS

Reps order probe into illegal encroachment beneath Eko Bridge

ABUJA

The House of Representatives has mandated its Committees on Works and Public Assets to investigate alleged illegal encroachment and unauthorised commercial activities beneath Eko Bridge and other Federal bridges in Lagos State amid concerns that such activities could threaten critical infrastructure and endanger commuters.

The investigation will examine the legality of containers, makeshift structures, warehouses, markets, workshops and other commercial establishments operating within the bridges' right-of-way, as well as determine whether any public assets have been unlawfully occupied, leased or otherwise used.

The resolution followed the adoption of a motion of urgent public importance sponsored by the member representing Surulere II Federal Constituency of Lagos State, Mr Lanre Okunlola.

The House expressed concern that unauthorised activities around Eko Bridge, particularly near its foundations, had reportedly damaged critical structural components and necessitated emergency engineering intervention.

It warned that "continued encroachment may undermine the lifespan and structural stability of the bridges, obstruct routine inspections and repairs, and expose commuters and adjoining communities to safety risks."

The motion stated that "the continued occupation of areas beneath and adjacent to Federal bridges may impede routine engineering inspections, emergency repairs and future expansion works while posing significant risks to commuters and adjoining communities."

Eko Bridge is a major transport link between Lagos Mainland and Lagos Island and falls under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Works.

The House also raised questions about the legality of the commercial activities, noting that it was uncertain whether the occupants had obtained valid approvals from the appropriate Federal authorities.

It called for an examination of any approvals granted to occupants to establish whether they complied with the Federal Highways Act, applicable planning regulations and the guidelines of the Federal Ministry of Works.

To establish the facts, the House directed the Federal Ministry of Works, the Federal Roads Maintenance Agency, the Nigerian Inland Waterways Authority, where applicable, and Lagos State physical planning authorities to submit relevant documents to the committees.

The documents are expected to include approved engineering drawings, survey plans, Right-of-Way maps, occupancy approvals and other records relating to developments beneath and around the affected bridges.

Following the adoption of the motion at the plenary presided over by the Deputy Speaker, Benjamin Kalu, the House directed its Committee on Works to determine "the legality of the structures and commercial activities," while the Committee on Public Assets will ascertain "whether any public asset has been compromised, occupied, leased, alienated or used contrary to existing laws."

The latter committee is also expected to identify the individuals, agencies or organisations responsible for any established violations.

The House further called for appropriate enforcement measures, including the removal of structures found to be illegally occupying the Federal Right-of-Way.

It also proposed long-term measures to protect, monitor and preserve Federal bridges nationwide.



A young schoolgirl studying at her mother's roadside stand at Airport Road in Abuja.

Opay reaffirms commitment to deepening financial inclusion

ABUJA

OPay has restated its commitment to turning technology into practical value through reliable payments, stronger merchant relationships, local jobs and easier access to financial services.

The company said that true measure of inclusion was not how many people could open an account, but how many could use financial services to earn, save, trade and withstand unexpected costs.

It noted that when a driver could receive payment, a shop could keep trading, and a family could send money when it mattered, financial inclusion became real.

The company added that this was the impact digital finance must continue to deliver one customer, one business and one transaction at a time.

It said from drivers receiving payments on their phones to small businesses serving customers without relying only on cash, digital finance was changing how Nigerians manage money.

The company added that it was part of the shift as new data showed progress in financial inclusion and the need to make access more useful.

It explained that for a commercial driver, receiving payment quickly could mean having enough money to buy fuel and continue working, while for a market trader, a digital transfer could help pay a supplier without leaving the shop, and for a family, sending money to a loved one could take seconds instead of a long journey.

The company said financial inclusion means providing practical ways for people to receive, send and manage money, regardless of income or location, as reflected in everyday moments.

OPay said Nigeria had made significant progress in financial inclusion, citing the 2026 Access to Financial Services in Nigeria survey by Enhancing Financial Innovation and Access (EFInA) which found that 79 per cent of adults, about 94.2 million people, now used a financial product or service.

Minister demands results from colleges of education under dual mandate

ABUJA

The Minister of Education, Dr Tunji Alausa, has challenged provosts of colleges of education to demonstrate results through the effective implementation of the dual mandate, improved institutional accountability and better-quality teacher preparation.

Alausa said the reform offered an opportunity to reposition colleges of education, strengthen teacher training and expand pathways for academic and professional advancement, stressing that its success depended on strategic leadership and collaboration among stakeholders.

The minister, who was represented by the Director of Colleges of Education at the Federal Ministry of Education, Dr Cecilia Uba, spoke in a goodwill message at the National Commission for Colleges of Education Teacher Education Leadership and Impact Award ceremony in Abuja on Thursday.

The event, held at the Wells Carlton Hotel, Asokoro, was organised in partnership with Gosima Group as part of activities marking the NCCE's national retreat and workshop on the effective implementation of the dual mandate and strategic plan for colleges of education.

"The effective implementation of the Dual Mandate presents a significant opportunity to reposition Colleges of Education, strengthen teacher preparation and expand pathways for academic and professional advancement," Alausa said.

He added that achieving the objectives required "strategic leadership, institutional accountability, collaboration and a shared commitment to excellence."

The minister reaffirmed the Federal Ministry of Education's commitment to working with the NCCE, provosts and other stakeholders to implement policies aimed at improving the quality, relevance and global competitiveness of teacher education in Nigeria.

Alausa commended the commission for organising the awards, describing the initiative as an opportunity to recognise educational leaders whose dedication and professional excellence had contributed to improving educational outcomes.

He urged the award recipients to see the recognition not merely as a reward for past achievements but as a call to greater responsibility, innovation and service to the country.

"As champions of education, you are encouraged to see this honour not merely as a reward for past accomplishments, but as a renewed call to greater responsibility, innovation and service to our nation," he said.

The dual-mandate policy allows eligible colleges of education to offer both the Nigeria Certificate in Education and approved bachelor's degree programmes in education, widening opportunities for teacher training and academic progression.

Eno promises N200,000 bursary for Akwa Ibom students if re-elected

UYO

Akwa Ibom State Governor, Umo Eno, has promised to increase the annual bursary for students in public tertiary institutions from N50,000 to N200,000 if re-elected for a second term in 2027.

The governor announced this during a fireside chat on the second day of the Ibom Ignite 2026 Conference at Ibom Hall, Uyo, on Wednesday.

He said the new rates would take effect if he won the February 2027 governorship election and was sworn in for another term on May 29, 2027.

Eno said the increase was intended to help students from less privileged backgrounds meet their educational expenses.

"We started by paying bursary, we moved it, it's now 50,000 for every student. But again, to show you that we're engaging, we're thinking about young people from 2027, as we come back May 29, 2027, to make sure that our young people who come from the kind of background I came from can at least pay their tuition, bursary will move to 200,000," he said.

State police could curb farmer-herder conflicts, rural banditry – IPCR DG

ABUJA

The Director-General of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Dr Joseph Ochogwu, has said that state policing could help address farmer-herder conflicts and rural banditry by improving local intelligence gathering, strengthening community engagement and reducing response times to security threats.

Ochogwu, however, warned that decentralised policing must be professionally managed and subject to effective oversight to prevent political interference, human rights abuses and the persecution of minority groups.

He spoke in Abuja on Thursday while delivering the keynote address at a conference on peace and conflict resolution in Nigeria, organised by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation-West Africa.

The conference, themed "Peace and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: Rethinking Strategies for Sustainable Peace," featured panel sessions on farmer-herder conflicts in North-Central Nigeria and rural banditry, with discussions focusing on the challenges of ending recurring violence and building sustainable peace in affected communities.

The debate over state policing has gained momentum following progress on a proposed constitutional amendment to establish a dual policing system. On October 23, the Presidential Working Group on the National Policing Bill announced that 24 state Houses of Assembly had approved the amendment, meeting the constitutional threshold for it to proceed towards presidential assent.

The panel on farmer-herder conflicts examined persistent violence associated with disputes over land, access to water and grazing rowutes, livelihoods and community relations in North-Central Nigeria.

The region has experienced repeated attacks, communal clashes and displacement, particularly in Benue and Plateau states. The violence has disrupted farming, displaced families and heightened tensions between affected communities.

Discussions at the confer-

NEWS

2027: AI-generated photos cast doubt on voter register, expert warns

ABUJA

The Director of the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, Clement Nwankwo, has questioned the credibility of Nigeria's voter register ahead of the 2027 general election, alleging that artificial intelligence-generated information and photographs have been inserted into the database.

Nwankwo warned that the alleged irregularities, alongside concerns about the Independent National Electoral Commission's preparedness, could undermine the credibility of the elections and expose the process to manipulation.

Speaking during an interview with ARISE NEWS on Thursday, he questioned the increase in the number of registered voters from more than 90 million to 103 million, arguing that the figure might not accurately reflect the number of eligible voters in the country.

He stated, "Technology has of course come forward, and now what we see is what is now referred to as AI-generated information and photographs that have been inserted into the voter register."

He said civil society organisations and individuals had used different technological tools, including AI, to examine the register.

He added, "And the verdict you see, of course, is that using AI, you can tell quite clearly that the voter register has very serious problems."

Questioning the increase in the number of registered voters, Nwankwo said, "We did see voter register that jumped from 90-something million to 103 million. And questions are arising as to how that jump happened and who is on that voter register, I think that we do not have 103 million persons who are eligible to vote in this country."

He said the country needed to address the problem, although he acknowledged that introducing an entirely new register before the 2027 election might no longer be feasible.

"It means that we must go back to the drawing board. And I think it's too late, though, for 2027 that you talk of a new voter register. But this country must come to terms with the fact that its current voter register has no credibility," Nwankwo said.

Nwankwo also raised concerns about the transparency of INEC's preparations, particularly its communication with political parties.

He added, "You must brief the political parties. You must call them in and say, these are what you are doing. But is INEC doing so? No. The parties don't know what is going on, and it should be that the parties should know what INEC is doing.

"So I don't see that communication going on. I don't see INEC putting out information on its preparedness."

The PLAC director said wider gaps in the preparations could be difficult to address before the elections.

He said, "And as we speak right now, looking at the threshold document, it is clear that there are lapses and gaps that may be difficult to rectify as we speak."

He also warned that shortcomings in the process of transferring voters to new polling units could disenfranchise more Nigerians in 2027.

Nwankwo said, "I think you will see an even larger number of people disenfranchised in the 2027 election, because INEC has not done what it should do to ensure that people can move and have their voting unit migrate to where they have recently moved to."

Nwankwo further questioned whether the commission had provided adequate guidance on how citizens could challenge errors or object to entries in the voter register.



CONFERENCE:
From left: Chairman House Committee on Pension, Jallo Mohammed; Chairman, National Pension Commission; Agbaje Olukayode; Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), George Akume and Director-General of the National Pension Commission, Ms. Omolola Oloworaran, during the National Pension Conference and awards in Abuja on Thursday.

NEPZA restates support for Ogun host communities

ABEOKUTA

The Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority has reaffirmed its commitment to community development around the Ogun–Guangdong Free Trade Zone, highlighting interventions in education, healthcare, infrastructure, youth empowerment and agriculture.

The Administrative Manager of the Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority, Mr Steven Makanjuola, disclosed this during a press briefing at the Ogun–Guangdong Free Trade Zone, Igbesa, on Wednesday, where he outlined the zone's contributions to industrial development, community welfare and Nigeria–China economic relations.

Makanjuola said the zone's operations went beyond attracting investments and promoting industrialisation, stressing that its long-term growth depended on constructive relationships with host communities.

"We recognise that our growth depends not only on investment but also on the relationships we build with the people around us. We value this partnership and remain committed to making our presence meaningful to our host communities,

"The Ogun–Guangdong Free Trade Zone was established to promote industrialisation, attract investment and strengthen economic cooperation between Nigeria and China"

He explained that the zone had become a platform for businesses to operate, partnerships to flourish, jobs to be created and skills to be developed, while translating bilateral relations between both countries into industrial investments, technology exchange and local economic opportunities.

Highlighting the zone's interventions in education, Makanjuola said it had established and maintained the China–Nigeria Friendship School in Igbesa for more than 14 years.

He said the school currently catered for over 700 pupils and had been recognised by education stakeholders as one of the leading public primary schools in Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State.

The NEPZA official added that the zone had also pioneered an inter-school knowledge competition for public schools across its host communities, benefiting more than 10,000 students over the years.

Beyond the competition, he said, the zone had supported public schools with sound systems, mowing machines, musical instruments, sports equipment, stationery and food items, while offering cash prizes to outstanding schools to encourage academic excellence.

He added that "We constructed a modern hospital block for the community. We also periodically donate medical supplies to hospitals and organize medical outreaches for our host communities.

Insecurity: Tinubu to boost Air Force with five new helicopters

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu is expected to induct five helicopters into the Nigerian Air Force fleet on Thursday as part of efforts to strengthen military operations against security threats across the country.

The aircraft comprise two Airbus H-125 helicopters and three AW-109 Trekker B helicopters manufactured by Leonardo Helicopters of Italy.

The Nigerian Air Force announced the ceremony in a flyer shared on its X account on Thursday, stating that the event would also feature the commissioning of newly constructed hangars at the Presidential Air Fleet facility in Abuja.

According to the flyer, Tinubu will attend as the special guest of honour, while the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sunday Aneke, will host the event scheduled for 10 am.

PUNCH Online had earlier reported that the Federal Government had taken delivery of the five helicopters as part of efforts to modernise the Air Force and improve its operational capacity.

The three AW-109 Trekker B helicopters arrived in Lagos on September 15, while the two H-125 helicopters had been delivered earlier, according to the Nigerian Air Force.

The three AW-109 aircraft are part of a larger order of 10 helicopters, with the remaining seven expected to be delivered before the end of 2026.

The Chief of the Air Staff had said the new aircraft would improve the availability of air assets and enhance the service's ability to respond to security challenges across multiple operational theatres.

The Air Force said the AW-109 Trekker B helicopters would support intelligence gathering, surveillance, close air support, armed escort and combat search-and-rescue operations.

The H-125 helicopters are expected to provide light helicopter support for various operational requirements.

The acquisition is part of the Federal Government's efforts to modernise the Air Force and strengthen support for ground troops conducting operations against terrorism, kidnapping and banditry.

Ogun police command strengthens GBV response with training

ABEOKUTA

The Ogun State Police Command has strengthened its response to gender-based violence following a two-day capacity-building training on post-violence care and survivor-centred approaches for police officers in the state.

The training was organised by the Ogun State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in collaboration with the APIN Public Health Initiative to equip officers with the knowledge and skills required to handle GBV cases professionally while protecting survivors' rights and dignity.

According to a statement issued on Thursday by the Police Public Relations Officer of the Ogun State Command, Deputy Superintendent of Police Oluseyi Babaseyi, the workshop focused on appropriate procedures for first responders, including officers investigating cases of sexual assault, domestic violence and other forms of abuse.

Declaring the programme open, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Mrs Adebimpe Obienu, said, "The training was designed to strengthen security officers' capacity to provide coordinated and rights-based responses to GBV.

"The workshop aimed to improve officers' knowledge and practical skills in survivor-centred care, safe referral procedures and post-violence support while carrying out their statutory responsibilities."

The first day of the training focused on the different forms of gender-based violence, its causes, risk factors and effects on individuals and society.

Participants also received technical guidance on relevant laws and the expectations of prosecutors during police investigations, with emphasis on the importance of proper evidence gathering and documentation.

Officers were trained on procedures for responding to incidents at crime scenes and police stations, including protecting survivors' privacy, safety and dignity.

The sessions also covered appropriate interviewing techniques, obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, preserving evidence and avoiding actions that could retraumatise survivors.

The organisers further emphasised the need for effective referral systems linking police officers with Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), healthcare facilities and social welfare agencies across the state.

NEWS

Tinubu defends new loans, says funds will build future opportunities

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has robustly defended Nigeria's new borrowing from international institutions and banks, insisting the loans will fund infrastructure that expands opportunities for future generations.

In a post by his Spokesman, Bayo Onanuga on X on Thursday, in an essay titled "From reforms to delivery: Our infrastructure investment and growth strategy," the President responded to criticism, especially from opposition leaders.

"The real question is not how much we borrow, but what we build, what value we create and what future we leave behind," he wrote.

Tinubu identified the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway, Sokoto-Badagry Superhighway, Trans-Sahara Superhighway, electricity grid upgrades and the modernisation of key commercial ports in Lagos as major projects expected to strengthen Nigeria's productive capacity.

These, alongside investments in healthcare, education and vocational training, would connect economic regions, reduce logistics costs, unlock agricultural and industrial potential and attract private investment.

The Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway is expected to cut logistics costs along its corridor by 15 to 20 per cent and could add up to two per cent to Nigeria's GDP through expanded trade, tourism and industrial activity.

It is also projected to generate about 100,000 direct jobs in construction and engineering, alongside more than 150,000 indirect jobs in logistics, materials and related services.

"We are not simply building highways. We are opening economic corridors, connecting markets, unlocking industries and reshaping Nigeria's economic geography," the President said.

He linked the investments to the administration's ambition to build a $1 trillion economy by 2030. "We cannot build a USD 1 trillion economy with infrastructure designed for an economy a fraction of that size," Tinubu stated.

The President said economic reforms introduced in May 2023 had helped restore macroeconomic stability, strengthen public finances and improve Nigeria's standing in international financial markets.

Real Gross Domestic Product growth reached 4.43 per cent in the second quarter of 2026, while headline inflation fell to 14.63 per cent in September from 20.98 per cent a year earlier. Gross external reserves rose to $55.1 billion as of 9 October 2026, including about $46 billion in net reserves, and the tax-to-GDP ratio increased to 12.5 per cent from seven per cent.

"The decisions taken since 2023 were difficult but necessary," he said, referring to measures including petrol subsidy removal, exchange rate unification, tax reforms and coordinated efforts to tackle inflation.

Army chief inaugurates 49 projects to boost personnel welfare

ABUJA

The Nigerian Army has inaugurated 49 welfare and infrastructure projects across the country to improve personnel welfare, enhance operational efficiency and address accommodation challenges facing officers and soldiers.

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lieutenant General Waidi Shaibu, disclosed this on Thursday, during the commissioning of a newly constructed Officers Transit Accommodation at Life Camp, Abuja.

The facility was among 11 projects commissioned in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), while 38 others were inaugurated across Nigerian Army formations and units nationwide.

Speaking at the ceremony, Shaibu said the projects aligned with his Command Philosophy, particularly the pillars of Sound Administration and the Soldier First Concept, which prioritise personnel welfare in building a professional, adaptable and combat-ready force.

He said adequate accommodation and essential infrastructure were critical to boosting morale, improving productivity and strengthening the Army's capacity to discharge its constitutional responsibilities.

The COAS said, "The projects underscore the Nigerian Army's sustained commitment to providing a conducive living and working environment for officers, soldiers and their families."

He charged officers who would occupy the newly commissioned transit accommodation to maintain the facility and uphold the highest standards of discipline and responsibility.

Shaibu also reaffirmed his commitment to sustained investment in welfare and infrastructure across Army formations and units nationwide, while appreciating President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for his continued support to the Nigerian Army.

Earlier, the Chief of Logistics (Army), Major General Adekunle Adeyinka, said the Officers Transit Accommodation was designed to address temporary accommodation challenges faced by officers posted to Army Headquarters and other formations in Abuja.

According to him, the facility comprises well-furnished, self-contained apartments equipped with modern amenities to provide comfortable accommodation for officers awaiting permanent allocation.

He said the development would improve personnel welfare and administrative efficiency by providing suitable temporary accommodation for officers during their transition to new postings.

Oyo LG boss offers scholarships to 18 students

IBADAN

The Iseyin Local Government Area of Oyo State has sponsored 18 students from the community on scholarship to study at the Abiola Ajimobi Technical University, Ibadan, in the last three years.

The council Chairman, Rasaq Fadiran, disclosed this while speaking with journalists in Ibadan, the state capital, on Thursday.

He said, "The beneficiaries of the programme were selected through thorough screening conducted by the institution, and they are studying courses in the medical, engineering, technology and basic digital skill acquisition areas to add value to the growth of Iseyin in particular, and Oyo in general."

Fadiran added that the scholarship programme, which the Governor Seyi Makinde government supported, made it possible for his administration in Iseyin Local Government to provide timely intervention to brilliant students seeking higher education and opportunities in medical and technology lines.

"Since I became the Chairman of Iseyin Local Government three years ago, we have sponsored 18 brilliant students who are indigenes of the community to acquire education that will impact their lives, their community and the state positively.

"We give the credit to our progress-loving Governor Makinde, who made the platform, the wherewithal and encouragement for this laudable scheme possible.

"Oyo is known for the stride to lead in all things good, so in academic and educational development, we are happy to say, the scholarship programme is adding great value to our community," Fadiran noted.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known as **LINDA LOCAL AJAYI**. Now wish to be known and addressed as **Mrs LINDA LOL OGBOMO**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

RECONCILIATION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **IYAYIKE NOGIE**, and **DANIEL NOSA**. are one and the same person, Henceforth, Now wish to be known and addressed as **DANIEL NOSA**. All former documents Remain valid concerned Authorities and the general public should please take note.

OREDO LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL
KING'S SQUARE, P.M.B. 1052, BENIN CITY,
EDO STATE.

Our Ref: ABC 1501/47 *Date:* 26th October, 2026

INVITATION FOR TENDER

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Oredo Local Government Council intends to apply part of its approved budgetary provision for the fiscal year 2026 to cover eligible payments for contracts to be procured under this budget. Bidding is open to all eligible bidders in line with Part IV, Section 35 of the Edo State Public Procurement Law 2020 and EDPPA's *Procurement Guidelines (current edition)* **Bidders are advised to note the following minimum criteria to qualify for the award of the contract.**

2.0 SCOPE OF WORK

Oredo Local Government Council now invites bid(s) for civil works as described in the table below:

Bidding No.	Project Description	Scope of Work
ABI922/98	Construction of Ultra Modern Health Center in Ward 3 Oredo Local Government Area.	Site clearing, Removal of Trees, Shrubs, Demolition of existing dilapidated structure of temporary fencing, construction building with blocks, reinforced concrete, roofing, installation of doors, windows, rendering, electrical fitting and finishing, plumbering installation
ABC1501/46	Construction of Modern Shopping Complex at Ogiso Market (Block A)	Site clearing ,Removal of Shades, Temporary structure, clearing of debris temporary fencing of site, construction of main building with blocks reinforced concrete floor reinforced concrete slab, Roofing, installation of doors , rendering, electrical fittings, finishing-floor tiles and staircase.
ABC1500/48	Construction of Modern Shopping Complex at Ogiso Market (Block B)	Site clearing ,Removal of Shades, Temporary structure, clearing of debris temporary fencing of site, construction of main building with blocks reinforced concrete floor reinforced concrete slab, Roofing, installation of doors , rendering, electrical fittings, finishing-floor tiles and staircase.
ABC1499/47	Construction of Modern Shopping Complex at Ogiso Market (Block C)	Site clearing ,Removal of Shades, Temporary structure, clearing of debris temporary fencing of site, construction of main building with blocks reinforced concrete floor reinforced concrete slab, Roofing, installation of doors , rendering, electrical fittings, finishing-floor tiles and staircase.

3.0 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

You are required to submit a detailed profile which should contain the following:

a. Certificate of incorporation/registration with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC)
b. Evidence of registration with Edo State Public Procurement Agency.
c. Evidence of payment of tax by the company for the immediate past 3 years (i.e. 2023, 2024, 2025)
d. Company's audited financial account (indicating turnover) and funding information over the past 3 years endorsed by a firm of chartered accountants.
e. Company Profile including names of Partners, Director(s), or if it is Private Limited Company (names of Shareholders and Beneficial Owners to that company): organization structure, key professional staff with their names and registration with appropriate regulatory bodies (COREN, QSRBN, ARCON, CORBON, etc.) with their current practicing license
f. Evidence of previous/similar work done in the past three (3) years showing the following:
   I. Letter of Award of the previous work done.
   II. Completion certificate obtained from previous work done.
g. A sworn affidavit indicating that:
   i. None of the Directors of the Company has been convicted in any court for any criminal offence including fraud and financial impropriety.
   ii. The Company is not in receivership, insolvent or bankrupt.
   iii. No officer of Oredo Local Government is a former or present Director, shareholder or has any pecuniary interest in the company.
   iv. No Staff of Oredo Local Government should be involved in illegal activity.
h. Bid security of 1% of the Contract sum for each of the projects.

i. All documents for submission must be transmitted with a covering letter on the company's letter head paper bearing all necessary details:

i. Equipment and technology capacity if applicable, with evidence of ownership or lease.
ii. Letter of consent to allow verification of documents submitted.
iii. Evidence of payment of a non-refundable tender fee of **N100,000.00 only**

4.0 COLLECTION/SUBMISSION OF BIDDING DOCUMENTS

Bidding documents may be collected from the **Department of Public Procurement, Oredo Local Government Council Benin City** from 27th **October to 13th November, 2026** between the hours of 8.00am and 3.00pm on Mondays to Fridays, except on public holidays for a non-refundable tender fee of **N100,000.00** payable only to Oredo Local Government Allocation Account **Account Number: 1023650452 U.B.A Bank**. Bidding documents shall be submitted duly signed by bidders in two separate sealed envelopes marked **"Technical Bid" and "Financial Bid"** Against the bided project title at the right top corner of the envelopes.
The two envelopes are to be placed in one large envelope and address to:

The Chairman
Oredo Local Government Council,
Kings Square,
Benin City, Edo State.

5.0 OPENING OF BIDDING DOCUMENTS

Bids must be submitted to the **Oredo Local Government's Tenders Board** as detailed in the bidding documents on or before **11:59am on 13th November, 2026** and the bids will be opened on the same day at **12:00pm** at the Oredo Local Government Council Secretariat, Conference Hall Benin City, in the presence of the bidders' representatives and Civil Society Organizations (with mandate of ensuring transparency and accountability) who wishes to attend. If the office happens to be closed on the date of the receipt and opening as specified, the bids will be received and opened on the next working day at the same time and location.

6.0 NOTE:

i. Late submission will be rejected
ii. This invitation shall not be construed to be commitment on the part of Procuring Entity for contract award nor shall it entitle the bidder to make any claims whatever and seek indemnity from the Agency by virtue of having responded to this advertisement.

7.0 Other details can be seen in the bidding document.

Engr, Emmanuel Ibhadode
HOLGA,
Oredo Local Government Council.
For,
Executive Chairman,
Oredo Local Government Council,
Benin City.

NEWS

Etsako West chairman pledges greater support for physically challenged persons

Lamai Cassius

AUCHI

The Executive Chairman of Etsako West Local Government Council, Hon. Romeo Aloaye Omoike, has pledged greater support for physically challenged persons, assuring them of inclusion in the council's welfare and empowerment programmes.

Hon. Omoike gave the assurance when members of the group, led by Mr. Umoru Aloaye, paid him a courtesy visit in his office.

The Chairman thanked the group for the visit and assured them that he would address issues affecting their welfare.

He also pledged to sponsor the group's annual activities in Benin City and promised to give greater consideration to them in future empowerment programmes of the council.

The council boss reaffirmed his administration's commitment to inclusive governance and ensuring that physically challenged persons are given opportunities to participate in community development and benefit from government initiatives.

Speaking earlier on behalf of the group, Mr. Umoru Aloaye commended Hon. Omoike for recognising the capacity of persons with disabilities to contribute meaningfully to governance.

The leader expressed appreciation to the chairman for his inclusive leadership and for appointing one of their members as a Special Adviser in his administration.

Mr. Aloaye also appealed for sustained support for the welfare of members of the group in Etsako West.



TRAINING:
Senior Special Assistant to the President on Technical, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education, Dr Abiola Arogundade (M); Director, Macroeconomic Analysis Department, Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, Mr Felix Okonkwo (2nd L) and participants, during the National Poverty Reduction with Growth Strategy (NPRGS) training in Enugu on Wednesday

Health reforms should show results, save lives — NHIA boss

ABUJA

The Director-General of the National Health Insurance Authority, Dr Kelechi Ohiri, has said health innovations must translate into measurable improvements in Nigerians' lives, warning that policies and technology alone cannot address the country's healthcare challenges without effective implementation.

Ohiri said this on Thursday at the 2026 Future of Health Conference organised by Nigeria Health Watch in Abuja, where he highlighted government interventions that have enabled thousands of women to access emergency childbirth care without upfront payments.

He disclosed that about "19,000 women had benefited from the National Health Insurance Authority's emergency obstetric care programme in the past 18 months, while approximately 300 hospitals had been accredited to provide treatment under the initiative."

experiencing complications during childbirth to receive treatment without making initial payments, with the NHIA financing the cost of care.

Ohiri said the intervention was designed to prevent avoidable deaths caused by delays in accessing emergency treatment, particularly when families struggle to raise money for hospital deposits.

"One of the most inequitable moments in the healthcare journey is when complications arise," he said, describing situations where women in labour were forced to wait for their relatives to source funds before receiving urgent medical attention.

He said the authority had also worked with partners to provide treatment for obstetric fistula, with about 6,000 women benefiting from the intervention.

According to him, the programmes demonstrate how changes in healthcare financing can remove barriers to treatment and improve outcomes for vulnerable Nigerians.

"Our success will not be measured by the number of speeches we deliver or the policies we announce. It will be measured by real improvements in people's lives," Ohiri said.

He argued that Nigeria needed to move beyond conventional approaches to healthcare delivery and financing, particularly as changes in the global health landscape exposed the risks of relying heavily on external funding.

"The future arrived much faster than anticipated. Many countries were left stranded because they were not adequately prepared," he said, calling for greater domestic ownership of health priorities and sustainable financing mechanisms.

Ohiri said the Nigerian Health Sector Reform Investment Initiative was designed around four pillars: governance, service delivery, health financing and health security.

He explained that the framework sought to strengthen coordination among governments and health sector stakeholders, improve access to healthcare, address financing constraints and prepare the country for future public health emergencies.

The NHIA chief noted that Nigeria faced the combined burden of infectious diseases, maternal mortality and rising non-communicable diseases, making it necessary to develop innovations suited to the country's specific circumstances.

He disclosed that the authority was working with some state governments to integrate services into health insurance schemes, with approximately 70,000 people enrolled through the approach.

He said the model was intended to provide more comprehensive care rather than treating patients as isolated cases based on particular diseases or age groups.

Ohiri also emphasised the importance of supporting local research and ensuring that promising innovations were assessed, funded and expanded beyond pilot projects.

He said the NHIA had partnered with Nigeria Health Watch to support five independent researchers selected through a competitive process to develop solutions to health system challenges.

Insecurity: Army deploys new battalion, artillery regiment to Kano

ABUJA

The Nigerian Army has deployed a new battalion and an artillery regiment to Kano State as part of efforts to strengthen security and improve its response to emerging threats.

The General Officer Commanding, 1 Division, Nigerian Army, and Commander, Sector 1, Joint Task Force, Operation Fansan Yamma, Major General Abubakar Sadique Muhammad Wase, said the newly established units required dedication, resilience and adequate support to achieve their operational objectives.

Wase stated this during an operational assessment visit to the 24 Battalion in Tudun Wada and the 311 Artillery Regiment in Dambatta, Kano State, between October 28 and 29, 2026.

According to a statement issued on Thursday by the Deputy Director, Army Public Relations, 1 Division, Colonel Abubakar Abdullahi, the GOC reassured the troops that the division was working closely with the Kano State Government to accelerate the units' attainment of full operational capability.

"Being fledgling formations, these units require collective resilience and dedication to achieve the desired objectives behind their establishment," Wase was quoted as saying.

He added that the welfare of personnel and the provision of logistical support remained priorities as the Army worked to make the formations fully operational.

The GOC, who was accompanied by the Commander, 3 Brigade, Brigadier General Saka Jimoh, also met with local government officials in Dambatta and Tudun Wada during the visit.

He urged the host communities to cooperate with the military and support the newly established formations to improve security across the state.

Wase stressed the importance of collaboration between the military and local communities in creating a secure environment for residents.

The Army said the establishment of the two units was part of its broader expansion and restructuring initiative aimed at strengthening the country's security architecture and enhancing operational responsiveness.

The visit provided an opportunity for the GOC to assess the units' operational readiness and identify areas requiring support to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

IGMAN prays for peaceful election, urges voters participation

Maxwell Okechukwu

ABAKALIKI

The Izzi Gospel Ministers Association of Nigeria (IGMAN) has organised a one day special prayers for a peaceful 2027 general election in Nigeria.

Held at the Nigerian Reformed Church in Abakaliki the state Capital, the session sought God's face and guidance for a free and credible election that will earn the confidence and trust of all stakeholders.

The gathering brought together Clergy Men and women who gathered to pray for the success of the forthcoming polls, good governance and sustained peace in Ebonyi State and Nigeria at large.

Speaking at the event, the Anglican Bishop of Abakaliki Diocese, Rt. Rev. Chukwuma Monday Nkwoagu, said "the prayers were necessary to seek God's wisdom and guidance for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), state electoral bodies, political parties and their candidates as well as the electorate, to join hands to make the electoral process peaceful and credible.

Bishop Nkwoagu, further urged eligible Nigerians to obtain their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and participate actively in the elections, noting that voter apathy could encourage electoral malpractice. He also called on political actors and their supporters to maintain peaceful conduct before, during and after the elections.

On the issue of zoning and a possible second tenure for Ebonyi State Governor, Francis Ogbonna Nwifuru, the Bishop emphasised the importance of peace and patience in political arrangements. He said any decision that promotes peace and stability should be given consideration, warning that political crises could damage communities and the state.

On religious leaders participating in political campaigns, the Bishop cautioned that the "clergy must remain impartial because their congregations comprise supporters of different political parties." He maintained that religious leaders should pray for all aspirants rather than openly favouring particular candidates.

The National President of IGMAN, Rev. Dr. Joseph Nwibo, said the gathering was aimed at seeking divine intervention for peaceful elections and the continued development of Ebonyi State and Nigeria.

He encouraged all eligible voters, including religious leaders, to exercise their voting rights by participating in the voting exercise. He also appealed to politicians to abide by electoral rules and uphold equity, fairness and justice.

Rev. Nwibo expressed support for Governor Nwifuru's second-term ambition, stating that although the association was not a political organisation, its members intended to express their position through their votes.

Other speakers, including Pastor Mrs Ukamaka Jonah and Pastor Ominyi Emmanuel, the coordinator of IGMAN in Ebonyi Local Government Area, called for sustained peace in the state and encouraged eligible citizens to participate in the 2027 elections.

The gathering ended with renewed calls for peaceful political participation, responsible leadership and active voter involvement as preparations for the 2027 general elections begun.

The Nigerian OBSERVER
That The People May Know

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13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
QUARTER PAGE	192,150	206,561	118,250	127,119	88,690	95,342	236,500	254,238	133,000	142,975

FRONT PAGE POSITIONS

SIZES	PRODUCTS RATE	PRODUCTS TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	PUBLIC NOTICE RATE	PUBLIC NOTICE TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)
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FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768

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STRIP INSIDE	88,600	95,245	118,250	127,119

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OTHER SIZES

SIZES	PUBLIC NOTICE RATE	PUBLIC NOTICE TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	PRODUCTS RATE	PRODUCTS TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	
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5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279	
4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980	
3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595	
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2 X 1	12,400	13,330	15,600	16,770	
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Feature

The Invisible Half: Why Nigeria cannot develop without its women

Grace Ijeoma Umeh



At 6am in Agege, Lagos, Funke is already awake. She sweeps her small shop, prepares her three children for school, cooks breakfast, fetches water from the compound tap, and then sits down to fry akara that she will sell until noon. By 2pm, she will go to the market to buy garri and fish on credit. By 7pm, she will be back home to cook, help her children with homework, wash clothes, and prepare for the next day. Her husband, a bus driver, will return at 9pm, eat, and sleep. Funke's day has sixteen hours of unpaid and paid work. Her husband's day has eight.

Multiply Funke by 100 million, and you have the story of Nigerian women. They are the invisible engine of the economy, yet they own almost nothing.

Nigeria is a country that talks a lot about development but ignores half of its population. We cannot build a prosperous nation when women who constitute 49 percent of our population are systematically excluded from land, credit, education, and decision making. Gender inequality is not a women's issue. It is a national economic emergency.

Consider the numbers. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, women own only 20 percent of enterprises in the formal sector, yet they constitute over 70 percent of traders in informal markets. According to the World Bank, only 10 percent of land in Nigeria is owned by women, despite women doing over 60 percent of farm work. In northern Nigeria, a girl is more likely to be married at 14 than to complete secondary school. In the National Assembly, out of 469 members, only 20 are women. That is less than 5 percent. Rwanda, which suffered genocide in 1994, today has over 61 percent women in parliament, the highest in the world. Nigeria, which has never had such war, is at the bottom.

Why does this matter for development? Because when you exclude women, you exclude productivity.

The first area is education. The girl child in Nigeria still faces barriers that boys do not face. In Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Bauchi and Jigawa, school completion rate for girls is below 40 percent. Parents who are poor will choose to send the boy to school and keep the girl at home to hawk or help in the farm. When a girl is out of school, the consequences cascade. She marries early. Early marriage leads to early pregnancy. Early pregnancy leads to vesicovaginal fistula, maternal death, and stunted children. A child born to a mother with no education is twice as likely to die before age five. The World Bank estimates that Nigeria loses over 17 billion dollars yearly due to girls not completing secondary school. That is not a gender problem. That is an economic problem.

The second area is economic exclusion. Nigerian women work hard, but their work is not counted. The woman who processes cassava from 5am to 8pm, the woman who carries tomatoes from Kano to Lagos, the woman who braids hair for twelve hours, all these women are working, but they have no access to credit. The Central Bank says women get less than 15 percent of commercial bank loans. Why? Because banks demand collateral like Certificate of Occupancy, which women do not have because land is registered in husband's name. So the woman remains small. She cannot buy a grinding machine. She cannot buy a freezer. She cannot expand. She remains at subsistence level. Meanwhile, studies show that when women get access to same resources as men, farm yields increase by 20 to 30 percent. If Nigerian women farmers had equal access to inputs, we could feed an additional 20 million people.

The third area is political exclusion. Nigeria's democracy cannot be called representative when women are missing. Politics in Nigeria is violent, expensive, and structured to exclude women. Nomination forms cost millions. Meetings are held at night. Campaigns require thugs. Women who enter are called prostitutes or wayward. Yet countries that include women do better. When women are in parliament, they prioritize health, education, and water. When women are local government chairpersons, they ensure primary health centres work. Excluding women from governance means excluding issues that affect families.

The fourth area is violence. Perhaps the most painful aspect of gender inequality in Nigeria is gender-based violence. One in three Nigerian women has experienced physical or sexual violence. Rape cases are increasing, yet conviction rate is less than 2 percent. In many police stations, when a girl reports rape, she is asked what she was wearing. In many courts, cases take ten years. In many communities, family will settle rape case with N50,000 and a goat. Domestic violence is even more normalized. Many people still believe a man has right to beat his wife if she disobeys. This culture of violence has economic cost. Women who are beaten cannot go to work. Girls who are raped drop out of school. Women who live in fear cannot innovate.

What about culture and religion? This is often used as excuse. Some people say our culture does not allow women to own land or lead. That is selective reading of culture. In pre-colonial Igbo society, women had Umunwanyi associations that controlled markets and could sanction men. In Yoruba society, women like Efunsetan Aniwura were powerful business owners and chiefs. In Hausa history, Queen Amina of Zaria led armies. Our culture did not historically exclude women. Colonialism and distorted interpretation of religion did. Even in Islam, Khadija, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, was a wealthy businesswoman who employed men. So argument of culture is not tenable.

So what must Nigeria do? We need to move from tokenism to transformation.

First, we need to fix education for girls with urgency. The Universal Basic Education Commission should have a special fund for girl child education in states with low female enrollment. States like Sokoto and Jigawa should make education free and compulsory for girls up to senior secondary, with conditional cash transfer to parents who keep girls in school. The school must be safe. Many girls drop out because there is no toilet, no water, and teachers harass them. Building girls-friendly schools with female teachers and separate toilets will increase retention. The Federal Government's Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment project, which aims to keep millions of girls in school, must be expanded and monitored to ensure money reaches girls, not contractors.

Second, we need economic empowerment that is structural, not cosmetic. Trader Moni of N10,000 is good for politics but does not lift woman out of poverty. What women need is access to land, credit, and markets. State governments should issue Certificates of Occupancy jointly in husband and wife's names. Bank of Industry and Bank of Agriculture should reserve at least 40 percent of loans for women with simplified collateral. Markets should be built with crèches so women who trade can keep children safe. Cooperatives should be strengthened so women can aggregate produce and negotiate better prices. When you empower a woman economically, you empower a household. Research shows women reinvest 90 percent of their income in family, compared to 35 percent for men.

Third, we need political quotas with teeth. The National Gender Policy recommends 35 percent affirmative action, but it has no legal backing. Nigeria needs a law that mandates political parties to reserve at least 35 percent of tickets for women, with penalties for non-compliance. We also need to make politics less violent and less expensive. Independent National Electoral Commission should enforce spending limits and punish electoral violence. When politics becomes ideas-based rather than money-and-thugs-based, more women will enter.

Fourth, we need to end impunity for gender-based violence. Every state should have a Sexual Assault Referral Centre with medical, legal, and psychosocial support. The Police should have special gender desks manned by trained female officers. Courts should have fast-track for rape and domestic violence. Traditional rulers and religious leaders should speak out. The Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act was passed in 2015, but only 30 states have domesticated it. All 36 states must domesticate and implement it.

Finally, we need to engage men and boys. Gender equality is not women fighting men. It is about partnership. Fathers who support daughters' education, husbands who share housework, brothers who protect sisters from early marriage, male legislators who sponsor gender bills, all these men are needed. Organizations like HeForShe have shown that when men become allies, change is faster.

Nigeria has examples of what is possible when women are included. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala leads World Trade Organization. Amina Mohammed is Deputy Secretary-General of United Nations. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is celebrated globally. In business, Ibukun Awosika built Chair Centre Group. In agriculture, Ndidi Nwuneli built Sahel Consulting that empowers thousands. These women succeeded despite system, not because of system. Imagine what would happen if system supported women.

Funke in Agege will continue to wake up at 6am tomorrow. She will fry akara, send children to school, and dream of owning a bigger shop. That dream is not too much. That dream is Nigeria's dream. When Funke grows, Nigeria grows. When we keep Funke small, we keep Nigeria small.

We cannot develop with one hand tied behind our back. That hand is our women.

FEATURE

Reasons for visiting the Museums as a public instituton

BY ALONGE JOSEPH

The concept of this paper is to highlight some key reasons why people visit the museums as a public institution. The museums as a public institution is designed generally to the public or everyone irrespective of, class, gender, age, race, culture or religion to gain learning experiences.

According to ICOM 2022; '' A Museum is a not – for – profit, permanent institution in the service of the society that researches ,collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage.

Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.'' The purpose of museums is to collect, preserve, interpret and display object of artistic, cultural or scientific importance for the study and education of the public. Museum is a place where people can see history, culture and creativity. Museum is an institution which collects, stores and studies man-made objects and those in their natural environment for the sake of information, education and enjoyment. Museum is the mirror of man's activity, his place of abode, his cultural and social environment; it is a research institution where people visit to know about their cultural past.

REASONS PEOPLE VISIT THE MUSEUMS.

There are many reasons why people visit the museums.

1. FOR EDUCATIONAL PUR POSE: There is no doubt that one of the primary roles of museums is to engage and educate the gener al public. Students often visit mu seums as part of school activities and research.Some people visit the museum simply for educational purposes .Education is the action or process of educating or of being educated. Museum education is "the totality of educational activi ties undertaken by a museum to ef fectively communicate with a di verse public, using heritage resourc es as its guide and catalyst" Pro gram for museum Development in Africa (PMDA 2001). Base on ICOM definition, one of the fundamental objectives of Museum is to use its collections to educate and serve the public. The educational opportunities in Museums to serve the public includes :conducting visitors round the museum exhibition ,outreach programs,train the trainers, workshops/seminars, skill acquisition programs, through collaborative art exhibition ,museum Day celebration and other active learning events for people of all ages etc. These groups include teachers ,students, tourists,researchers, individuals and serious minded people who want to be educated and better informed than before through the educational resources provided by the museum both the tangibles and the intangibles heritage of humanity. ww

2. TO SATISFY CURIOSITY: The museum primarily keeps ancient relics and artifacts. Many stories both positives and negatives have been said about them in the museum. Some visitors are curious to see and know what takes place in the museum with reference to National museum Benin bronze works, Queen Idia bronze head,ancestral alters, pictorial exhibition of Oba Ovonramwen deportation to calabar in 1897 and the Lagos museum where visitors come to see the car which the former Head of State, General Murtala Mohammed, was assassinated in 1976.

These groups of people still have the impression that the museum is a place where old things are kept and they come purposely to see those ancient relics of our material culture in order to ease their tension, assumptions and curiosities.

3. **FOR RESEARCH PURPOSE:** Most people visit the museum for research purposes.

Researchers and scholars use museums to study historical and cultural materials.

Research is the act of collecting information or data about a particular subject. Museums have in their galleries and stores objects which serve as evidence of cultural history. These objects are collectively referred to as tangible and intangible heritage resources.

Most of the objects in museum collection usually have data or information stored in catalogue and are kept as records to be analyzed and studied by interested scholars or researchers. These objects tell a lot of stories of the past for today's generation and preservation for the future generations.

4. **TO STUDY OR LEARN HISTORY:** Museums provide information about history, science, art, and culture.Visitors come to see historical objects ,view ancient tools, artworks, clothing, weapons, and other artifacts.

History broadly speaking is the study of the past, focusing on human events and their development over time, with historians analyzing evidence to understand and explain the past events and their significance. It is the study of the past with the aim of better understanding of the present so as to shape the future.

History is the study of event as they occurred in the past e.g. civil war and war weapons as found in National war museum ,Umuahia , ancient kingdoms/ empires, great Kings / Obas, ancient buildings, early explorers such as Mongo Park etc. As people have learned in their history books they would like to justify their knowledge and to know more about them and their history, their appearance, activities, foods, cloth and ways of live. Museum is one of the best place we can determine some ideas about them.

5. **TO PRESERVE HISTORY**- People visit museums to appreciate objects and stories that have been preserved for future generations. Information learned are kept and remembered by the visiting groups which are in turn passed from generation to generations.

6. TO UNDERSTAND CULTURE- Museums help people learn about the traditions,culture and lifestyles of different societies.Culture as a way of life differs from one society or the others as seen in the flexibility among the Hausas ,Igbos and Yorubas people.Museum provides the opportunity for visitors to see these cultural variables and learn about them. Such variable includes our ways of dressing ,greetings ,eating ,dancing ,singing etc

7. **FOR LEISURE** : Visiting the museum can be an interesting and enjoyable way to spend time.A number of people visit the museum simply for leisure and entertainment purposes especially when on vacation or free from work or duties;they see this period as a time for relaxation, picnics, parties or fun fares. The museum as a place of relaxation enables them to enjoy the atmosphere which exists within the museum premises, have fun with friends,and snap photographs for memories sake. while away time in the museum premises, among these are people who may have some time to spare

8. **FOR CENTER OF APPOINTMENT** - Museums can be a places for social activities for visitors to spend quality time with family and friends.It could be a place of contact for young laddies and men on appointment.

Also,some ethnic groups meetings always take place in the museum on Saturdays and Sundays ,research has shown that due to possible low budget , people decides to take museum as a meeting point.

9. **TO USE MUSEUM FACILITIES:** Museum as a public institution is made up of facilities such as physical structures , conference halls , exhibition halls ,open fields ,museum kitchen , museum libraries,museum galleries , crafts shop ,export clearance etc.These facilities are often used at one time or the other by museum users.

10.FOR INSPIRATION : Art and historical displays can inspire creativity and new ideas.The serene and conducive atmosphere of a museum can creates room for visitors to carefully observe,reason new ideas,form unique experiences,visions and missions for life imagination.

11.TO APPRECIATE WORKS OF ART: Museums allow visitors to see paintings, sculptures, photographs, and other creative works both tangible and intangible works of humanity.Visitors used the opportunity to express their love,admiration and likeness towards the ingenuity of our ancestral collections.

12. **FOR ULTERIOR PURPOSE:** Some people visits the museum for negative reasons ,selfish inter est and hidden agenders which may be inimical to the establishment as observed in some museums in the past. We heard of objects theft from some museums (Lagos, Jos ,Esien) from people who pretends to be genuine visitors to the museum ex hibition.

CHALLENGES/CONSTRAINTS.

Below are some of the of challenges encountered by museum audiences in visiting the museums .

(1). Lack of digital platforms for wider dissemination of educational activities.

(2). Difficulties in accessing the Mu seum due to vehicular traffic situ ation.Eg Benin museum.

(3).Inadequate publicity of existence of museum and her activities to the general public.

(4).Poor understanding of the concept of museum ,some people see museum as fetish point to visit.

5.unhealthy environment of the museum premises.

6.The conventional permanent exhibition of most museums collections in the gallery for a life-long period may be discouraging.

7.Lack of sign posts at strategic positions in town made museum invisible to many visitors.

CONCLUSION:

The museum as a cultural hub through its rich cultural heritage both tangible and intangible collections exemplify the social-cultural importance of every society.

All members of the community in respective of yor age , gender ,religion .culture or class are highly welcomed to the museum.

Finally,Students,researchers, sociologist ,historians ,groups/individuals are no doubts expected to be potential visitors to the museum for a positive educational information ,research and acquisition of historical ideas and knowledge which are passed from generation to generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. All staff should be security con scious.
2. Govt should encourage dedication on workers through motivation and constant training programmes.
3. Installation of CCTV within the museum premises and galleries.
4. Ensure constant power supply through solar system.

5.There should be collaborations with various security agencies to ensure safety of lives and properties.

*ALONGE JOSEPH IS ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NATIONAL MUSEUM BENIN CITY.



National Museum, Benin

ArtsWorld with Francis Odup 08023680030

"My health is in my hands", chorused the primary school pupils at Evbuotubu Primary School, in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State, as each held up their copy of the WASH4all comic books distributed to them for free by the MediaBFI team.

In the words of Rev. Oje Ohiwerei of Heritage Assembly global ministry, "If you want to change a nation, change the youths".

To meet the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), everyone must take action, no matter how small or simple; hence the need for novel ways to collectively and creatively involve young people in making a tangible contribution in "advancing the global movement for the Sustainable Development Goals in the most creative, wholesome, transformative, impactful and innovative way that gainfully carries young people along", using artistic expressions, creative education and graphic humour intentionally.

Art is a universal language; and the saying that a picture is worth a thousand words is not farfetched: "One image can communicate more than dozens of pages of text or hours of speeches.

One image can change the course of history. Editorial cartoons draw attention to important political, economic, and social issues like nothing else. Using symbols or visual metaphors, their reach transcends country borders and language barrier".

As one of the earliest and arguably the most popular development communication channel globally, the role of cartoon and comics in a shaping public opinions, mind sets and changing world culture remains crucial. Our experience of how cartoons and comics journalism is being harnessed in developed nations in contributing to speaking truth to Power, moulding public opinion, educating children and inspiring youths, as well as in investigative reporting efforts speak globally to this fact.

It is no more news that reading culture is waning globally, and graphic communication is becoming more and more crucial in the entire business of information communication and general education. In the mass media, for instance, spaces for texts are shrinking as people are more in haste to meet deadlines and have little or no time /interest in reading texts no matter how valuable they may be.

In Nigeria alone, there is an unprecedented increase in number of online journalism platforms as well as social media use. While the printed newspapers and magazines are fast losing readers on a daily basis, online journalism, and social media in particular, is gaining more and more patronage. Their secrets are hidden in the power of audiovisuals cum graphic humour, on which internet service providers and their vast collaborators leverage to rake in billions of dollars annually through web cartoons, digital comics, cartoon animations, edutaining cartoon apps, political campaign info-graphics, etc.

In our educational sector, most children and youths who try to cultivate the habit wish there was a way reading could be attractive. Hence pictures, VISUAL STORYTELLING – whether still or animated- are getting more attention, especially among young people. This explains why MediaBFI -the media team of Beautiful Feet International (BFI) Ministry - deploys creative education, using comics, animations and poster campaigns as outreach tools to raise awareness among young people in ensuring improved personal hygiene and sanitation through its 'WASH in Schools (WinS)' health and wellness outreaches, in line with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Their first comic book, WASH4All comics, was produced in collaboration with the Horizon International (USA) in a join-intervention project from 2014 till date. The special comic book, WASH4All comics, 1st of a planned 13 editions in the series, is titled. "Schoolchildren Battle Malaria and other Diseases" and has been offered for free download worldwide since September 16, 2014, by Horizon International and MediaBFI. However, because most of the real targets of the comics are grassroots schoolchildren who don't have access to the internet, it became very necessary to make print copies of the comics available for free to these set of audience in selected local schools where WASH need is the highest anywhere in the world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

What the BFI WinS project seeks to achieve is to go from school to school, broadening audience engagement and inspiring voluntary changes in attitudes and behaviors among schoolchildren and youths using cartoons and comedic art as creative education tools.

In a local context, using the comic books as visual teaching aids, the WASH4All Comics and Animations graphically explain various health and environment-related issues children needed to know both in school and at home so as to stay healthy and learn properly. This is done in such a creative and humorous way that spurs the young readers into proactive actions in their little corners.

Some of the issues being addressed by the project included: what personal hygiene means; the importance of sanitation in the school; how you can defy the flooding to keep your classes and school clean; how malaria is contacted and how you can prevent malaria; why you should watch your hands regularly with soap; how to properly wash your hands with soap; puberty, menstruation and sexuality, what you should know; how to be responsible for your health and wellness; etc.



Francis Umendu Odupute, the president of BFI, in the midst of cheerful pupils of Evbuotubu Primary School, Benin City.

Some of the schools visited by the MediaBFI outreach team during the first phase of the (WASH in Schools (WinS) project included Evbuotubu Primary School, and DaySpring Schools in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Other places so far experimented were Umelugboma community, near Asaba, Delta State, etc.

After the health talks in each school, there were questions and answers sessions; some children asked personal health questions while others just wanted more clarifications on certain terms used during the health talks. All the children were happy for the information they received, especially for the free comics. The pupils and students were encouraged by MediaBFI to form WASH clubs in their schools in order to put to practice all they learnt about improving the WASH situations in their school environments, and also as a way to attract future visitations and support from the BFI team and or other like minds to their schools.

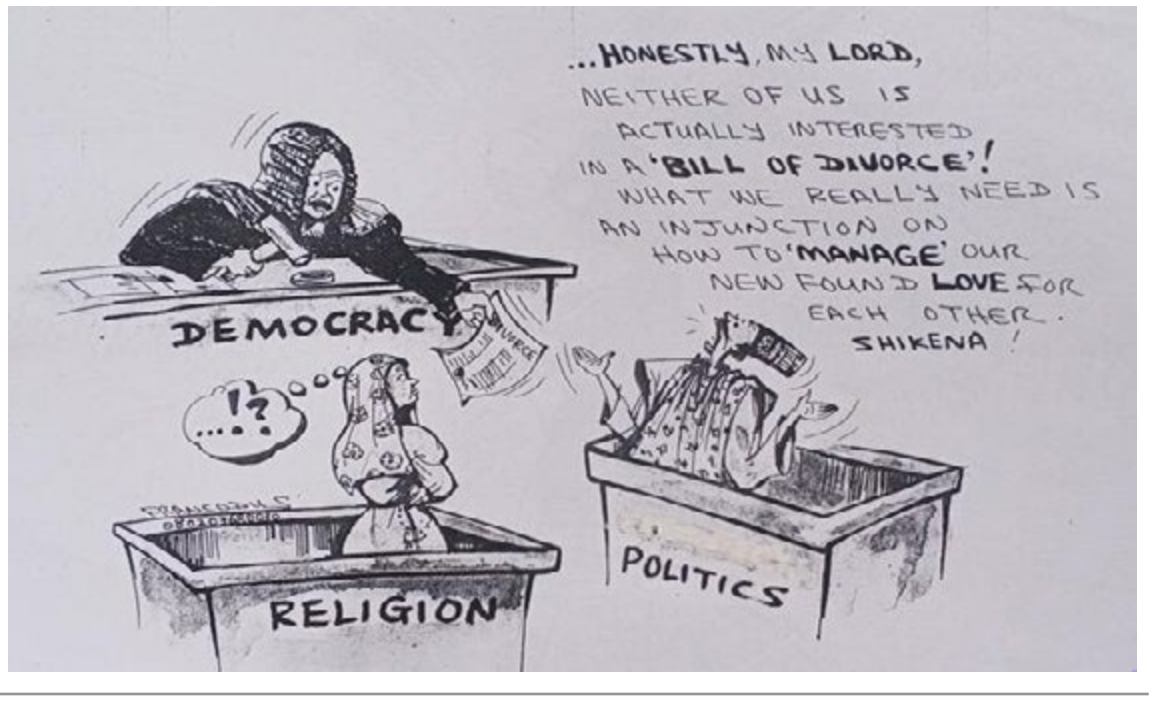
The school teachers also collected copies of the free comics for themselves as adult participants, as they were expected to keep drumming into the ears of the pupils the lessons learnt from the health outreach as well as possibly help organize the children into thriving WASH clubs that could trigger paradigm shifts in the young minds and result in a culture of cleanliness and environmental friendliness in their schools.

School heads and teachers of all schools so far visited thanked the BFI team and the sponsors of the project, and asked for more of such visits in the future.

*WASH Education: Why Adults must be carried along:

"All these things…we teach the children o, but when they get home their parents teach them different things; …the society also teach them another thing altogether. You see, I pity children –they are confused. They don't know which one to believe, they don't know what is truly right or wrong…"

The above comment by a female teacher at Evbuotubu Primary School in Benin City, and other suggestions by some adults in the course of the ongoing BFI WinS project inspired the BFI Health and wellness outreach team, led by BFI president, Francis Umendu Odupute, to consider publishing and distributing for public education a quarterly graphic bulletin on health and wellness entitled "HEALTHWISE" as part of its planned adults and communities engagement in the fight to improving WASH culture in Nigeria and other parts of Africa in the context of securing the future health-wise.



FEATURE

THE JAPA GENERATION: **Why Nigerian youths are leaving and what we are losing**

Monalisa Osawe

At the departure hall of Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, every night tells same story. Young Nigerians in their twenties and thirties, with backpacks, with dreams, with tears, hugging parents who may not see them again for years. A nurse, a doctor, a software engineer, a plumber, a tailor. They are leaving. Not for holiday. For survival. The word on street is Japa, Yoruba slang for to flee, to escape.

Nigeria is experiencing one of largest human capital flights in its history. According to UK Home Office, over 141,000 Nigerians migrated to UK between 2021 and 2024 as students and health workers. According to Canadian Immigration data, Nigeria is among top five source countries for permanent residency. According to Nigerian Medical Association, over 15,000 doctors left Nigeria in last five years. According to Nursing and Midwifery Council, over 42,000 nurses left in three years. The consulting firm that audits this says Nigeria loses over 2 billion dollars worth of human capital yearly to Japa.

This is not migration. This is haemorrhage.

Why are young Nigerians leaving? The answer is not one thing. It is combination of unemployment, hopelessness, insecurity, and search for dignity.

First, unemployment and underemployment. National Bureau of Statistics says youth unemployment is over 53 percent, but that figure hides reality. Many youths classified as employed are underemployed. A graduate who studied Mechanical Engineering for five years and now rides okada in Benin for N3,000 daily is counted as employed. A lady with Masters in Microbiology who sells thrift clothes on Instagram because she cannot get job is counted as employed. Real unemployment among graduates is estimated at over 70 percent.

Nigeria produces over 600,000 graduates yearly from universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, but economy creates less than 100,000 formal jobs. The rest hustle. They do POS business, they do Yahoo Yahoo, they do hookup, they do anything to survive. The graduate who spent parents' life savings to go to school, who did NYSC, who has certificate, who applies for 200 jobs without reply, becomes frustrated. When opportunity comes to leave, even to do care work in UK that pays N1.5 million monthly, compared to N60,000 here, he takes it. Not because he hates Nigeria, but because Nigeria does not value him.

Second, insecurity. No young person wants to build future in place where life is cheap. In North East, Boko Haram kills. In North West, bandits kidnap. In South East, unknown gunmen kill. In South South, cultists kill. Even in relatively safe South West and South Central, kidnappers operate. A young lady in Auchi cannot go to farm without fear. A young man in Ekpoma cannot drive at night. How do you start business when you can be kidnapped and asked to pay N5 million ransom? How do you build factory when cultists will come to collect settlement? Many youths say Japa is not just about money, it is about safety. They want place where they can walk at night without fear, where their children can go to school without being kidnapped.

Third, lack of dignity and merit. Nigeria is country where who you know matters more than what you know. A young graduate with first class in Computer Science applies for job in government agency. The job goes to son of politician with third class. A young entrepreneur bids for contract, contract goes to girlfriend of commissioner. A young doctor works in teaching hospital with no gloves, no light, with salary delayed for 3 months, while politician flies to London for headache. This kills morale. Young people want system that rewards hard work. In Canada, UK, US, they see system where if you work hard, you can rise, regardless of surname. That dignity is what they seek.

Fourth, collapse of basic services. Youths are tired of generator, of buying water, of no light, of bad roads. A tailor in Benin who needs electricity to sew cannot work because BEDC gives 2 hours light. She buys fuel at N1,000 per litre to power generator. Her profit goes to fuel. A barber who needs light to barb hair closes shop by 6pm because no light. A software developer in Yaba who needs internet to work spends N30,000 monthly on data that is slow. These are not luxuries. These are basics. When basic things that government should provide are missing, productivity dies. Youths say if we must provide everything ourselves, why not provide it abroad where at least system works?

What is cost of Japa to Nigeria? It is huge and not well understood.

We are losing health workers. In many general hospitals in Edo, Ondo, Ekiti, one doctor covers 100 patients. Nurses are so few that patient waits 6 hours. Maternal mortality increases because no midwife. This is direct result of Japa.

We are losing teachers. Many experienced teachers in private schools have left. Schools now employ SSCE holders to teach.

We are losing artisans. Plumbers, electricians, tilers who were trained through apprenticeship now charge exorbitant because many of their colleagues have left. A plumber who used to charge N5,000 now charges N20,000 because demand is high.

We are losing money. Training a doctor in Nigeria costs government over N5 million in subsidy. When that doctor leaves after house job, Nigeria loses investment. UK, Canada, US gain without spending.

Most importantly, we are losing hope. When every successful young person around you is planning to leave, remaining youth feel left behind. It creates culture of escape, not building. School children now say they want to Japa, not they want to be doctor in Nigeria. That psychological damage is deep.

Can Japa be reversed? Not by stopping people at airport. You cannot legislate people to stay in hardship. You can only make staying attractive.

First, we must fix economy to create jobs, not just talk about jobs. Nigeria needs industrialization that is labour-intensive. We have raw materials: limestone in Okpella, gas in Delta, cocoa in Ondo, sesame in Jigawa. We should build factories that process these raw materials and employ thousands. One factory like Dangote Refinery employs 30,000. We need 100 such factories. Government should give tax holiday, power, and land to investors who will employ over 1,000 youths in one location. Not traders who import, but manufacturers who produce.

Second, we must reform public service to be merit-based. Recruitment into civil service, police, teaching, health should be through transparent examination, not connection. When youth sees that his neighbour got job because he passed exam, not because he knows commissioner, trust returns. Edo State's recent recruitment of over 5,000 teachers through computer-based test is example. If sustained nationally, it will rebuild confidence.

Third, we must guarantee security and basic services. No investor will build factory where kidnappers operate. Security must be number one. Community policing, state police, forest guards, technology for tracking kidnappers, all must be deployed. For basic services, power must be fixed. Nigeria generates 5,000 megawatts for 230 million. We need 50,000 megawatts. Government should decentralize power, allow states to generate, allow private sector to build solar mini-grids for industrial clusters. When tailor in Benin has 20 hours power, she will not Japa.

Fourth, we must engage diaspora, not condemn them. Japa youths are not enemies. They are ambassadors. They send over 20 billion dollars yearly as remittances, more than foreign direct investment. That money builds houses, pays school fees, starts businesses. Government should create Diaspora Investment Fund that allows them to invest in housing, agriculture, and infrastructure with guarantee. India and China grew because they engaged diaspora, not because they insulted them. Our youths abroad should be seen as extension of Nigeria, not loss.



NIGERIANS AT THE AIRPORT:

How propaganda works

Bagudu Mohammed

There are two kinds of people this weekend. The first camp had their minds fixed on Kaduna already convinced that President Tinubu would be stoned, booed, and left staring at empty seats. They were hunting for failure.

The second camp were expecting the opposite headline: "Kaduna shut down for Tinubu," a mammoth crowd, loyalty confirmed. They too were hunting, but for validation.

The tragedy is this: even if 90% of the APC presidential campaign flag-off in Kaduna was positive yesterday, some will circulate only the 10% negative clip to prove their prophecy.

A single booing video, looped and re-forwarded, becomes the whole truth.

This is not accidental. Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance explains it. People seek information that comforts their prior belief and discard what threatens it.

Eli Pariser calls it the filter bubble, Walter Lippmann long before warned that we define first and then see.

And so the negative becomes canonical not because it is dominant, but because it is useful. It consoles, it massages the echo chamber, it becomes evidence for a judgment already made.

Psychologists call this confirmation bias, but in politics it is propaganda in its purest, most voluntary form: we propagandize ourselves.

On the other side are those who will pretend everything went perfectly, who airbrush out every glitch as if dissent did not exist. They too are performing.

In both cases we cease to be observers and become actors, staging the world we wish existed and demanding that reality conform to our script.

We pass judgment quickly because it soothes us. Yet as Daniel Kahneman shows in his work on motivated reasoning, a fiction believed today becomes tomorrow's disappointment.

You cannot live on illusion without paying emotional interest.

This is what I call obsessive imprisonment: locking yourself inside what you want to be true until you lose the capacity to see what is actually possible, however unpalatable.

Bagudu Mohammed is the founder of Alternative Perspectives, a widely read commentary platform on social media. It offers evidence-based analysis and real-life insights as a credible alternative to groupthink, convenient narratives, and echo chambers. The platform explores a wide range of issues, including politics, society, relationships, governance, and contemporary trends.

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HAS FLÁVIO BOLSONARO LEFT BRAZIL TO EVADE JUSTICE?

Carney to push for closer ties at Canada-EU summit in Montreal

For decades, Canada-EU summits took place without much fanfare - but that's not the case for this coming two-day meeting in Montreal.

Thursday and Friday's summit will be closely watched for details on how Canada and the European bloc deepen their ties.

Last month, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed "opening the door" to Canada for what she called an "associate membership" - a status that does not currently exist.

The overture came after Prime Minister Carney addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg, telling EU lawmakers that Canada and Europe were "stronger together" in the face of "geopolitical rupture".

Carney and many EU member states welcome closer ties, but not all are on board with what to call this new relationship.

Some, like Germany, are questioning the "associate member" term, fearing that Canada is getting preferential treatment ahead of other nations who also want in.

According to reports by multiple news outlets, Germany and other nations successfully lobbied to remove mention of the title in a draft statement ahead of the summit, opting instead for softer language that references an "ever closer association".

Germany's ambassador to Canada, Matthias Lüttenberg, told CTV News on Tuesday that some member states were "a little surprised" by von der Leyen's announcement.

The concept of "associate membership", he added, is something that is not clearly understood as it pertains to Canada.

"Germany has been using the term of associate membership for something completely different, which is the relationship of the EU to Ukraine and potentially Moldova", he said, both of which have been trying to join the bloc for many years.

Audacious Indian jailbreak saga ends with 17 prisoners recaptured

A fake medical emergency, an audacious jailbreak and a 36-hour search operation that ended with 17 prisoners being recaptured.

Those are the highlights of a story from India's Tamil Nadu state that has captured headlines across the country.

It began on Monday night after 17 men escaped from a prison in Theni district in the southern state after overpowering guards, and ended almost two days later with police catching them in batches.

The incident has drawn attention to overcrowding in Indian prisons. Police say the Theni prison was housing 334 inmates against a capacity of 200, leaving authorities unable to maintain control once chaos broke out.

The state police said it has suspended nine staff at the prison for alleged negligence in connection with the incident.

All the men who escaped were undertrials - inmates on trial or awaiting one - and 18 of them were in one cell at the prison in Thekkampatti in Theni.

On Monday night at 2230 local time (17:00 GMT), one of the prisoners acted like he was going through a seizure. The other cellmates shouted for help and a jail official responded. He was soon overpowered by the prisoners, police said.

The prisoners then got out of the cell, reportedly attacked two other jail guards and took away keys which they used to open the main gate and flee. While 17 escaped, one returned to the prison immediately.

Several prison personnel were injured in the attack.

Police sources told BBC Tamil that they were examining the possibility of collusion between some prison officials and the escaped men.

Sandeep Rathore, Director General of Police for Prisons in Tamil Nadu, said in a press briefing that the jailbreak was caused by "human error".

"There was a clear breach of security protocol as the prisoners managed to pass through a three-tier barrier manned by security personnel," he said.

At the time of the incident, only four guards were on duty, far below the staffing required to maintain the prescribed 1:6 guard-to-inmate ratio recommended by the state - which should have worked out to 34 guards against the approved strength of 200 prisoners.

The police then launched a manhunt, calling forces from across the state.

"Advanced technology, drone surveillance, CCTV footage analysis, and the tireless efforts of police personnel played a crucial role," the department said in a statement on X.

Four men were arrested at a bus station in a nearby village, and the fifth was caught while he was travelling in a tuk-tuk.

A drone search of a forest near the prison led to eight more escaped prisoners being caught. Videos of the arrests showed the men obeying police instructions even as they did not answer questions from reporters who were also seen at the scene.

Two more were captured with the help of drone surveillance, police said, while the last two men surrendered on Wednesday.

News agency PTI reported that all 17 recaptured prisoners have been moved to high-security correctional prisons.

Rathore told media that all prisons across the state would be audited to check if rules were being followed.

The incident evoked memories of one of the biggest jailbreaks in Tamil Nadu in 1995 when 43 suspected militants escaped from a special camp after digging a 153-foot-long tunnel beneath a historic fort. Some of them were never recaptured.

While the investigation is going on, the incident has sparked a conversation on overcrowding in Indian prisons. The National Crime Records Bureau's last Prison Statistics India report from 2023 showed a national occupancy rate of 120.1%.

Data shows that undertrial prisoners - individuals who are detained while they await police investigation or court trials - make up more than 73% of India's total prison population. Human rights groups and legal experts have also raised concerns about delays in investigations and trials that lead to people languishing for years behind bars.

Audio reveals exchanges between control centre and drivers before deadly Spain train crash

Audio recordings published in Spanish media reveal conversations between train drivers and a railway control centre in the minutes leading up to a deadly train crash that killed at least 69 people and injured dozens.

Officials are investigating the cause of the disaster, which occurred when a train travelling from Madrid to Seville barrelled into a stationary train on Wednesday morning.

Three audio recordings between the control centre in Madrid and two train drivers appear to show that one high-speed train was given clearance to move even though another some 25km (15 miles) up ahead had stalled.

The release of the recordings comes as Spain begins three days of national mourning for one of the worst rail disasters in Europe's modern history.

One train, run by state-owned operator Renfe, had 397 passengers on board. Ahead of it on the same line was a train run by private operator Iryo, with 147 passengers.

A reported issue with the automatic signalling system - a computer failure - had forced all trains to halt on the affected stretch.

But later the Renfe train was ordered to proceed in "error", according to Spain's transport minister.

Audio recordings published by Spanish news outlets including El Pais and RTVE reveal the conversations that took place between the two train's drivers and the control centre in the Spanish capital ahead of the crash.

In one recording, a control centre operator is speaking to the driver of the Renfe train, which was travelling behind the other train and was having some technical difficulties.

After some exchanges, the control operator tells the driver: "Continue your journey and then proceed under [Lateral Signalling Block], at normal speed with normal operation."

The driver replies, "At normal speed?" To which the controller says: "Yes."

The Lateral Signaling Block is a back-up or alternative train system used when the automatic signalling or data transmission system fails.

The driver of the other train - operated by Iryo - says in another audio recording that communication with the train-control system has been lost and it is not moving.

The train "is stationary in front of the entry signal at Urda", the driver tells the control centre operator. After a series of exchanges, the driver is then told to "resume the journey" normally.

Flávio Bolsonaro denies fleeing Brazil after landing in Miami

Brazilian Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, who landed in Miami after losing the presidential election on Sunday, has said it was never his intention to "leave my homeland".

"I did not flee Brazil; I left for the sake of Brazil," he said in his first statement since his departure.

The US provided visas to him and his family after Brazil cancelled his passports as part of a criminal investigation. Bolsonaro denies any wrongdoing. On Wednesday, US President Donald Trump told reporters: "We gave him a pass to come into the country".

Newly re-elected President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has criticised Bolsonaro's secretive exit from the country, saying "those who have nothing to hide have nothing to fear".

Bolsonaro's arrival in Florida ended days of confusion over his whereabouts, after he was reported to have travelled to Argentina, and then prematurely reported to have already entered the US on Tuesday.

In a statement, Bolsonaro thanked both the presidents of Argentina and the US, and the American public "who share the same values as the good people of my own country".

"It was never my intention to leave my homeland, but I know exactly where this is heading," he said. "I departed from a regime of exception so that I could become the leader my people deserve."

He called himself a victim of a coup d'état and political persecution, and said his travel to the US was to protect his family.

In the lengthy letter, he also repeated unsubstantiated allegations of "electoral fraud" which he said allowed a "mathematical impossibility" to occur in the election.

On Wednesday, Trump declined to discuss the allegations made in Bolsonaro's letter.

"I won't get involved. It was a very strange election, that's for sure," Trump said. He went on to add that he thought Bolsonaro "and his family were treated very unfairly".

NEWS

FOREIGN

Ethiopia acquires Russian fighter jets and air defence systems amid war in Tigray

The acquisition of fighter jets comes amid ongoing tensions with Eritrea.

Ethiopia has received 12 Su-35 fighter jets from Russia, as fighting intensified in the northern Tigray region neighbouring Eritrea.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who is attending the Russia-Africa summit in Moscow, described the acquisition as a "milestone" that would boost Ethiopia's defence capacity.

He said Ethiopia and Russia agreed on the deal several years ago and the warplanes had come ahead of schedule. He also said that Ethiopia had plans to acquire four S-400 air defence systems from Moscow.

The Ethiopian leader said the military hardware was essential to protect the country from external threats.

Abiy, who described Russian President Vladimir Putin, "as a close friend of Ethiopia", said Ethiopia had now become the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to own this kind of "advanced combat technology."

"If we fail to build this capability, surviving as a country in our region will become difficult. Countries with sufficient preparation are not easily defied," he said.

Russia and Ethiopia have signed several military agreements in recent years, including a deal in 2021 to train and improve technology for the military.

Abiy explained that Ethiopia signed an agreement with Russia several years ago to procure the Su-35 jets and S-400 systems, citing global air force trends and security threats facing the country.

The Su-35, he noted, is equipped for both air-to-air and air-to-ground combat, with the ability to detect and neutralize incoming cruise missiles at distances of up to 200 kilometers.

Military intelligence analyst Qalaab Segatu told BBC Amharic that Ethiopia's acquisition of additional warplanes was a key indication that "it was preparing for possible wars with other countries, not just internal conflicts".

According to him, the jets are highly maneuverable and capable of covering large areas, with radars capable of ensuring air superiority and long-range scanning.

When combined, the fighter jets and air defence systems "create a significant capability to protect and defend major cities and critical infrastructure such as the Renaissance Dam, providing key strategic air superiority," Qalaab said.

Abiy said besides the advanced capabilities of the aircraft from Russia, the use of drones was equally important in strengthening deterrence.

Ethiopia has extensively used military drones, including those sourced from Turkey and China, in recent conflicts.

"We need to build capacity not only with drones, but also with the fourth generation capabilities of the Su 30 and Su 35 [aircraft]," Abiy said.

The latest acquisition of military hardware from Russia comes after the current conflict in northern Tigray started last month between the government and the party that controls Tigray, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Both blame each other for violating a 2022 deal that ended a civil war.

Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of backing the TPLF, which it denies. Tensions between the two countries have also persisted as Abiy terms Ethiopia's lack of direct sea access an "existential question", which Eritrea views as a direct threat to its sovereignty.

Eritrea gained independence in 1993 after a decades-long war with Ethiopia, with the latter losing access to the sea.



The acquisition of fighter jets comes amid ongoing tensions with Eritrea

El Salvador sends 2,000 troops to Haiti to rescue four missing soldiers

El Salvadoran military vehicles arrive in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince

El Salvador has deployed more than 2,000 soldiers to Haiti as part of a mission to retrieve four nationals who went missing in the Caribbean country almost two weeks ago.

The "robust deployment" was communicated by El Salvador President Nayib Bukele to the Prime Minister of Haiti Alix Didier Fils-Aime earlier this week, the foreign ministry of El Salvador said in a statement on Wednesday.

Bukele said the soldiers would also assist ongoing "security efforts against gangs in Haiti", the statement continued.

Tensions between the two central American countries have escalated over the disappearance of the four air force technicians working as part of a UN-backed anti-gang organisation in Haiti.

The four soldiers with the Gang Suppression Force (GSF) were travelling back to their base in an armoured vehicle when they were ambushed in an area of the Caribbean island nation controlled by armed groups called Croix-des-Bouquets.

No gang has so far claimed responsibility.

The Salvadoran foreign ministry said the "large-scale operation" was "supported by various countries and international organisations".

Earlier this week, Haiti handed four bodies over to special forces claiming they belonged to those of the missing servicemen, but Bukele said they did not match.

He said one of the corpses was a child's and another was wearing a different country's military uniform.

Bukele threatened last week in an X post to wipe out Haiti's gangs, saying he will replicate action he has taken in El Salvador, if they did not release the Salvadorans.

In October last year, the UN Security Council approved expanded powers for the GSF to tackle worsening gang violence in Haiti.

The multinational force has struggled to penetrate areas where gangs hold sway. More than 5,700 people were killed in gang-related violence in Haiti this year, the UN says, and armed gangs control much of the capital.

Haiti has been ravaged by gang violence for years, but the situation has worsened in the political vacuum that followed the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021.

US sanctions Rwanda's defence ministry over DR Congo conflict

The United States has imposed sanctions on Rwanda's defence ministry over its alleged support for the M23 rebel group in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, increasing pressure on Kigali to withdraw its troops and halt support for the rebels.

"Rwanda must halt its support for M23 and withdraw its troops from eastern DRC," US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said.

The sanctions come months after Rwanda and DR Congo signed a US-brokered peace agreement aimed at ending the conflict.

Fighting has continued in eastern DR Congo since early 2025, when M23 seized the cities of Goma and Bukavu. Rwanda denies backing M23.

The US Treasury says Rwanda's defence ministry directed thousands of troops to fight alongside M23 in eastern DR Congo, providing weapons, equipment, logistics and training.

The M23 has seized mineral-rich areas, including gold-mining sites in South Kivu and Rubaya, a major coltan-producing area in North Kivu. Washington says minerals from rebel-held territory enter Rwanda's supply chains, alleging that Rwanda exports more minerals than it produces.

The sanctions are intended to reinforce the Washington Accords, signed by the Congolese and Rwandan presidents in December 2025 under US mediation. The deal aimed to end the conflict and expand regional trade and investment, but fighting has continued.

On 24 October, ahead of the sanctions announcement, DR Congo President Félix Tshisekedi urged the international community to increase pressure on Rwanda.

"We must firmly demand that the international community impose concrete sanctions against Rwanda and exert increased pressure, so that we may finally secure a lasting peace in our country," he said.

In a statement to Reuters, DR Congo foreign ministry welcomed the sanctions and urged Rwanda to honour its commitments under the Washington Accords, respect the UN Charter and withdraw its troops from Congolese territory.

"The Washington Accords contain clear commitments regarding Rwanda's security, specifically the neutralization of the DR Congo-sponsored FDLR genocidal militia, which are wholly unmet, and with no accountability," Rwandan government spokesperson Yolande Makolo told the BBC.

The FDLR is a militia linked to perpetrators of Rwanda's 1994 genocide. Kigali considers it a security threat and cites its presence in eastern DR Congo to justify its military posture.

"Rwanda remains ready to fully implement the Washington Accords, concurrently with the willingness of the DRC to fulfill those commitments, and with the mediator holding all parties accountable," she said.

The US also sanctioned Zigama Credit and Savings Society, a popular bank and financial institution serving Rwanda's security services.

Washington alleges it facilitated tens of millions of dollars in transactions for M23 and its political wing, the Congo River Alliance, helped pay for military equipment for Rwandan forces from China and enabled gold to be transported from rebel-controlled areas to Kigali.

The sanctions freeze the designated entities' assets under US jurisdiction and generally prohibit .

Tunisian journalist sentenced to four years in jail on terrorism charges

A court in Tunisia has sentenced jailed independent journalist Zied el-Heni to four more years in prison, this time on terrorism-related charges.

A vocal critic of President Kais Saied, he was given a year in jail in May over remarks he made about press freedom.

The latest case relates to his request to verify leaked audio recordings attributed to politician Mondher Lounissi, a former interim leader of the Ennahdha opposition movement.

His lawyer said the charges include claims he had formed a terrorist organisation and failed to report a terrorist offence.

El-Heni had refused to hand over his mobile phone to the authorities in the absence of a warrant, in order to protect his sources.

Lounissi was sentenced to nine years in prison in the same case, although el-Heni's lawyer said it remained unclear what the recordings contained. International journalism organisations have condemned the ruling describing it as an escalation of Tunisia's assault on the Press.

Dozens of Saied's critics are currently behind bars.

Many of Ennahdha's members have been jailed or have fled the country since Saied staged a sweeping power grab in 2021.

Opinion

Okpebholo's masterstrokes that Edo people must know



EUBALDUS ENAHORO

When Governor Monday Okpebholo took over the mantle of leadership in Edo State, many asked what direction his economic philosophy would take.

Barely two years later, the direction is clear and bold. The Governor is quietly doing stuff that previous administrations found difficult to do and which are not in the public domain.

Take for example, shifting the tax burden from the poor to the rich, proving that the government can run a profitable business, and demanding results over rhetoric.

For years in Edo State, the poor bore the brunt of taxation. Market women, bus drivers, small shop owners were harassed daily with multiple levies, tickets and touts while big businesses evaded tax through loopholes.

Governor Okpebholo is changing that narrative. His administration is institutionalizing a progressive tax system. The ongoing reform at the Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS) is focused on widening the net to capture high-net-worth individuals, large corporations, luxury property owners and businesses in the informal high-income bracket, while granting relief and streamlining collection for micro and small businesses.

The message is simple: If you make more in Edo, you pay more for Edo's development. If you are struggling to survive, the government should support you, not squeeze you. This is not just economics; it is social justice.

This is the SHINE Agenda in action - making Edo a state where prosperity is shared and the burden is fair.

For decades, Nigerians were sold a lie: "Government has no business in business." That lie was made believable because government businesses were run aground by corruption, nepotism and lack of vision.

But today, the new Edo Line is Okpebholo's answer to that lie.

The Governor did not sell the Edo Line; he revived it. He did not concession it for peanuts; he retooled it. Today, Edo Line is back on our roads with new buses, with a transparent management system, with routes that are profitable and with drivers who are accountable.

What Edo Line has done is more than transportation. It has restored public confidence. It has proven that if you put a round peg in a round hole, if you remove political interference, and if you insist on accountability, a government-owned enterprise can be efficient, profitable and serve the people.

If the Edo Line can work, then our markets, transportation system, and our farms can work. The Governor has broken the psychological barrier.

The Governor has regularized the appointments of several contract staff in the state civil service and ensured the regular and prompt payment of salaries before or on the 26th of every month.

The Governor has done a lot for Edo people which are known to only a few people. For instance, it was news to participants during the Edo Orientation week organized by the Edo State Orientation Agency, in Benin city, that 126 contract staff of the Edo Specialist Hospital were employed on the directive of the Governor.

In the words of the Chief Medical Director, Edo Specialist Hospital, Dr. Anthonia Inibokun Njoku, the compassionate Governor gave the permission to employ the contract staff.

Apparently because of such actions of the Governor that are not known to Edo people all appointees of the government have been told to ensure every Edo man and woman knows what the government is doing and how they can access opportunities being created across the state.

That was precisely the message of the Director General of the Edo State Orientation Agency, Hon. Maleke Idowu Moye and other speakers to participants at the event with the theme, "One message, One Governance,"

There is no doubt that good work without good communication is like winking in the dark. Governor Okpebholo is working - roads are being rehabilitated, schools are being renovated, health centres are being equipped, security is being strengthened, and workers' welfare is being prioritized. These achievements need to be projected.

According to Maleke, "It is no longer enough to be an appointee with a portfolio. Every Special Adviser, Senior Special Assistant, Special Assistant and other appointees must become Chief Marketing Officer of the SHINE Agenda.

The appointees were admonished to project the New Edo positively, be ambassadors and not embarrassment.

They were informed that the agency is watching their activities and when in doubt of any information about the government they should contact the Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kassim Afegbua.

There is no doubt that Governor Okpebholo described as a man of humanity, who listens and believes that actions are better than speaking English knows how to connect with the people

While it has been emphasized that every government needs time and patience from the people, Okpebholo has made significant giant strides in a short time.

The completed Ramat Park Flyover is one of the fastest Billion Naira Fly over to be executed and another one is ongoing in less than two years. This is a project most governments build for eight years.

This and other messages of what the government is doing must be taken to the wards, local governments, social media pages, community meetings and the New Edo story must reach the people.

The Special Adviser on Public Affairs and Media, who is also Director of Publicity, Edo State All Progressives Congress, APC Campaign Council, Hon Haruna Braimoh disclosed some of the achievements of the government to reposition the state in the various sectors, noting that Governor Okpebholo has promised to leave Edo better than what he met.

The Special Adviser disclosed that work is going on in the rural communities across the state, adding that the Chinese are in Edo North exploring minerals.

In the same vein, the Special Adviser, Media and Publicity Buggie Okhuemoi said Governor Okpebholo is one of the best things to happen to the state because he is a blessing and when he finishes his tenure, the people will know that a Governor has ruled the state.

"Okpebholo is working for the future and very passionate to leave behind a legacy," he added

The Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kassim Afegbua admonished citizens to consciously realize they have a responsibility to be of good conduct in the eyes of the public when nobody is watching.

"When a Governor is working, we should celebrate and encourage the government. This government is performing and the people must be told."

In his key note address, titled, " Governance literacy Value Orientation and the responsibility of Appointees in Building Citizenship," Mr. Soni Irabor commended Governor Okpebholo for what he is doing, noting that some people are not appreciating what the Governor is doing because they do not believe he can do them

"It is the responsibility of government appointees to ensure that the people are informed about what the government is doing. The ultimate purpose of governance is to build the trust of the citizens because trust is earned."

Governor Okpebholo may not be a noise maker. But in his calm, methodical way, he is restructuring Edo's economy to favour the poor, he is restoring faith that government business can work for the people, and he is delivering tangible results rewriting what was wrong

What remains is for those in government to move with the same speed, the same clarity and the same purpose to tell this story because Edo must SHINE, and the people must see the light.

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

Electric Vehicles: How ready is Nigeria?

Timi Olubiyi

The future of transportation is undoubtedly electric, and Africa has the opportunity to be at the forefront of this revolution. No doubt, the world is advancing towards clean and renewable energy options, in particular around electric vehicles (EV) adaptations. But what baffles the author is that Nigeria seems not to be bothered and we continuously move on with our daily tasks without referencing what happens around us globally.

It is common knowledge that the way to go is net zero emissions by 2050 across all business units and supply chains, including transportation. This is a key priority and a growing renewable energy footprint around the world but Africa is to the contrary from context observation. From the records and with a follow-up survey by the author in 2024 across the Republic of Ireland, a small country with a population of less than 6 million, as it stands, four out of every five homes now power their cars with 100% electric because the future of energy is electric. Such acceptance can promote energy security, zero-emission, reduced energy cost and sustainable future easily without any economic concerns. Is this achievable in Nigeria in the near future? Achieving net-zero emissions in Africa presents significant challenges due to factors like limited access to reliable electricity, reliance on traditional fuels, and underdeveloped and old infrastructure.

In Nigeria and indeed most countries in Africa, the transportation sector is one of the largest contributors to global carbon emissions, with traditional gasoline (fuel) and diesel vehicles being primary sources of air pollution and environmental degradation. In response to these concerns, the rise of electric vehicles (EVs) could represent a significant shift towards more sustainable and eco-friendly transportation options, yet we are at the infant stage of adoption on the continent. As the world grapples with climate change and the depletion of fossil fuels, electric vehicles offer a promising solution to reduce pollution, enhance energy efficiency, and promote sustainability.

From observation, one of the most compelling benefits of widespread usage of electric vehicles is their environmental impact. Unlike traditional vehicles that run on internal combustion engines, EVs are powered by electricity stored in batteries, which means they produce zero emissions. This can significantly reduce air pollution, particularly in urban areas like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Abuja and the like, where traffic congestion and poor air quality are major concerns. By shifting from gasoline (fuel) to electricity, EVs can help reduce the number of harmful gases, such as carbon dioxide (CO_2), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and particulate matter, which are linked to health challenges and serious climate change. Carbon dioxide emission is a key driver of climate change. The gas usually traps heat in the atmosphere, gradually warming up the planet and causing intense heat waves and disruption of the ecosystems.

So to reduce the emissions of CO_2 from combustion engines, working by burning fuel and overheating with high engine noise, electric vehicles are desirable. Because they are more energy-efficient compared to their gasoline-powered counterparts, more so, EVs with less maintenance culture and repair expectations are low. In fact, EVs are more cost-effective in the long run, despite high initial purchase price because over time the operational costs of running are lower. Believe it or not, EVs have fewer moving parts compared to conventional cars, where there is no need for oil changes, oil filters and radiator or coolants. In fact, the brake systems tend to last longer because of regenerative braking technology, a feature common in many electric vehicles. The cost of electricity for charging is also typically lower than the cost of the usual fuel or diesel, further reducing the lifetime costs of owning an EV.

With all the aforementioned the future of electric vehicles looks promising but technological advancements in battery storage, such as solid-state batteries and faster-charging technologies, are expected to improve to enhance the overall EV performance, its affordability, and convenience. As the global demand for clean energy grows globally, it is the hope of the author that governments in Africa, in particular Nigeria, will step up their efforts to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles. Though effort on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) promotion is high in Nigeria in recent times, which is a clear alternative to high cost of fuel currently but the real global standard and future of transportation is electric.

Many countries have now introduced stricter emissions regulations, offering financial incentives such as tax credits, rebates, and subsidies to make EVs more accessible to consumers. Nigeria should not be an exemption; our government can also initiate similar policies. Additionally, several governments have set ambitious goals to phase out the sale of new gasoline and diesel vehicles in favor of zero-emission models EVs within the next few decades, Africa can also start promoting this. In addition, businesses and investments drive can be channeled into this developing critical area. Such as investment in home charging solutions, public charging infrastructure, wide spread charging stations, encouraging car manufacturers and private companies to set up assembling plants in Africa countries. Investing in home charging solutions will make it easier for individuals to charge their vehicles overnight. These investment options and widespread infrastructure will help reduce range anxiety and make electric vehicles a more viable option for everyday consumers in Africa.

While challenges such as charging infrastructure, battery costs, and range limitations remain, ongoing advancements in technology, along with supportive policies and growing consumer demand, are driving the transition toward a cleaner, more sustainable transportation system. This can also happen in Africa. As electric vehicles become more affordable and accessible, they have the potential to significantly reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, improve air quality, and create a more sustainable future for generations to come.

The Nigerian OBSERVER

COLUMN

The conversion wind: After YABATECH and Kaduna, what about Auchi Polytechnic?



Government decisions can rekindle hope and encourage institutions to aspire to greater heights. One such moment followed the elevation of two of Nigeria's foremost polytechnics, Yaba College of Technology (YABATECH), Lagos, and Federal Polytechnic, Kaduna, to university status. The development deserves applause.

Yet, amid the celebrations, a question arises: what happens to Auchi Polytechnic, a peer of YABATECH and Kaduna Polytechnic whose history and contributions to technical education place it among Nigeria's established tertiary institutions?

This question is not motivated by envy or resentment. It is an appeal for equity, fairness and a broader vision of educational development. If the Federal Government considers these conversions necessary to strengthen technological education and expand opportunities, Auchi Polytechnic deserves equally serious consideration. It has a proud history, an established academic structure, experienced personnel and the potential to function effectively as a university of technology.

Reports published on 16 October 2026 stated that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu had assented to legislation upgrading Federal Polytechnic, Kaduna, to the Federal University of Technology and Vocational Studies, Kaduna, and establishing the corresponding institution in Yaba, Lagos.

YABATECH's conversion had received the President's initial approval on 14 February 2025, before the legislative process was completed. These developments are intended to strengthen higher education, research, innovation and vocational skills development. They are laudable objectives.

Nigeria needs institutions that produce skilled graduates, advance applied research and offer practical solutions to economic challenges. The elevation of these two institutions nevertheless raises questions about the future of other established polytechnics, particularly Auchi Polytechnic.

Established in 1963, Auchi Polytechnic has grown into a prominent centre for technical, technological and professional education in Edo State and the wider South-South region. It has trained generations of Nigerians who have contributed to public service, private enterprise, industry and national development. Its alumni work across different fields, demonstrating that the institution's influence extends far beyond its campus.

This record deserves recognition not merely as history, but as a basis for evaluating the institution's future. As technological innovation, digital transformation, advanced manufacturing and scientific research reshape the world, Nigeria cannot afford to overlook institutions capable of advancing these objectives.

Against this background, I respectfully appeal to President Tinubu to consider Auchi Polytechnic for conversion into a university of technology. The institution possesses attributes that could support such a transition, subject to appropriate assessments, approvals and legislative procedures.

Its land may offer opportunities for expansion; its existing infrastructure provides a foundation for development; and its human resources constitute an important asset. These strengths should be evaluated objectively alongside any gaps that need to be addressed.

A credible assessment should also examine whether the institution can sustain postgraduate education, build a stronger research culture and establish meaningful partnerships with technology firms, manufacturers and public agencies. These are not privileges conferred by a new title; they are responsibilities that require long-term investment and measurable standards. A phased transition, with clear milestones and periodic reviews, would help ensure that the proposed university is academically credible, financially sustainable and responsive to national needs. This would also protect students and public investment.

Converting a polytechnic into a university requires careful planning, adequate funding, institutional restructuring and compliance with regulatory standards. The Federal Government should commission an objective assessment of Auchi Polytechnic's land, facilities, staffing, programmes and long-term prospects. This would identify strengths, expose deficiencies and determine the investment needed for a successful transition.

Beyond infrastructure, qualified and experienced personnel are indispensable to a successful university. Auchi Polytechnic has an established academic workforce with experience in teaching, professional training, research and administration. Its lecturers have contributed to knowledge and the development of skilled manpower across several disciplines. Nevertheless, any proposed conversion must assess staffing levels, qualifications, research output and the capacity to sustain expanded programmes.

A university is not defined by its name alone, but by teaching quality, research rigour, graduate competence and social contribution. Any conversion must therefore be accompanied by academic excellence, innovation, accountability and continuous improvement.

I must acknowledge the contributions of the incumbent Rector of Auchi Polytechnic, Dr. Salisu Shehu Umar, whose administration has pursued institutional development through the creation of additional schools and departments and the unbundling of some existing departments. Dr. Umar has also facilitated the construction of office buildings and lecture halls.

These initiatives represent efforts to strengthen the institution's academic structure and physical infrastructure and to respond to evolving educational and professional needs. They provide a useful basis for assessing readiness, although the institution's ultimate suitability must be determined through an objective evaluation of its academic, infrastructural and financial capacity.

These developments offer the government an opportunity to examine readiness and identify the support required. The Rector's efforts, alongside those of Governing Council Chairman Prof. Jonathan Ayuba, management, staff, students, alumni and other stakeholders, should inform the discussion about the institution's future.

Conversion must involve more than changing a name or expanding an administrative structure. A successful transition requires a clear academic philosophy, an appropriate governance framework, sustainable funding and a realistic implementation plan.

For Auchi Polytechnic, such a plan could prioritise technological innovation, applied research, entrepreneurship, industrial collaboration and professional development. Its established strengths in technical and vocational education could underpin a university that combines theoretical knowledge with practical competence.

> Auchi Polytechnic has served Nigeria for more than six decades. Its contribution to technical education deserves recognition, and its future should be approached with ambition and foresight

Nigeria needs universities that bridge classroom instruction and workplace demands. A technologically oriented university building on Auchi Polytechnic's experience could help prepare graduates for practical employment requirements.

Subject to appropriate staffing, facilities and accreditation, its programmes could cover renewable energy, artificial intelligence, robotics, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, environmental technology and sustainable agriculture. Industry partnerships could provide internships and practical training, while research could help solve local challenges, support small businesses and promote economic diversification.

There is also a regional argument. Edo State and the wider South-South region could benefit from an expanded centre of technological education and research. A university developed from Auchi Polytechnic could widen access to higher education, attract investment, generate employment and encourage research into regional challenges. These benefits, however, would depend on credible planning, adequate resources and effective management.

The case for Auchi Polytechnic must fit within a coherent national policy. The government should establish transparent conversion criteria covering institutional capacity, academic quality, infrastructure, staffing, financial sustainability and national priorities. Clear criteria would promote merit and public interest while helping institutions identify the improvements they need.

If YABATECH and Federal Polytechnic, Kaduna, have been considered suitable for elevation, the Federal Government should explain the policy principles underlying those decisions and provide an appropriate pathway for other deserving institutions. This would strengthen public confidence and demonstrate that the future of technical education is being approached systematically.

I am not suggesting that the government disregard differences between institutions or grant university status indiscriminately. I am advocating a fair assessment of Auchi Polytechnic's credentials and, where deficiencies exist, appropriate support and a realistic timetable for improvement. The National Assembly, Federal Ministry of Education, National Board for Technical Education and other relevant bodies should assess readiness, protect standards and ensure proper funding and implementation.

The interests of students and staff must also be protected. Existing students should not experience disruption to their programmes, while staff should receive clear information about the transition, professional development opportunities and changes to their responsibilities. Proper arrangements would maintain confidence and safeguard the institution's community.

Ultimately, the objective should not be to create universities merely for prestige. Nigeria already has institutions struggling with inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure and difficulties maintaining academic standards. Establishing another university without addressing these challenges would achieve little. Any elevation of Auchi Polytechnic must therefore be supported by credible commitments to funding, infrastructure, research and institutional autonomy within the law. It should also preserve the practical orientation that distinguishes polytechnic education, rather than sacrificing technical competence for academic titles.

Mr. President, your administration has demonstrated a willingness to reconsider the structure of technical and vocational education through the elevation of YABATECH and Federal Polytechnic, Kaduna. I respectfully urge you to extend the same consideration to Auchi Polytechnic. The institution has a history worth celebrating, a workforce worth investing in and opportunities for expansion. Its leadership has pursued improvements to academic and administrative structures, while its land and facilities may provide a foundation for further development.

I therefore appeal to President Tinubu, the Minister of Education, the National Assembly and other relevant authorities to initiate a comprehensive assessment of Auchi Polytechnic's readiness for conversion into a fully fledged university of technology, rather than merely empowering it to award a Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) degree.

The objective should be an institution with a clear technological orientation, an expanded research mandate and the capacity to award degrees in accordance with applicable regulatory requirements. If improvements are necessary, Auchi Polytechnic should receive a clear roadmap and appropriate support to meet the required standards.

This appeal does not diminish the achievements of YABATECH or Federal Polytechnic, Kaduna. Their elevation is a welcome development for Nigerian education. Rather, it calls for the benefits of educational reform to be extended to other deserving institutions through a transparent and equitable process.

Auchi Polytechnic has served Nigeria for more than six decades. Its contribution to technical education deserves recognition, and its future should be approached with ambition and foresight. The time has come to assess what this institution could achieve with the resources and opportunity to grow.

Mr. President, please consider Auchi Polytechnic. Let its next chapter bring renewed ambition, expanded opportunities and greater service to Nigeria. Elevating deserving institutions is not merely a reward for past achievements; it is an investment in the country's future.

Auchi Polytechnic deserves that opportunity too.

• *Kelly Odaro, PhD, is a columnist and Lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria.*

FEATURE

27 Years in Darkness: The Miracle of Seeing for the First Time



BAGUDU MOHAMMED

An extraordinary story published by Daily Trust on Saturday, 17 October 2026, invites us to reflect on the wonders of medical science, the resilience of the human spirit and the destiny helpers God places along our paths.

Under the headline "How I Regained Sight 27 Years After," the newspaper told the story of Abdullahi Abubakar, a 30-year-old man born in Kebbi State but raised in Wudil, Kano State, who lost his sight at the age of three. After 27 years of darkness, surgery at Makkah Specialist Eye Hospital, Kano, gave him the opportunity to see the world for the first time.

Recalling his experience, Abdullahi explained that his family had visited several hospitals without success. Eventually, he accepted his condition and abandoned the search for treatment. Yet blindness brought challenges beyond the inability to see. He recalled how people sometimes treated him as though his only purpose was to be fed and cared for.

This reflects what sociologist Erving Goffman described as stigma: society reducing an individual to a perceived limitation rather than recognising the whole person. Abdullahi, however, refused to surrender to that identity. He studied Islamic knowledge, sold water and traded animals to earn a living, begging only when necessary. Friends often became his eyes, guiding him through unfamiliar places.

His breakthrough came when a neighbour, a police officer, took him for medical assessment. Doctors reportedly determined that his condition could be treated surgically, but the cost was beyond his means. An intervention by Wudil Local Government eventually connected him to the hospital, where the operation was performed.

After surgery, the doctors removed the covering from his eye, and he encountered bright light. Initially, identifying objects was difficult, but he gradually learned to recognise what he was seeing. His experience illustrates an important scientific distinction: restoring sight does not necessarily mean immediately understanding everything the eyes perceive. The brain must interpret visual information, and this learning process can take time.

One of his greatest joys was seeing his daughter's face for the first time. He also examined his own face using his phone camera and discovered the resemblance between himself and his daughter, something his wife had often told him about. His daughter's face became a daily source of happiness.

Imagine the emotions of a father who has loved his child without ever seeing her face, suddenly discovering her features. And imagine the love of a wife who chose him and built a family with him while he was blind. Their story reminds us that genuine love is not dependent on physical appearance.

Abdullahi was equally fascinated by the world around him. The Wudil River, people diving from its bridge, boats transporting sand, bustling markets and roadside shops became objects of wonder. Even the stars amazed him. His wife explained that the bright object was the moon while the smaller ones were stars.

He can now walk independently along familiar routes, although he continues learning about objects by asking friends to identify them. He also explained how he had previously recognised people through their voices and footsteps. Such abilities illustrate how the brain can adapt when one sense is unavailable, strengthening reliance on others.

His dreams have changed, too. Before surgery, he dreamed of things he had never physically seen, including cars. Now, he says, his dreams increasingly reflect the appearance of objects he encounters in everyday life. This raises fascinating questions about how visual experience influences the brain's interpretation of the world.

Abdullahi's story also challenges us to understand blindness medically rather than assume that every case is incurable. Some conditions can be reversed, others treated to preserve or improve remaining vision, while some forms of blindness remain irreversible with current medical technology.

Cataracts, for example, can often be treated surgically by replacing the cloudy lens. Certain corneal conditions may benefit from transplantation, while some retinal diseases have specialised treatments. However, advanced damage to the optic nerve, including damage caused by glaucoma, is generally irreversible. Treatment can often slow further deterioration but cannot reliably restore nerve tissue already destroyed.

The possibility of recovery therefore depends primarily on the underlying cause, the extent of damage and available treatment, not simply the number of years a person has been blind. Anyone experiencing visual impairment deserves a proper assessment by an eye specialist rather than assuming that nothing can be done.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that at least 2.2 billion people worldwide have near or distance vision impairment, with at least one billion cases preventable or yet to be addressed. These figures underscore the importance of accessible eye care, early diagnosis and community-based interventions.

Abdullahi's experience is also a reminder of the importance of opportunity. In the language of economist Amartya Sen, disability and deprivation can restrict people's capabilities, not necessarily their determination, intelligence or willingness to contribute to society. Before surgery, Abdullahi was already working to support himself. Afterward, he received ₦100,000 from the local government chairman to restart his animal-trading business.

What a difference timely assistance can make!

I commend Wudil Local Government for facilitating his treatment, the medical team at Makkah Specialist Eye Hospital and the many unsung heroes who make life-changing medical interventions possible in our communities. Their actions demonstrate what compassionate leadership and accessible healthcare can achieve together.

For Abdullahi, this is more than recovering sight. It is an opportunity to rediscover his daughter, appreciate his surroundings, strengthen his independence and imagine new possibilities for his future.

At 30, after 27 years in darkness, he is discovering a world he has known only through sound, touch, imagination and the descriptions of others.

What a world. What a triumph of medical science. What a reminder never to underestimate the possibilities that emerge when human compassion meets scientific knowledge.

Bagudu Mohammed is the founder of Alternative Perspectives, a widely read commentary platform on social media, and writes a weekly newspaper column published every Monday on the back page of Peoples Daily. Web: https://alternativeperspective.onrender.com

Extract from the Convocation lecture delivered by Dr Goke Adegoroye at the Joseph Ayo Babalola University (JABU), Ikeji- Arakeji, Osun State

FRANCIS ODUPUTE

In one word,what isTV required to reposition the public service as a virile national institution is INTEGRITY.If we can uphold uphold integrity in appointment, discipline, training, deployment and promotion,we would have solved 80 percent of the problems of the civil service"

" Public Service in Nigeria had metamorphosed from a manageable, compact,focused,trained,skilled and highly motivated body into an over- bloated,ill- equiped , poorly paid,rudderless institution lacking in initiative and beset by loss of morale,arbitrariness and corruption"

"Literature commonly reset the roadmap to a resilient public service on four pillars:digital transformation, meritocracy and professionalisation, structural rationalisation and independent oversight.My years of service and reflection have convinced me that Nigeria has not been short of any of these tools.In every case,the missing link is integrity"

"Our institutions speak eloquently of talent management and continuous training.But those who deal with public servants every day tell a different story.The service must be transformed from a dumping ground for political patronage into an elite corps of skilled professionals".

"My thesis today is simple but urgent:no nation can rise above the capacity, integrity and efficiency of its public service".

"The malaise of our public service, therefore,is not a failure of intellect.It is a crisis of incentives and accountability.Our institutions are structured to reward compliance, patronage and process rather than competence, innovation and measurable results"

Our Universities.

"Integrate data analytics, public sector economics,e-governance and artificial intelligence into the social and management sciences and move from memorizing lecture notes to learning from real African cases.Students should graduate knowing not only what bereaucracy is,but how to re-engineer a ministry's workflow".

" Bridge the gap between University research and government policy. Faculties should write not only for journals but also actionable policy briefs for the MDAs,and partner with governments to carry out independent diagnostics and performance audits of public institutions,serving as the scientific conscience of public governance".

"Above all,our universities must produce a new breed of ethical,value driven and innovative public managers".

Graduating class of 2026.

"The world outside is populated by all sorts of people,many of whom are ready to exploit society for their selfish ends.You are certainly not one of them; but you may have been created for them.You must see the privilege of your education as a responsibility,a responsibility to humanity to contribute your quota to make life better"

" Commit yourselves to excellence and integrity.But be warned: excellence can be burdensome,for it highlights the inadequacies of others.Integrity is an even greater burden,for it stands out and challenges those who lack it.That is why leadership is never an easy sail for a true reformer

It's a journey marked by growth, resilience, sometimes betrayal and, ultimately, triumph.As our Lord said,"No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62)

"To those of you receiving your Master's and Doctoral degrees tomorrow: do not let your field of study define your horizon.Standing before you to speak on the public service governance is a graduate of Agriculture"

SPORTS FEATURE

Youth Football and no policy direction:
The price of a system without a structure

Douglas Bye-bye
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The 2026 football calendar is closing as one of the worst for Nigerian men's youth football in recent history. The U15 boys who went to the inaugural FIFA U15 World Cup and Festival in Baku, Azerbaijan failed to beat neighbours Benin Republic and were eliminated in the Tier C Round of 16. The Golden Eaglets U17 failed to even qualify for the U17 AFCON. Same with the Flying Eagles coached by Abdul Maikaba who lost 4-1 to the Young Stallions of Burkina Faso at the Stade Charles Konan Banny in Yamoussoukro.

And now all eyes are on the U23 Olympic team who face DR Congo next month with an Olympic ticket to Los Angeles 2028 on the line. This is not bad luck. It is policy failure.

The core of the problem is we have no structured approach to the appointment of youth coaches. In Morocco, in Senegal, in Japan, the U15 coach is appointed to play the same system that the U17, U20, U23 and senior national teams play. In Nigeria, every youth coach is hired as an independent contractor with his own philosophy, his own list, and his own survival plan.

Today the NFF appoints coaches based on availability, not suitability. When a youth tournament is two months away, we hurriedly announce a coach, give him three weeks to screen 100 players at the FIFA Goal Project in Abuja, and expect him to win Africa. That is not preparation, that is gambling.

There is no coaching succession plan. A proper federation should have a Head of Youth Development who oversees U15, U17, U20 and U23. Instead we have a technical committee that changes every board election and appoints friends. One coach is sacked after one bad tournament, another is brought back after four years out of the game. There is no continuity of ideas.

Because there is no job security, youth coaches do not develop players, they chase results to keep their jobs. They will not take a technically gifted 14-year-old from an academy and groom him. They will rather choose a physical player who eventually gets found out when the competition begins.

This leads to the second problem - the disconnect between our booming youth club and academy ecosystem and the national team. Nigeria today has perhaps the best U16 private academy structure in Africa. Beyond Limits, Sporting Lagos Youth, Remo Stars Academy, Mavlon, Mailantarki, 36 Lions - these clubs are producing players who are being signed directly by Midtjylland, KRC Genk, and Hoffenheim.

But when it is time for Golden Eaglets, those academy products are ignored. Why? Because the national team selection is still based on open screening in Abuja where 300 boys arrive with no data, no tracking, no scouting report. The best academy in Ikenne is playing a tactical system for 12 months, but his best boy has to come and fight for 30 minutes in a chaotic trial game to impress a coach who has never visited his academy.

In Senegal, Generation Foot and Diambars ARE the U17 national team. In Morocco, the Mohammed VI Academy IS the U20. In Nigeria, the NFF sees private academies as rivals, not feeders. There is no formal partnership, no loan of data, no shared calendar.

So we have a strange situation: Our U17 clubs win tournaments in Europe. Beyond Limits won the Viareggio Cup in Italy, beating European giants. Remo Stars U19 reached the final of the Premier League Next Gen Cup. But the U17 National Team that is supposed to be an All-Star of those clubs cannot beat Niger Republic.

The reason is we do not marry success. The NFF does not ask: How does Beyond Limits develop a ball-playing midfielder? What diet, what gym work, what video analysis do they do? We just take their player, remove him from that environment for 2 months, put him in a hotel in Abuja with no nutritionist, and play kick-and-follow football.

The third and most destructive layer is political selection. Youth football has become the most politicized. Every board member, every state FA chairman, every big man wants to have two players in the U17 camp.

The coach knows that if he drops the son of a sponsor or the player of a powerful agent, he will be sacked tomorrow. So he carries politically protected players who cannot run, and sacrifices technically superior boys. The team becomes a collection of interests, not a team.

Agents have taken over youth teams. An U17 World Cup appearance increases a player's value massively. So agents pressure coaches to field their players even when they are injured or tactically indisciplined. The coach becomes a puppet, because the agent is the one paying for his flight, his accommodation, sometimes even his allowance when NFF has not paid.

This political selection kills development. The boy who knows he is in the team because of his godfather does not train hard. The boy who was dropped despite being better leaves the country and goes to Benin or Ghana to change nationality. That is why we are losing talents to England and France.

It also kills tactical identity. How do you build a high-pressing team when your striker is imposed on you and cannot press? How do you build from the back when your centre-back is in camp because his state FA chairman brought him? You abandon your philosophy and just play long balls.

Look at the U15 team that failed recently at the global event. Those boys were selected in 3 weeks. Compare to Spain U15 who have been together since U13, with same coach, same sports science. We cannot expect miracles when we prepare for a global tournament like we are preparing for a community shield.

The U23 team facing Congo DR next month will face the same pressure. Congo has kept the same U20 group that beat Cameroon last year. They have played several friendly games together. Our U23 will be assembled in 10 days, with players from different clubs, with a coach who was appointed last month.

The solution is not rocket science. First, NFF must publish a National Playing Philosophy and a 5-year Technical Plan. Second, appoint a Technical Director on a 5-year contract who hires all youth coaches, not the board. Third, create an Elite Youth Scouting Department that embeds scouts in the NPFL U19 Youth League, NLO1 and top academies with GPS data and video.

Finally, mandate that a large percentage of any youth national team must come from accredited Elite Academies with verifiable birth records and development data. End the open screening jamboree. Insulate youth coaches from politics - give them contracts tied to player progression to Europe and the senior national team, not just trophies.

Until we do that, we will continue this cycle. No country qualifies for the Olympics with politics.

SPORTS

The Nigerian OBSERVER
That The People May Know

Athletic Heat CEO Ese Oguma athletes' investment

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As Nwanaga, Osisike put N200,000 up for Women's throws at anniversary meet

Nigeria's national record holder in the women's javelin, Kelechi Nwanaga, and UTEP Miners standout Esther Osisike have committed a combined N200,000 in prize money to the women's throwing events at the Athletic Heat 10th Anniversary Meet.

Nwanaga is backing the women's javelin, while Osisike is supporting the women's discus, with each athlete contributing N100,000 to reward the top three finishers in their respective events.

Under the prize structure, winners in both disciplines will receive N50,000, with the runners-up earning N30,000 and third-place finishers taking home N20,000.

The sponsorships add to the incentives for competitors ahead of the anniversary competition, scheduled for Saturday, November 7, 2026, at the Yaba College of Technology Sports Complex in Lagos.

NWANAGA BACKS HER SPECIALIST EVENT

A leading figure in Nigerian women's javelin, Nwanaga brings considerable international experience to her support of the event.

The former UMBC Retrievers and Florida State Seminoles athlete won silver at the 2015 African Junior Championships before claiming gold at the 2015 African Games.

She went on to finish fourth at the 2016 African Championships and sixth at the 2018 Commonwealth Games. In 2018, she captured the African Championships title and successfully defended her African Games crown in 2019.

Nwanaga's personal best of 58.15 metres, recorded in Ozoro in July 2017, remains the Nigerian national record in the women's javelin.

Her contribution to the Athletic Heat meet offers competitors in the event an opportunity to earn financial rewards while showcasing their abilities on



ESTHER OSISIKE

Edo FA LGA Elections: Inonoje Roland Benji, Chinedu UBA reelected Chairmen Ovia NorthEast, Egor LGAs

Promise Greater Investment in Women, School Football

As Edo Football Association concluded it's local Government elections under a peaceful atmosphere in Benin,new leaderships have emerged just as some incumbents Chairmen have retained their seats.

In the heartbeat local Government Area,Aituari Igbinedion defeated incumbent Coach Douglas Idahosa after securing 3 votes against 2 to emerge new chairman of Oredo .

The reelected chairmen of Ovia North East and Egor Local Government Areas Inonoje Roland Benji, Chinedu UBA have pledged to consolidate the existing grassroots football programmes while introducing new initiatives aimed at discovering and nurturing young talents across their domains.

They both made the pledge while chatting with journalists after the election in Benin city.

Other elected chairmen include Ogieriakhi Austin A. as Chairman of Orhionmwon, Okundolor Johnbull Nosa as Chairman of Ovia South West, and Aighumuagbonrie Jimmy as Chairman of Uhunmwonde.

Other elected officials include Uri Kevwe Raphael, Vice Chairman of Egor; Aina Solomon Ayodeji, Vice Chairman of Ovia North East; Amaziwya Berarda Osagie, Vice Chairman of Etsako West; Blessing Ojaga, Vice Chairman of Owan West; and Eseigbe Evans, Vice Chairman of Esan North East.

Speaking to newsmen after the election, the newly elected Egor LGA Football Association Chairman, Uba Chinedu K, said his administration would focus on continuing programmes that have already commenced while seeking new ways to improve football development in the area.

Eight African players Qualify for ITTF World Championships in Astana

Eight African male table tennis players have secured qualification for the 2027 International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) World Championships Finals in Astana, Kazakhstan, following their performances at the African qualification tournament in Tangier, Morocco.

The qualified players include Egypt's Youssef Abdelaziz, Mohamed Elbeiali, Mahmoud Helmy and Omar Assar, alongside Tunisia's Wassim Essid, Algeria's Stephane Ouiche and Benin's Abdel-Kader Salifou.

Badri Mostafa of Egypt also secured qualification, bringing the number of confirmed African representatives to eight, with one additional qualification spot still available.

The qualifiers have earned the opportunity to compete on the global stage, where they will represent Africa against some of the world's best table tennis players.

The qualification campaign in Tangier has provided the players with a pathway to the prestigious competition in Astana, as Africa continues its push for greater representation at the world championships.



MALE TABLE TENNIS PLAYERS

RIYE U17 Boxing Circuit: 24 young boxers set for Ogun competition

24 young boxers from the four sporting zones of Ogun State will compete at the maiden RIYE Under-17 Boxing Circuit scheduled for Friday, October 30, 2026, at the Alake Sports Centre, Ijeja, Abeokuta.

The organisers have assured participants and spectators of adequate safety measures and effective coordination throughout the competition.

The event is being organised by the Senior Special Assistant to the Ogun State Governor on Youth Development, Honourable Tunde Delu, under the Young Athletes Yield Initiative, YAYI, to identify, nurture and develop young sporting talents across the state.

Speaking at a press conference in Abeokuta, Hon. Delu said the competition was part of efforts to establish a structured pathway for young athletes to develop their abilities and pursue successful sporting careers.

Hon. Delu explained that the initiative was designed not only to provide competitive opportunities but also to identify promising athletes early and support their long-term development.

He recalled that the organisers had earlier held the RIYE Under-15 Athletics Championships, adding that plans were underway to extend the circuit to other sports, including table tennis, gymnastics and scrabble.

The organisers announced that winners of the 12 bouts would each receive one hundred



U17 BOXERS

WAFU-B Women's Champions League: Ampem Darkoa beat Edo Queens in dramatic replay to reclaim title

Ghanaian side Ampem Darkoa have defeated Nigeria's Edo Queens 3-2 after extra time in the replay of the 2026 WAFU-B Women's Champions League final to emerge champions of the regional competition.

A decisive goal in the 92nd minute by Mohammed Afishata secured victory for Ampem Darkoa, earning the Ghanaian side their second appearance at the CAF Women's Champions League following their maiden participation in 2023 in Côte d'Ivoire.

The result reverses the outcome of the original final, which Edo Queens won on penalties after a 2-2 draw in regulation time without extra time being played.

Ampem Darkoa subsequently appealed the result, and the decision was upheld by the Confederation of African Football (CAF), leading to the replay of the final.

The Ghanaian side took advantage of the opportunity to overcome the Nigerian champions and secure the WAFU-B title, booking their place as the region's representatives at the 2026 CAF Women's Champions League in Egypt.

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