

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF FOUR EYES MEDIA

Benchmark

An Achievement and Impact Magazine

MARCH 2026

Game
Changer:
How Bukola
Olopade Is
Rewriting
the Rules
of Nigerian
Sports



Free
Data for
Learning:
Nigeria's
Most
Urgent
Digital
Bet

Inside the Mind
of a Lawyer,
Political
Operator and
Public Servant:
The Femi
Gbajabiamila
Story

At the Forefront of Reform: Nigeria's New Generation of Leaders





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A Note From The Publisher

At a time when leadership is being tested across institutions and sectors, the stories we choose to tell matter more than ever. BenchMark Magazine was conceived as a platform to spotlight leadership, innovation, and public service that are shaping the future of Nigeria. In every edition, our aim is simple: to document impact, highlight progress, and provide a thoughtful reflection on governance, policy, enterprise, and national development.

This issue brings together voices and institutions that are redefining standards in their respective fields. From reforms within key government agencies to initiatives that are expanding opportunities across sectors, the individuals featured in these pages represent a new wave of leadership grounded in vision, resilience, and service.

Our cover feature offers insight into the leadership journey of one of the country's foremost public sector figures, whose work continues to demonstrate how institutions can evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. Alongside this, readers will find engaging interviews, policy conversations, and sector updates that provide context to the decisions and ideas shaping our national landscape.

At BenchMark, we believe that recognition is not merely about celebration. It is also about documentation and inspiration. By highlighting achievements and sharing the lessons behind them, we hope to encourage a culture of excellence and accountability across both public and private sectors.

As you turn these pages, we invite you to reflect on the progress being made, the challenges that remain, and the possibilities ahead.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

Publisher

Four Eyes Media

"We just don't hear about the things that are actually working."

– Overheard in a Abuja café

A few months ago, I was sitting in a crowded café in Abuja, listening to a group of friends vent about the "Nigerian situation." We are good at that, aren't we? Listing everything that is broken. One insisted that nothing ever works here. Another said quietly, "That's not completely true. We just don't hear about the things that are actually working."

That line stayed with me. Not because it was dramatic, but because it was honest.

As I sat there, I realised I had spent my morning reading about a niche irrigation project in the North that had tripled crop yields, and a new digital tax framework that was making life easier for small business owners. Yet stories like these rarely dominate our conversations.

I kept thinking: why are breakthroughs often whispered while shortcomings are so loudly projected?

That question is why you are holding this first edition of BenchMark. I wanted to create a space where we pause to examine the receipts. Not political cheerleading, but verifiable milestones, reforms, and leadership decisions shaping Nigeria's present and its future.

In this debut issue, you will find our Policy Spotlight on the latest Tax Reforms. Now, I know "tax" usually sounds like a headache, but when you see how these changes are designed to de-clutter the path for entrepreneurs, it begins to look a lot more like opportunity.

Our Reform Tracker focuses on the evolving transformation of NNPC Limited, examining how structural changes within the national oil company may influence transparency, performance, and most importantly, earnings. Our Leadership Profile this quarter highlights a public servant whose work ethic deserves to be on record.



Collectively, these stories matter because they shift the conversation from "What's wrong?" to "What's working?" When we document these milestones – whether a major corporate impact story or a quiet public sector innovation – We create a benchmark others must aspire to meet.

Thank you for joining us for this first chapter. This magazine is as much yours as it is ours. As you turn these pages, I invite you to look for the silver linings that are not just optimism, but evidence.

Let's start measuring what matters.

Warm regards,

Opeyemi

Opeyemi Oloruntegbe

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From Potential To Prosperity: Export-Led Economy

This article is adapted from a paper delivered by Zacch Adedeji, Ph.D, Executive Chairman of the Nigeria Revenue Service, at the inaugural Distinguished Personality Lecture of the Faculty of Administration, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.



▲ **Zacch Adedeji, Ph.D**
Executive Chairman of the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS)

Nigeria stands at a defining crossroads. Despite being Africa's largest economy, endowed with abundant natural resources and a youthful population, the country has remained tethered to the brink of prosperity without fully crossing over. This lecture confronts that paradox directly. Drawing on the Harvard Atlas of Economic Complexity, it diagnoses Nigeria's economic trajectory from 1998 to 2023, reveals a pattern of deep structural stagnation, and proposes a phased roadmap for building a genuinely export-led economy rooted in productive complexity.

The findings are stark: Nigeria ranks 142nd out of 145 countries on the Economic Complexity Index (ECI). The Harvard Growth Lab projects annual growth of just 2.2% over the next decade – barely keeping pace with population growth. Meanwhile, crude oil and gas account for over 80% of export earnings. Between 2008 and 2023, Nigeria added only six new products to its export

basket. The "missing middle" – the absence of a labour-absorbing industrial base between the high-tech oil sector and the vast informal economy – lies at the heart of this challenge.

Rethinking Growth Through the Lens of Complexity

Moving beyond GDP as the primary measure of economic progress, the Harvard Growth Lab's Atlas of Economic Complexity assesses a nation's underlying productive capabilities – the collective knowledge and know-how embedded in its economy. Products are vehicles for know-how: a combination of technology, skills, and institutional capacity. When a country exports a wide variety of sophisticated goods, it signals a deep reservoir of this know-how. This is the real engine of long-term prosperity, enabling an economy to adapt, innovate, and climb into higher value-added activities.

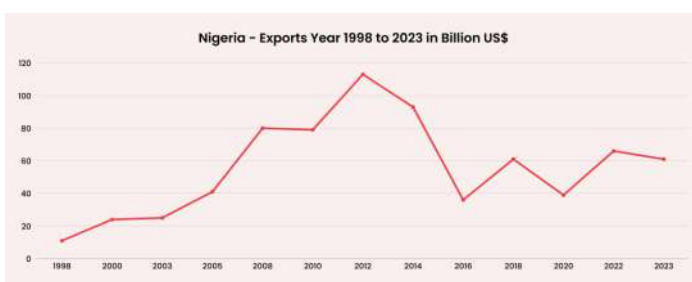
The Economic Complexity Index (ECI) captures this by measuring both the variety and exclusivity of a country's exports. Crucially, the ECI is a leading indicator: countries whose complexity exceeds their current income level tend to grow significantly faster in the following decade.

The complementary Product Space maps how all traded goods relate to one another, revealing that diversification is path-dependent. Moving from cotton fabric to garments is achievable; jumping from crude oil to semiconductors requires entirely different capabilities. The strategic goal must therefore shift from increasing the quantity of exports to building the quality of domestic productive knowledge.

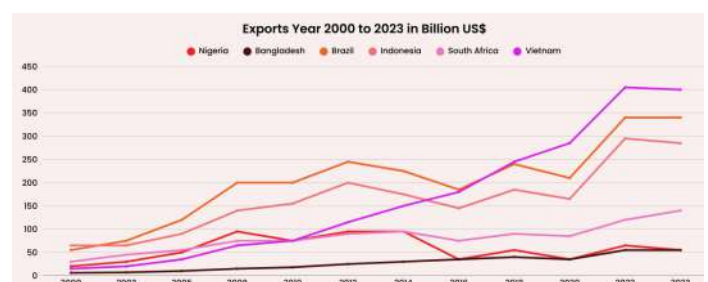
Nigeria's Export Trajectory (1998–2023) – Three Decades of Stagnation

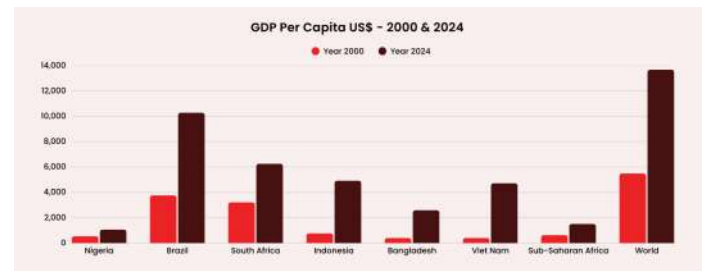
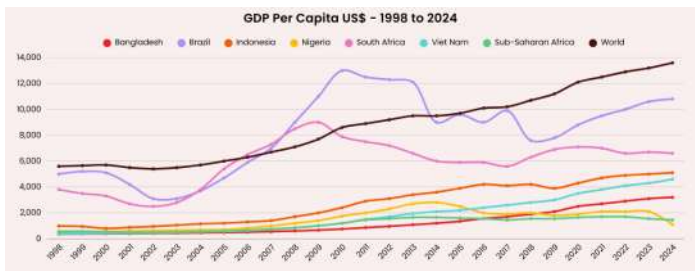
Nigeria's export performance over twenty-five years is not a story of transformation – it is a story of structural stagnation. Export earnings have fluctuated violently with global oil prices: surging to \$113 billion in 2011 during the commodity super-cycle, collapsing to \$36 billion after the 2014 oil price crash, and recovering partially to \$66 billion by 2022. These swings reflect global crude prices, not Nigerian productivity, making long-term economic planning nearly impossible.

The root cause is an unchanging export basket. In 2023, crude petroleum (\$43.5bn) and petroleum gas (\$8.38bn) dominated exports. The next largest were nitrogenous fertilisers (\$1.01bn) and cocoa beans (\$481m) – a multi-decade failure to develop competitive non-oil sectors. Some point to new additions like sesame seeds and cashew nuts as diversification. But these are low-complexity commodities that do not build sophisticated industrial capabilities. Adding items to an export list means nothing if the underlying productive structure remains unchanged, complementary Product Space maps how all traded goods relate to one another, revealing that diversification is path-dependent. Moving from cotton fabric to garments is achievable; jumping from crude oil to semiconductors requires entirely different capabilities. The strategic goal must therefore shift from increasing the quantity of exports to building the quality of domestic productive knowledge. Nigeria's ECI rank of 142nd out of 145 countries places it alongside resource-dependent and fragile states. The economy is hollowed out: a capital-intensive oil sector at one



▲ Source: Harvard Atlas of Complexity





extreme, a vast low-productivity informal sector at the other – with no vibrant industrial manufacturing base in between. This missing middle is the structural explanation for stagnant complexity and the failure to achieve the transformation that has lifted peer nations out of poverty.

Learning from the World – A Comparative Study

The contrast with global peers over the same period is instructive. Vietnam started from a lower base than Nigeria in 1998 (GDP per capita of \$361 vs. Nigeria's \$547), yet its per capita income is now four times Nigeria's. Total exports grew from \$11 billion to \$404 billion through a deliberate, staged strategy: building a competitive textiles industry first, then using those capabilities as a ladder into electronics, machinery, and integrated circuits. Vietnam's ECI rank improved from 95th in 2000 to 48th by 2023 – a genuine deepening of productive capability.

Bangladesh illustrates a different trap: consistent GDP growth of 5.1% per year, yet an ECI rank that worsened to 128th as over 85% of exports remained concentrated in garments. Growth without complexity has a ceiling. Indonesia, a fellow commodity exporter, added 16 new products since 2008 and is projected to grow at nearly 5% annually, yet still struggles to build a competitive manufacturing base – a reminder that resource wealth alone is insufficient. Brazil and South Africa are the most sobering cases: once industrial heavyweights, both have experienced significant de-industrialisation, with ECI ranks falling by 44 and 13 positions

respectively. Productive capabilities once once lost, are extremely difficult to rebuild. The consistent lesson: success requires a proactive strategy to build complexity through global value chain integration – not simply avoiding the resource curse.

The Diagnosis – Why Nigeria is Trapped in a Vicious Cycle

Nigeria's stagnation stems from deeply entrenched, mutually reinforcing barriers. The resource curse operates through Dutch Disease: large oil-driven foreign currency inflows keep the Naira artificially strong, making non-oil exports uncompetitive while cheap imports suffocate nascent local industries. Oil dependency has also shaped institutional priorities, with policymaking focused on distributing oil revenue rather than creating conditions for productive businesses to thrive.

Infrastructure deficits compound the problem. Nigeria's Apapa and Tin Can Island ports are among the world's most inefficient, imposing prohibitive costs through congestion and erratic customs administration. Electricity access stands at only 61.2% of the population - compared compared to 87-100% in peer countries – forcing businesses onto expensive diesel generators and making Nigerian manufacturers structurally uncompetitive before they even reach global markets.

Trade policy has been chronically incoherent, simultaneously espousing export promotion while implementing import bans, arbitrary tariffs, and border closures that prevent firms from accessing the imported inputs essential

for modern manufacturing. The 4% Free-on-Board levy introduced under the 2023 Customs Act directly taxes production and reinforces Nigeria's reputation as a high-cost, unpredictable environment. The new OECD Global Minimum Tax further eliminates the tax holiday strategy traditionally used to attract foreign direct investment, making the quality of infrastructure and institutions the only credible selling point. The cumulative result is a hollowed-out industrial base caught in a structural paradox: Naira depreciation, which should boost export competitiveness, instead raises production costs because manufacturers depend on imported inputs.

The AfCFTA Frontier – A Regional Catalyst for Complexity

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents Nigeria's most immediate strategic opportunity – a regional platform to build productive capabilities before competing directly with established global powers. The AfCFTA covers 1.5 billion people and a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion. The World Bank estimates effective implementation could lift 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty. Crucially, intra-African trade is structurally different from Nigeria's trade with the rest of the world: instead of raw materials, it involves manufactured goods, plastics, building materials, and processed foods – precisely the sectors where Nigeria must develop capabilities to break oil dependence. Nigeria formally joined the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative in 2024, identifying initial export products including soap, glass, synthetic fibre, and plastics. The deeper prize lies in regional value chains. The African automotive market is projected

Metric	Nigeria	Bangladesh	Brazil	Indonesia	South Africa	Vietnam
ECI Rank (2023)	142	128	93	72	77	48
ECI Rank (2000)	143	97	37	49	53	86
Ease of Doing Business Rank (2023)	131	168	124	73	84	70
Logistics Performance Index (2023) Ranking	110 (2018 data)	100	56	63	21	43
Quality of Port Infrastructure (WEF) Ranking	122	92	103	64	56	85
Electricity Access (% of Population 2023)	61.2%	99.50%	99.80%	99.40%	87.20%	99.80%
Human Capital Index (2020)	0.38 (Rank 188)	0.46 (Rank 122)	0.55 (Rank 91)	0.54 (Rank 96)	0.43 (Rank 135)	0.69 (Rank 38)

Country	Number 1 Export	% of Total 1	Number 2 Export	% of Total 2	Number 3 Export	% of Total 3	Top 3 % of Total
Nigeria	Crude Petroleum	70.6	Gas	10.3	Fertiliser	1.7	82.6
Bangladesh	T-shirts	12.4	Men's Suit	12.1	Sweater	10.6	35.1
Brazil	Soya Beans	13.7	Crude Petroleum	10.7	Iron Ore	7.9	32.3
Indonesia	Coal	11.5	Palm Oil	7.6	Ferro Alloys	5	24.1
South Africa	Gold	12.8	Platinum	9.2	Cars & Trucks	8.6	30.6
Vietnam	Transmission Apparatus	18	Computers & Office Machines	7.4	Integrated Circuits	7	32.4

to reach \$42 billion by 2027, yet the continent imports almost all its vehicles. Nigeria could become a regional supplier of automotive components — glass, tyres, plastics under the AfCFTA's Rules of Origin framework.

Similarly, Africa's dependence on imported medicines creates a commercial opportunity: through consolidated demand mechanisms like the African Pooled Procurement initiative, Nigerian pharmaceutical manufacturers could finally achieve the scale required for viable large-scale production. Infrastructure deficits, non-tariff barriers, and transshipment risks remain real obstacles, but the path forward requires competitive integration rather than protectionism. The AfCFTA is Nigeria's laboratory — where it can develop the industrial discipline and logistical competence required to eventually compete on the global stage.

A Roadmap for Export-Led Growth

Breaking Nigeria's structural cycle demands a fundamental paradigm shift: from short-term oil revenue management and reflexive protectionism to a long-term, coherent strategy for building productive capabilities. Three principles must anchor this strategy. First, the goal must be complexity, not merely diversification — adding low-value commodities creates an illusion of progress. Second, industrial policy must be grounded in the Product Space, identifying adjacent products that Nigeria can realistically produce using existing or acquirable capabilities. Third, export-orientation must become the organising principle of all policy: every fiscal, trade, and infrastructure decision must be evaluated by whether it makes Nigerian exporters more competitive.

Phase 1: Foundational Reforms (Years 1–5)

The priority is stabilisation and clearing self-inflicted barriers to trade. The Tinubu administration's unification of the foreign exchange rate and the beginnings of inflation reduction are critical first steps. Trade policy must be rationalised: the 4% customs levy should be reduced to 1%, and a five-year moratorium on major tariff changes announced to give investors planning certainty. Port efficiency must

improve urgently — completing the Single Window Project, implementing 24/7 port operations, and rehabilitating access roads. A comprehensive overhaul of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system, designed directly with industry clusters, must begin immediately.

Phase 2: Building Capabilities (Years 2–6)

With foundations stabilised, the focus shifts to building productive capabilities. The Ministry of Trade and Industry should commission a Product Space analysis to identify 10–15 adjacent priority products — for example, moving from raw leather to finished leather goods, or from petrochemical feedstocks to industrial inputs. Support must be specific and performance-based: long-term finance for machinery, international quality certifications, and R&D funding. The Nigeria Tax Act of 2025 is estimated to generate approximately N400 billion for capability-building agencies in 2026; a governance framework ensuring at least 80% goes to genuine R&D is essential. Free Trade Zones must be consolidated from dozens of underfunded facilities into two or three world-class zones with independent power, water, and direct port access — serving as incubators for priority industries.

Phase 3: Moving Up the Value Chain (Years 7–20)

The final phase deepens Nigeria's industrial base and consolidates global integration. The Nigerian Content Development Fund

should catalyse a world-class petrochemical industry to supply domestic plastics and packaging manufacturers. The Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission must be retooled to target Global Value Chain activities strategically. A 20-year infrastructure development plan — encompassing a modern power grid and multimodal transport network — structured around four-year delivery cycles, must translate short-term gains into durable industrial capacity.

From Potential to Shared Prosperity

With foundations stabilised, the focus shifts to building productive capabilities. The Ministry Nigeria's three-decade stagnation is not an accident of geography or fate — it is the consequence of strategic choices. The framework of economic complexity offers a more honest measure of progress than GDP: it asks whether Nigeria is accumulating the collective knowledge and productive capabilities that will make it resilient, innovative, and competitive in the coming decades. The current answer is deeply concerning, but the roadmap for change is clear.

Vietnam's transformation from a lower starting point to a \$404 billion export economy was achieved through deliberate, complexity-building strategy maintained consistently over decades. Nigeria possesses the human capital, natural endowments, demographic dividend, and entrepreneurial energy to achieve a comparable transformation. What has been missing is strategic clarity and institutional commitment.

The AfCFTA provides a regional platform to build industrial discipline. The three-phase roadmap provides the sequenced steps. The Tinubu administration's early reforms provide the foundation.

What is required now is sustained political will — a commitment that transcends election cycles and resists the constant temptation to return to the easy path of oil dependency. The examples of South Africa and Brazil warn that productive capabilities, once neglected, can be lost permanently. The journey from potential to prosperity is not a short one — but with the right map and the right resolve, it is a journey Nigeria can finally complete.



Game Changer

How Bukola Olopade Is Redefining the Rules of Nigerian Sports

In just twelve months at the helm of the National Sports Commission, Director General Bukola Olopade has done what many said could not be done: transformed Nigeria's sprawling, chronically underfunded sports sector into something that looks unmistakably like a world-class economic engine. Benchmark Magazine sat down with the DG to understand the vision, the battles, and the extraordinary results of what the NSC is calling its Year of Strategic Renaissance.



▲ Bukola Olopade

The Architecture Of Reform

Ask any serious sports administrator what kills an institution faster than lack of funding, and they will tell you: governance failure. It was governance — or rather its absence — that Olopade tackled first.

The COO Model, introduced for the first time in Nigerian sports governance history, placed professional Chief Operating Officers across federations, separating the technical management of sport from its administrative operations. Alongside this, the NSC oversaw what it describes as the cleanest federation elections in recent history — a rancour-free transition that brought fresh leadership and a new alignment of Secretaries-General into key positions.

But governance reform extended beyond paperwork and personnel. The Commission cleared longstanding arrears owed to the World Anti-Doping Agency and fully operationalised Nigeria's Anti-Doping Act — moves that averted a looming national suspension and, critically, restored Nigeria's standing in the eyes of international sports bodies.

Gender equity, too, became a deliberate design principle rather than an afterthought. Through the inclusion of the Association of Football Fans of Nigeria (AFFAN) and the creation of new

women's leadership portfolios, decision-making tables were consciously expanded.

Building The Sports Economy

The economic argument for sport — long made theoretically in Nigeria — has now acquired hard evidence. Under Hon. Olopade's stewardship, the Sports Investment Promotion Office (SIPO) emerged as the Commission's most commercially consequential innovation. A structured investment-matching platform, SIPO has connected federations with corporate partners across events, logistics, training support and commercial development, securing the ₦50 billion in private commitments that represent the highest such figure ever recorded.

Beyond private investment, the NSC introduced a Unified Budget System — a standardised, transparent budgeting framework designed to protect capital funding lines from the administrative volatility that has historically diverted sports funding before it could reach athletes or facilities.

Then there was a reform that felt quietly revolutionary: the reactivation of Direct-to-Athlete Grants, dormant for eight years. Over one million US dollars was disbursed directly to athletes — bypassing bureaucratic intermediaries — to fund preparation and competition. For many

Nigerian sports professionals, it was the first time government money arrived when it was needed, and in the hands of those who needed it.

Historic Firsts: A New Chapter For Team Nigeria

The on-field achievements of 2024-2025 are remarkable not merely for their volume but for the breadth of sport they represent. Nigeria's sporting dominance has historically been concentrated in football, athletics and boxing. This year told a different story.

Nigeria became the first African nation to compete in a Bobsleigh World Cup — Simidele Adeagbo and Kewe King representing Nigeria in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. In Scrabble, Nigeria achieved the unthinkable, ascending to the World Number 1 ranking and ending 35 years of American dominance. The Women U19 cricket team — previously barely known to most Nigerians — rose to the global top five and qualified for the 2027 ICC U19 Women's World Cup. And Nigeria's swimmers claimed the country's first-ever international swimming medals. The women's national football team, the Super Falcons, claimed their tenth WAFCON title. The D'Tigress women's basketball team won the AfroBasket championship for the seventh time. The Super Eagles qualified for the FIFA World Cup play-offs. Wrestling produced 10 gold medals at the African Championships. Weightlifting yielded 18 continental medals. Taekwondo's Anyanacho Elizabeth alone claimed three gold and two silver medals.

The African Military Games, hosted in Abuja, produced a haul of 231 medals alone — 114 of them gold. The Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh contributed 30 more. In a single year, Nigeria competed meaningfully across disciplines that many assumed were outside the nation's reach.

The Human Capital Revolution

Medals and investment figures are visible metrics. Behind them lies a less visible but equally consequential transformation in



▲ Simidele Adeagbo and Kewe King representing Nigeria for their official 2-woman Bobsleigh World Cup debut in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy

how Nigeria identifies, develops and supports its athletes.

The talent pipeline has been redesigned from the ground up. The National Youth Games and the CAA African U18/U20 Championships – hosted in Abeokuta – now serve as primary platforms for nationwide talent discovery and data building. The most promising young athletes identified through these platforms are inducted into the Invited Junior Athletes scheme, monitored continuously, trained formally, and brought to compete as a 38th 'state' at the National Sports Festival.

The apex of this pipeline is the newly established Elite Athletes and Podium Performance Board, which provides targeted high-performance support to Nigeria's most competitive athletes. The Board coordinates directly with the revitalised National Institute of Sports, repositioned under Olopade as the institutional engine of capacity building across the ecosystem.

International bilateral training programmes with China and Europe have been fully operationalised, and scholarships for Nigerian student-athletes have been secured at the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences and partner institutions in China and Cuba.

Nigeria On The World Stage: Hosting Rights And Global Ambition

If investment is one measure of a nation's sporting credibility, the right to host major international events is another. The NSC has in the past year secured or renewed hosting rights across a remarkable range of events.

Most significantly, Nigeria has been awarded the hosting rights for the 2nd African School Games in 2027 – beating strong bids from South Africa and Kenya in a competitive process concluded in Algiers. The Commission has also submitted a formal Host Offer for the 2034 Commonwealth Games, a declaration of long-term intent that would have seemed implausible five years ago.

Within the year under review, Nigeria hosted the African Military Games, the E1 Lagos GP – Africa's first all-electric powerboat race – the 14th African Armwrestling Championship, the West Africa Para Games, the African Cycling Championship, a World Table Tennis Contender event, and more than a dozen other national and international competitions. Cities from Abuja to Lagos, Abeokuta to Jos, Babcock to Cross River, became temporary capitals of sport.

The Road Ahead: 2026 And Beyond

Olopade is candid about the challenges that remain. Facility decline accumulated over decades of underfunding will not be reversed in a single budget cycle. Global inflation has complicated logistics and equipment procurement. And legacy governance resistance – the institutional inertia of officials who benefitted from the old opaque order – has not vanished overnight.

But the roadmap the NSC has published for 2026 and beyond is notably ambitious. The MKO Abiola Stadium upgrade is slated for completion in Q1 2026. A National High-Performance Centre is planned, community mini-stadia are being constructed nationwide, aligned explicitly with programmes to reduce the numbers of young Nigerians not in education, employment or training.

On the digital front, a nationwide deployment of the Sports Information

Management System – covering athlete passports, federation licensing and performance analytics – is underway, with AI-enabled talent identification as a stated medium-term goal. SIPO is to be permanently institutionalised as the NSC's economic engine, with the ambition of financing up to 40% of sports development independent of government allocations.

The Commission is also actively bidding for the African Games 2031, AFCON hosting rights, and other continental championships – moves that would cement Nigeria's position as the continent's premier sports host nation

What Success Looks Like

It is tempting, when reviewing the achievements of this past year, to treat them as a destination. Olopade is determined they be understood as a departure point.

"We inherited a sector that had been largely treated as a cost centre rather than an asset class," he reflects.

"The work of this year has been to change that perception – not just in boardrooms, not just in government, but in the mind of every Nigerian who has watched a D'Tigress championship, or seen a bobsled pilot carry our flag down a slope in Italy, or heard that a Nigerian teenager is now the world's number one Scrabble player. When the nation believes in its own potential across every discipline, that is when the transformation becomes irreversible."

The NSC's first year of Strategic Renaissance has delivered more than most thought possible. The real measure of its success, however, will be written not in this year's medal haul but in the depth of the institution being built – and whether, long after today's headlines have faded, Nigerian athletes continue to arrive at world stages ready to compete, and to win.

Repositioning NIPOST for Nigeria's Digital Economy



▲ Tola Odeyemi
Postmaster General of Nigerian Postal Service (NPOST)

When Tola Odeyemi assumed office as Postmaster General of NIPOST, she inherited more than an institution in need of reform – she inherited a public trust deficit. In this candid conversation, she reflects on what it truly takes to transform a legacy organisation: leading people before systems, sequencing change without creating chaos, and building institutional credibility one kept promise at a time. From cashless operations to cross-border e-commerce, Odeyemi charts a bold course for a postal service that aims to be the backbone of Nigeria's digital economy.

You assumed office at a time when NIPOST was undergoing significant reform. Reflecting on your journey so far, what has been the most defining leadership lesson in steering a legacy institution through transformation?

The most defining lesson has been understanding that transformation is fundamentally a human challenge before it is a technical or structural one. When I assumed office, NIPOST had the infrastructure of an institution built for a different era, a workforce accustomed to certain rhythms of work, and a public that had largely moved on without us. The temptation in that environment is to focus on systems and technologies as the

primary levers of change. But I quickly realised that unless the people within NIPOST at every level could see themselves in the vision of a transformed institution, no investment in technology or process would hold.

So the first and most enduring lesson has been: lead the culture, and the reforms will follow. We had to help staff understand not just what was changing, but why it mattered and what role they would play in the new NIPOST. That required sustained internal communication, visible leadership presence in the field, and a genuine commitment to carrying people along rather than issuing directives from Abuja.

The second lesson is about sequencing. Transformation fatigue is real. If you try to change everything at once in a legacy institution, you create chaos and resistance. We were deliberate about identifying early wins, such as operational improvements and revenue milestones that staff could feel and the public could see, and using those as foundations for the deeper structural reforms. Credibility, once earned through small victories, gives you the political and institutional capital to tackle the harder battles.

Finally, I have learned the importance of protecting institutional memory while disrupting institutional inertia. NIPOST has knowledge, networks, and reach that no startup or private logistics company can replicate overnight. Our mandate extends to the last mile to communities where commercial operators find it economically irrational to go. That is not a weakness to be apologised for; it is a strategic asset to be leveraged. The leadership lesson is to genuinely believe in the institution you are rebuilding.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not acknowledge that none of this reform journey happens in a vacuum. The ongoing transformation of NIPOST has been pursued with the active support and political will of the Honourable Minister of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, Dr. Bosun Tijani,

whose commitment to repositioning Nigeria's digital and communications infrastructure has provided the enabling environment for our work. Equally, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda and his direct mandate to the Minister to transform NIPOST as part of Nigeria's broader digital economy ambitions have given this reform programme the institutional authority and urgency it requires. When a Postmaster General can point to a clear presidential directive and a Minister who champions the mission, what is possible changes. It shortens timelines, unlocks resources, and signals to both internal and external stakeholders that this transformation is not optional. That backing has been, and continues to be, indispensable.

In your engagements across the country, what have Nigerians told you they expect most from a revitalised and modern postal service?

Nigerians have been remarkably consistent in what they ask of us, and their expectations are neither unreasonable nor beyond our reach. Three themes dominate every engagement, whether I am in a state capital or a rural local government headquarters.

First, they want reliability. Not necessarily speed, though speed matters, but the knowledge that when they use NIPOST, something will actually happen. For too long, the postal service has been synonymous with uncertainty. People want to know that their parcels will arrive, their documents will be delivered, and their transactions will be processed. Reliability is the foundation on which everything else is built.

Second, and increasingly prominent given Nigeria's demographic reality, is digital integration. Nigerians, especially the under-35 majority, want to interact with postal services through their phones. They want to track shipments in real time, pay online without visiting a counter, and access services remotely. This is not a luxury demand; it is a baseline expectation in an economy

where mobile penetration is transforming every sector.

Third, and perhaps most poignant in the conversations I have had with ordinary citizens, is the desire for NIPOST to be a trusted government interface at the community level. The post office is often the most accessible government facility in many communities. People want it to be a place where they can not only send and receive mail, but also access financial services, government identity documents, utility payments, and social protection disbursements. They want the post office to work for them again.

These expectations are realistic, and they anchor our reform agenda. We are not just rebuilding a postal service; we are rebuilding a public trust infrastructure.

And I am proud to say that trust is already being earned, not just from Nigerians, but also from the international community living in Nigeria. A recent example that clearly shows this is our partnership with the Embassy of Bangladesh in Nigeria to support the diaspora voting process for Bangladesh's recently concluded presidential elections. NIPOST handled the entire logistical process: collecting, distributing, and securely dispatching ballot materials on behalf of the Bangladeshi expatriate community in Nigeria. This was a sovereign civic exercise conducted under the authority of a foreign government, entrusted to NIPOST because of our national reach, operational reliability, and the institutional confidence we have been building. When a foreign embassy chooses a postal service to manage the ballots of its citizens abroad, it's not just a routine contract; it's a statement of trust. We plan to honor that trust and to strengthen it.

Beyond technology upgrades, what internal reforms have been most critical in improving operational efficiency and accountability within NIPOST?

Technology without governance reform is decoration. The internal reforms that have moved the needle most for NIPOST have been structural and behavioural, not digital. The transition to cashless operations across our post



offices has been transformative for accountability. When cash is removed from daily transactions, the structural conditions for both deliberate and inadvertent leakage are significantly diminished. This reform was not welcomed universally when announced; change of this nature rarely is. But its impact on transparency and revenue assurance has been demonstrable.

We have also made significant investments in performance management frameworks, shifting from a culture in which presence was equated with performance to one in which outputs and outcomes are measured. This involved rebuilding our internal reporting systems, enhancing supervisory capacity at the zonal and district levels, and establishing genuine accountability pathways where underperformance has consequences and excellence is acknowledged.

One of the most consequential operational reforms has been the complete redesign of our national mail routes. NIPOST inherited a routing architecture that was built for a different era, one that did not reflect Nigeria's current commercial geography, infrastructure realities, or e-commerce demand patterns. We have gone back to first principles, mapping origin-to-destination flows, identifying bottlenecks in our hub-and-spoke network, and restructuring routes to reduce transit times and improve reliability. This is unglamorous work, but it is foundational.

You cannot build a modern logistics operation on top of an irrational routing structure.

Alongside route redesign, we have moved decisively to secure direct operational agreements with major international carriers. We have established agreements with Delta Air Lines, Lufthansa, and Air France/KLM for the movement of international mail and parcels, arrangements that give NIPOST dedicated capacity, predictable schedules, and the service levels that cross-border e-commerce demands.

We have also secured a partnership with Ethiopian Airlines, whose cargo network across the African continent is unrivalled and whose Lagos hub provides a critical gateway to intra-African postal flows. On the domestic side, we have secured a direct agreement with Greater Washington, a domestic airline cargo operator, that provides dedicated air cargo capacity for time-sensitive mail and parcel movements within Nigeria, which is a meaningful upgrade from the ad hoc arrangements that previously governed our domestic air logistics. We are also working with the Nigerian Railway Corporation to leverage rail infrastructure to move mail and parcels along key corridors. It is a cost-effective, high-capacity complement to road logistics, particularly for bulk movements between our major hubs. We have also moved to expand our road fleet by procuring additional trucks, targeting faster turnaround times on last-mile and inter-city routes, and reducing our dependence on third-party haulage, which has historically been unreliable.

Human capital development has been a quiet but critical reform priority. NIPOST's workforce carries the weight of years of underinvestment in skills development. We have worked with partners to rebuild training capacity, with

particular emphasis on digital literacy, customer service orientation, and the operational competencies required by our new service lines.

I also want to be direct about the scale of our ambition, because it goes beyond Nigeria's borders. We are actively developing both ground and air cargo corridors across the West African sub-region, with the objective of positioning NIPOST as the regional logistics hub for West African e-commerce. The economic rationale is compelling: West Africa is a market of over 400 million people, with rapidly growing digital commerce activity, yet lacks a reliable, integrated postal and logistics backbone that connects the sub-region efficiently. NIPOST's scale, our international carrier agreements, our relationship with the ECOWAS institutional framework, and our domestic infrastructure give us a credible platform to fill that gap. We intend to be the network through which West African e-commerce moves, not merely a Nigerian operator with regional aspirations, but the designated infrastructure of sub-regional trade.

Finally, procurement and financial management reforms have been essential. We inherited significant legacy liabilities and inefficient contracting arrangements. Strengthening internal controls, renegotiating vendor relationships, and improving financial forecasting have created fiscal headroom that we are reinvesting directly into service delivery and infrastructure expansion.

Earlier this year, NIPOST announced a nationwide transition to cashless operations across post offices to enhance transparency and efficiency. Could you provide an update on the implementation and its impact so far?

The cashless transition is one of the reforms I am most proud of, precisely because it was difficult and we pushed through. At inception, we faced both infrastructure constraints, POS coverage, and network reliability in remote areas, as well as cultural resistance that should not be underestimated in an organisation accustomed to cash handling.

Implementation has proceeded in phases, prioritising our highest-volume post offices first, then progressively

extending to smaller outlets. We have worked closely with technology partners to ensure POS infrastructure is maintained and replaced promptly when it fails, because downtime at a cashless counter is simply a queue driver for informal workarounds. What was key to this was reactivating our agency banking license, which allows cash to be brought to our counter but converted to a digital payment for transactions.

The revenue impact has been measurable. We have seen improvements in daily revenue remittances to the central accounts, reductions in unexplained variances between processed transactions and received revenues, and a more reliable audit trail that strengthens our compliance and oversight capacity.



Customer experience has been mixed, as is honest to acknowledge. For customers in urban centres with strong mobile and card infrastructure, the transition has been smooth and often preferred. For older customers or those in lower-connectivity environments, we continue to work on transition support. Feedback mechanisms are in place, and we actively monitor complaints. Overall, the direction is correct, and the trajectory is positive.

NIPOST is collaborating on the National Addressing System with a digital postcode framework. How will this system improve delivery accuracy and broader government service access?

The National Addressing System and our Digital Alphanumeric Postcode Project are among the most consequential infrastructure contributions NIPOST can make to Nigeria's development, and

arguably the least understood in terms of their full potential.

At the most immediate level, a standardised, digital addressing system solves a fundamental operational problem: Nigeria lacks a reliable, machine-readable address infrastructure. That gap affects not just postal delivery but also emergency services, financial inclusion, electoral management, land titling, and every government service that requires the spatial identification of citizens or properties. Our postcode framework creates the underlying geographic reference layer on which all of these applications depend.

For NIPOST specifically, the operational benefits are significant. Accurate

postcodes mean logistics operators, e-commerce platforms, and field staff can route deliveries efficiently, reducing failed deliveries, missed collections, and the customer service burden they generate. In a country of Nigeria's size and geographic diversity, routing accuracy is not a marginal efficiency gain: it is the difference between a functional and non-functional logistics operation.

For the government more broadly, the addressing system enables a major expansion of service reach. Social protection payments, voter registration, health interventions, and census data collection all become more precise when addresses are standardised. NIPOST's national network, our staff, our post offices, and our community relationships position us as the natural implementation partner for rolling out and maintaining this infrastructure.

We are in active collaboration with the National Addressing Council, which is chaired by His Excellency, the Vice President, to ensure NIPOST's postcode framework integrates with national systems rather than operating in parallel. The goal is a single, authoritative addressing infrastructure that every institution, public and private, can rely on.

The launch of a digital licensing regime is intended to streamline logistics and help businesses track licence status easily. How will this initiative accelerate growth and formalisation within the broader logistics ecosystem?

Nigeria's logistics sector has enormous commercial energy but significant structural fragmentation. Thousands of operators, from motorcycle dispatch riders to mid-size courier companies, function in a largely informal regulatory environment. That informality is not simply an administrative inconvenience; it creates real barriers to investment, insurance coverage, sector financing, and consumer protection.

The digital licensing regime addresses this directly by creating a transparent, accessible, and enforceable framework for licensing logistics operators. When a business can obtain, renew, and track the status of its licence digitally, and when that licence is publicly verifiable, the compliance burden falls, the incentive to formalise rises, and the regulatory environment becomes more predictable for all participants.

For smaller operators, in particular, digital licensing opens doors that were previously closed. A formally licensed operator can access credit facilities,

enter into contracts with e-commerce platforms, and seek insurance coverage in ways that are unavailable to informal actors. These are not trivial economic benefits; they are the pathways through which micro and small logistics businesses become sustainable enterprises.

For the broader ecosystem, a more formalised sector means better data, better enforcement of quality and safety standards, and a more level competitive playing field. Large, compliant operators have consistently advocated for this reform precisely because regulatory grey zones are often exploited by actors who undercut standards.

NIPOST's role as the regulatory authority in this space is not about creating bureaucratic friction. It is about building the institutional foundations for a world-class logistics industry in Nigeria, one that can attract investment, integrate with international supply chains, and serve Nigerian consumers with confidence.

With the expansion of e-commerce in Nigeria, how is NIPOST strengthening last-mile delivery and positioning itself as a backbone for national logistics?

E-commerce is perhaps the most significant commercial development reshaping logistics globally, and Nigeria's trajectory is no exception. The growth of digital retail, driven by platforms large and small and accelerated by mobile payment penetration, is creating delivery volumes that the private sector, particularly at the last mile, cannot efficiently serve at scale across Nigeria's full geographic footprint.

NIPOST's strategic position in this landscape is defined by a network no

commercial logistics operator has matched: post offices and postal agents in all 36 states, 774 local government areas, and thousands of communities where commercial last-mile delivery is simply not economically viable for private operators. That reach is our fundamental competitive advantage in e-commerce.

We are actively investing in the operational infrastructure to realise that advantage. This includes upgrading post offices to serve as smart-locker locations, an increasingly important model in markets where home-delivery addresses are unreliable or inaccessible. It includes building sorting and distribution capacity at key regional hubs to improve speed and reliability. And it includes technology integrations with e-commerce platforms that enable seamless tracking and fulfilment workflows.

We are also forging partnerships with private logistics operators that recognise NIPOST as a last-mile partner rather than a competitor. The market is large enough to accommodate multiple models, and for operators whose commercial density is concentrated in urban areas, NIPOST's rural and semi-urban reach is a complementary capability rather than a threat.

An important aspect of our international e-commerce strategy is NIPOST's involvement in the Postal Prosperity Zone. The PPZ initiative was created by the Universal Postal Union. It is a framework designed to reconnect designated postal operators with the global cross-border e-commerce flows that, in recent years, have shifted to commercial logistics networks. It does this by integrating commercial suppliers, global marketplaces, and their logistics partners directly into the UPU's standardized postal IT system, providing them with a single interface, a single label, and a single integration point to access national postal networks worldwide.

For NIPOST, participation in the PPZ is more than symbolic; it positions us as a strong, digitally connected partner for international e-commerce platforms that need last-mile delivery across Nigeria's 36 states and FCT. It grants access to cross-border parcel volumes that now bypass the postal channel entirely and



upgrades our customs and fulfillment infrastructure to meet the standards required by global marketplace operators. Nigeria's e-commerce growth is not only local diaspora commerce, but also cross-border trade with neighboring markets, and inbound international retail is all expanding quickly. The PPZ provides NIPOST with the tools to seize this opportunity within a compliant, standardized, and globally recognized framework. To accomplish this, we are working on relevant licensing with the Nigerian Customs Service and expanding our warehousing infrastructure.

The goal is to position NIPOST as the essential infrastructure layer of Nigerian e-commerce logistics, not just domestically, but as Nigeria's designated gateway into the global postal network for cross-border digital trade.

NIPOST announced a logistics support initiative offering discounted services to MSMEs in partnership with SMEDAN. How has this programme progressed, and what impact is it having on small businesses nationwide?

The MSME logistics initiative with SMEDAN is a product of a conviction I hold deeply: that NIPOST's mandate is not simply commercial. We are a public institution with a public purpose, and the health of Nigeria's small-business economy is indeed a concern of ours.

Early feedback from SMEDAN and beneficiary enterprises has been positive, particularly in sectors such as fashion, food processing, and artisanal goods, where e-commerce channels are rapidly becoming the primary sales channel. We are tracking impact through business outcome data, sales volumes, geographic reach, and customer retention, rather than just transaction counts, because the policy objective is business growth, not just parcel volume.

This initiative is also an important proof of concept that NIPOST can serve as a development infrastructure rather than merely a commercial service provider. We intend to deepen and expand it as we gather evidence of impact.

The NIPOST Agro-Infrastructure and Logistics Initiative (NAILI) was introduced to address post-harvest losses and strengthen agricultural

logistics. What milestones have been achieved since its launch?

NAILI represents one of NIPOST's most ambitious programmatic expansions, and one with direct implications for food security, rural livelihoods, and the structural transformation of Nigeria's agricultural economy. This program stems from the simple fact that post-harvest losses are a LOGISTICS problem.

Post-harvest losses in Nigeria are a national economic tragedy. Conservative estimates suggest that between 30 and 50 percent of certain perishable crops are lost between farm and market due to inadequate cold chain infrastructure, poor road connectivity, and fragmented market linkages. NAILI is premised on the insight that NIPOST's physical network, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, can serve as the logistical backbone for connecting smallholder producers to markets more efficiently.

Since the initiative's launch, we have made progress on several fronts. We have identified and are developing key post offices and sorting facilities to serve as cold storage and consolidation hubs in agriculturally productive corridors. We have engaged with state governments, agricultural cooperatives, and commodity associations to build the institutional linkages that connect NIPOST's logistics infrastructure to actual agricultural supply chains. And we have piloted route optimisation for produce movements on selected corridors.

The milestones ahead are ambitious: operational cold-chain hubs in priority agricultural states and measurable reductions in post-harvest losses in our pilot corridors (Jos and Makurdi). We are building toward them with the seriousness they deserve.

NIPOST introduced an automated payment solution for inbound international parcels to streamline customs and improve customer experience. How is this initiative performing, and what improvements have users observed?

Our Paystack-driven automated payment system for inbound international parcels addresses a long-standing friction point that has led to a poor customer experience at the interface between NIPOST and the Nigeria Customs Service.

The traditional process, involving long queues, manual assessments, cash payments, and delayed releases, caused significant customer frustration, operational inefficiencies, and revenue loss.

The automated system digitizes the payment and assessment process, allowing customers to pay customs duties and NIPOST handling fees electronically, receive real-time notifications when parcels are ready for pickup, and increasingly, arrange homedelivery without visiting a counter.

Since launch, performance has clearly improved in release times. The time between parcel arrival and customer pickup has significantly shortened for users who use the digital pathway. Complaint volumes related to inbound parcel processing have decreased. Additionally, the digital payments audit trail has enhanced revenue assurance for both NIPOST and Customs.

Customer feedback has highlighted several areas for continued improvement, including notification reliability, the user experience of the payment interface on lower-end smartphones, and the resolution process for disputed assessments. We take this feedback seriously and are actively iterating on the system.

The broader significance of this initiative extends beyond convenience. Nigeria receives substantial inbound parcel volumes driven by diaspora commerce and international e-commerce growth. A streamlined, transparent customs payment process is essential to sustaining and growing those flows, and to ensuring that NIPOST is positioned as a facilitator of international trade, not an obstacle to it. We are advancing this digitization process by integrating with NCS's B'Odogwu clearance platform.

Partnerships have been central to your reform agenda. How is NIPOST leveraging collaborations with government agencies, private logistics operators, and development partners to expand service reach?

Partnerships are not a supplement to our reform agenda — they are constitutive of it. NIPOST cannot achieve the transformation we have set out to accomplish through internal resources

and institutional will alone. The scale of the ambition requires external capacity, investment, technology, and expertise that partnerships bring.

With government agencies, our most critical partnerships are with institutions whose mandates intersect with ours in ways that can create compound impact. The collaboration with SMEDAN on MSME logistics, with the relevant ministries on the National Addressing

System, and with Customs on parcel processing automation are all examples of interagency collaboration that expand what either institution could achieve independently. We are also deepening relationships with NIBSS, NIMC, the CBN, and state governments to leverage NIPOST's network for financial inclusion and digital identity objectives.

With private sector operators, we have made what I regard as one of the most structurally significant decisions of this reform era. The Honorable Minister of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy obtained approval from the Federal Executive Council for a new operator partnership model for NIPOST, a framework that transitions our extensive network of over 1,200 post office locations toward a tiered, private-sector-operated structure. Under this model, private sector operators will take on the day-to-day management of individual post offices under NIPOST's brand, standards, and oversight. This is not privatisation. NIPOST retains ownership of all physical assets, direct control of our major hubs and international mail processing infrastructure, and its regulatory authority over the entire ecosystem. This model has been successful for many designated operators globally, including in the United Kingdom and Australia. It would be the first of its kind in Africa, and we are excited to pilot it. Critically, it solves a problem that has constrained NIPOST for decades: the gap between our geographic footprint and our operational capacity. With private sector partners funding and running individual post offices, we can extend real service quality to all 774 local government areas without requiring commensurate government capital expenditure.

With development partners, including multilateral institutions, bilateral



development agencies, and international postal bodies, we are accessing technical assistance, capacity building, and in some cases concessional financing that accelerates infrastructure investment. Nigeria's postal transformation is of interest to the development community precisely because of the public service dimensions of what we are building: financial inclusion, rural connectivity, and access to government services.

Managing partnerships of this complexity requires internal capacity, a dedicated partnerships function, clear accountability frameworks, and honest performance assessment. We are building that capacity as a permanent institutional feature, not a project-by-project arrangement.

Looking ahead, what key indicators — whether in service quality, revenue growth, infrastructure expansion, or customer trust — will define a successfully transformed NIPOST over the next five years?

When I reflect on what success looks like for NIPOST over the next five years, I think in terms of four dimensions that together constitute a transformed institution.

The first is financial sustainability. A successfully transformed NIPOST will be an institution that generates sufficient revenue from its commercial operations to fund its service delivery mandate without chronic dependence on government subvention. This does not mean becoming a purely commercial entity. Our public service obligations are non-negotiable, but it does mean building the revenue streams, cost discipline, and asset utilisation that make us financially resilient. I want to see double-digit

annual revenue growth sustained over multiple financial years, driven by new service lines and improved operational performance, rather than by fee adjustments alone.

The second dimension is service reach and reliability. Success means that a Nigerian in Borno State and a Nigerian in Lagos can access the same core postal, logistics, and government service interfaces through NIPOST, and can trust that what they send or receive will arrive as promised. Our net promoter score, our measure of customer trust and advocacy, should be among the highest of any government institution. That is an ambitious target. It is also the right one.

Third is infrastructure quality. Post offices should, within five years, be environments where Nigerians are proud to transact their affairs. Modern, clean, digitally equipped, and staffed by well-trained professionals. Our hub-and-spoke logistics network should be capable of supporting e-commerce fulfilment at the national scale required by Nigeria's digital economy.

Finally, and this is perhaps the measure I care most about, is institutional credibility. NIPOST should be an institution that the government turns to as a trusted implementation partner for national programmes, that the private sector seeks out as a logistics and infrastructure collaborator, and that the public regards with confidence. That credibility, once earned, is the most durable indicator of successful transformation. It cannot be manufactured. It has to be built, slowly, through every interaction and every kept promise.

Moniepoint Informal Economy Report 2025

Key Insights on Nigeria's Informal Business

38% 

Young Entrepreneurs
(Age 25 - 34)

85% 

Sole Proprietorships
(Solo Operation)

65% 

35% 

Business Ownership

Employment Impact

40%

Employ Labour

75% of those who hire have between 1-3 employees

27% 27% of businesses are 5+ years old

Daily Revenue & Profit

44%

earn < ₦20,000 daily

70%

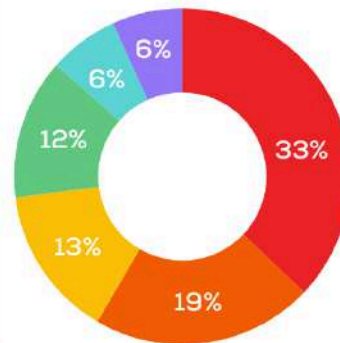
earn < ₦50,000 daily

Gender Gap

41% women earn less than ₦10,000 daily

34% men earn less than ₦10,000 daily

Regional Concentration



1 in 6 informal businesses = Lagos (16%)

- South West
- South South
- South East
- North Central
- North West
- North East

Business Growth & Costs

65%

experienced a revenue increase

47%

saw a profit increase

79% faced increased operational costs

Top Reasons: Supplier prices ↑
Transportation ↑ | Naira depreciation

Savings & Financial Discipline

74%

save money regularly

29%

save weekly via cooperatives

69% save < ₦50,000 monthly

42% savings would last less than 1 month

Business Records & Credit

75% track business records (structured or unstructured)

38% track mentally (no written records)

54% offer credit to their customers (mostly on a conditional basis)

Credit Behaviour

51% Never taken loans

40% Fear inability to repay

Loan Sources

Digital lenders (**22%**)
Commercial banks (**20%**)

Only 6% secure loans greater than ₦1 million

Payment Methods



Cash remains the dominant payment method

Transfer: 2nd most common

Cards: Least common

Bulk Purchases: Prefer transfers (safety with larger amounts)

Survey methodology based on Nigeria's informal economy definition: Non-registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC)

Data Source: Moniepoint Informal Economy Report 2026 | Partnership with International Finance Corporation (IFC) & Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade & Investment

Driving Renewed Hope: How Pi-CNG & EV is Rewriting Nigeria's Energy and Transport Story

When Nigeria removed fuel subsidies in 2023, the decision reshaped the nation's economic landscape overnight. It was a necessary reform, but for millions of Nigerians, it also meant higher transport fares, rising business costs, and increased pressure on household incomes.

At that pivotal moment, the question was not whether reform was needed. It was how to ensure that reform translated into relief, opportunity, and long-term stability. The Presidential Initiative on Compressed Natural Gas and Electric Vehicles (Pi-CNG & EV) emerged as that answer.

Rather than offering a temporary fix, Pi-CNG & EV set out to address the structural roots of Nigeria's transport cost crisis by harnessing one of the country's greatest untapped assets: natural gas.

From Policy to Personal Impact

At its heart, Pi-CNG & EV is about easing everyday burdens.

For commercial drivers, it means spending significantly less on fuel and keeping more of their daily earnings. For commuters, it means more stable and affordable fares. For small businesses that depend on transportation, it means relief from the volatility that drives up the cost of goods and services.

Across cities and communities, the shift to CNG is quietly transforming daily life. Transport operators who once struggled with unpredictable fuel expenses are finding greater cost stability. Mechanics are acquiring new technical skills that position them for relevance in a changing energy economy. Entrepreneurs are entering new value chains tied to gas conversion, distribution, and infrastructure support.

What began as an economic response is steadily becoming an ecosystem of opportunity. More than 6,000 technicians have been trained nationwide, creating



▲ **Ismaeel Ahmed**
Executive Chairman, Presidential Compressed Natural Gas Initiative (PICNG)

a new skilled workforce within Nigeria's emerging green economy.

Building Confidence in a New Energy Path

Energy transitions are not only technical; they are behavioural. Early skepticism about CNG, concerns about safety, reliability, and accessibility, required deliberate engagement and education.

Recognising that rapid growth must be matched by safety and accountability, Pi-CNG & EV launched the Nigerian Gas Vehicle Monitoring System (NGVMS). Developed in collaboration with key regulatory bodies, including the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA), Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON),

Nigeria Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDC), and the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the NGVMS provides a digital verification and monitoring framework for CNG vehicles nationwide.

The platform enables real-time data tracking of gas consumption, enhances regulatory oversight, prevents unlicensed operations, and opens pathways for carbon credit opportunities. It also creates innovative financing possibilities by allowing structured repayment models tied to fuel purchases.

Complementing this is the development of 86 national safety and technical standards, ensuring quality control across the value chain.

Through structured training programmes, public sensitisation campaigns, and visible deployment of CNG-powered buses and vehicles, Pi-CNG & EV has steadily built public trust. And as confidence grows, so does adoption. What once felt unfamiliar is becoming normalised. CNG stations are no longer rare sights, and converted vehicles are increasingly part of everyday traffic.

This cultural shift may prove to be one of the initiative's most enduring achievements.

Economic Relief with Environmental Responsibility

While the immediate goal of Pi-CNG &



▲ EV bus launch



Pi-CNG

Making Transportation Cheaper and Cleaner

100,000+ Vehicles Converted

From petrol and diesel to cleaner Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) solutions nationwide.



58+ Refuelling Stations

Operational across **28 states**, expanding access to cleaner and more affordable transport fuel.

58+ Refuelling Stations



Operational across **28 states**, expanding access to cleaner and more affordable transport fuel.



99,700 Jobs Created

Direct and indirect employment generated through conversion centres, logistics, and the energy transition ecosystem.

Fleet Deployment

Deployment of CNG buses, tricycles, and electric buses into public and commercial transport networks across Nigeria.



Fleet Mobility

Launch of **40 Electric Buses** under the Pi-CNG & EV programme to diversify Nigeria's clean transport future.



1,125

Technicians Trained

Auto-CNG technicians trained nationwide, supporting thousands of new jobs in the clean transport sector.

Additional Achievements



\$2 Billion+ Investments Secured

Private sector investment attracted into Nigeria's CNG and EV infrastructure value chain.



93,845 Conversion Kits Procured

Strengthening Nigeria's national capacity for vehicle conversion.



337+ Conversion Centres

Rapid expansion of conversion capacity nationwide.



Renewed Hope Mass Transit Scheme

Affordable transport solutions delivering free and discounted fares to millions of Nigerians now transitioning into a sustainable commercial transport model.

▼ Courtesy Visit to NMDPRA



EV was economic cushioning, its long-term impact extends further.

CNG burns cleaner than petrol and diesel, reducing harmful emissions and contributing to improved air quality in densely populated cities. By lowering the carbon intensity of transport, the initiative aligns Nigeria with global clean energy trends while serving domestic priorities.

The introduction of digital monitoring systems also opens doors to carbon credit opportunities and data-driven planning thereby positioning Nigeria to participate more actively in global sustainability frameworks.

In this way, Pi-CNG & EV connects local economic relief with global environmental responsibility.

Supporting the Backbone of the Economy

Beyond passenger vehicles, the initiative recognises that Nigeria's supply chains - the trucks that carry food, construction materials, and essential goods - are central to economic stability.

By enabling heavy-duty vehicles to adopt blended fuel systems that reduce diesel dependence, Pi-CNG & EV is helping to lower operational costs in logistics and distribution. Over time, this contributes to moderating inflationary pressures and improving the affordability of goods across markets.

The ripple effect extends far beyond fuel stations. It reaches farms, factories, construction sites, and households.

A Model of Coordinated Reform

Large-scale national change requires coordination across institutions. Pi-CNG & EV has brought together regulatory

agencies, financial institutions, private investors, transport unions, and state governments under a shared framework.

This alignment has strengthened standards, accelerated infrastructure deployment, and improved access to financing solutions that make vehicle conversion attainable rather than aspirational.

Innovative credit programmes now allow drivers and fleet operators to transition without overwhelming upfront costs. Structured repayment models ensure sustainability while expanding inclusion.

What might once have been a fragmented effort has evolved into a coordinated national strategy.

The initiative has also mobilised over \$2 billion in investments across infrastructure, manufacturing, and distribution that indicates a strong private-sector confidence in Nigeria's gas mobility future.

Looking Ahead: A Hybrid Energy Future

Pi-CNG & EV is not positioned as an endpoint, but as a bridge.

As Nigeria builds toward a broader clean

mobility future, the initiative complements emerging electric vehicle infrastructure and renewable energy integration. Together, these pathways form a hybrid model that reflects Nigeria's unique realities, leveraging gas abundance today while preparing for deeper electrification tomorrow.

The goal is not merely substitution of one fuel for another. It is the creation of a diversified, resilient energy ecosystem that supports growth, innovation, and long-term affordability.

More Than an Energy Programme

Ultimately, Pi-CNG & EV represents something larger than fuel conversion.

It reflects a belief that reform can be people-centered. That economic adjustment can be paired with opportunity. That domestic resources can power domestic progress.

From drivers saving more of their income, to technicians building new careers, to investors committing capital to local infrastructure, the initiative is reshaping how Nigeria thinks about energy and mobility.

It demonstrates that cleaner energy can also be cheaper energy. That sustainability and economic relief can move in the same direction. And that national challenges, when met with strategic leadership and coordinated action, can spark lasting renewal.

Nigeria's energy story is still being written. But with Pi-CNG & EV, a new chapter has clearly begun. One that is grounded in measurable human impact, not just in policy ambition.



▲ Signing of MoU with YJT, China

Two Years Of Khalil Suleiman Halilu's Transformative Leadership At NASENI



▲ **Khalil Suleiman Halilu**
Executive Vice Chairman/CEO, NASENI

In two years of visionary leadership under Khalil Suleiman Halilu, the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI) has transitioned from a research-focused institution to a performance-driven technology transfer and commercialization hub. The Agency's reorientation aligns directly with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda for industrialization and technological self-reliance.

Since assuming office in September 2023 as the youngest Executive Vice Chairman/CEO in NASENI's history, Khalil Halilu has delivered measurable results: over 44 indigenous products developed and commercialized, 55 national projects implemented, more than 50 strategic partnerships signed, and over 30,000 direct jobs created. NASENI's presence now extends across all 36 states and the FCT, establishing it as the engine room of Nigeria's industrial renewal.

Upon assumption of office, the EVC initiated comprehensive institutional reforms to transform NASENI into a delivery-oriented organization. Key reforms include the creation of the Project Management Office (PMO) and Implementation Management Office (IMO) to strengthen accountability and execution. The deployment of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system enhanced transparency and efficiency across projects.

The Agency also introduced a results-based budgeting framework linking 100% of allocations to measurable deliverables. Five key policy frameworks now guide NASENI's operations:

1. Accelerated Technology Transfer and Adaptation Policy – to localize global technologies.
2. Green Economy Roadmap (ZECO) – to drive clean energy industrialization.
3. 3Cs Blueprint (Creation, Collaboration, Commercialization) – NASENI's operational philosophy.
4. Innovation-to-Commercialization Framework – bridging R&D and market delivery.
5. Gender and Youth Inclusion Policy – to mainstream inclusion in innovation and production.

Sectoral Interventions

Power Sector

NASENI's interventions in the power sector promote energy security, renewable access, and local capacity development. The Agency has domesticated the manufacturing of solar panels, LED bulbs, inverters, small hydro turbines, and smart prepaid meters.

- Solar Panels and Modules Manufacturing: Providing affordable renewable power alternatives.
- High Efficiency LED Energy Saving Bulbs and Lamps: Enhancing energy efficiency and cost reduction.
- NASENI Smart Prepaid Meter: Eliminating estimated billing and curbing energy theft.
- NASENI-HYCOM Small Hydro Power Project: Building indigenous capacity for SHP turbine production.
- Solar Streetlight Systems: Promoting sustainable and affordable lighting nationwide.

Transportation And Industrial Sector

Under Halilu's leadership, NASENI has advanced indigenous manufacturing in the transport sector.

- NASENI Made-in-Nigeria Motorcycle and KEKE NASENI: Introducing affordable transport options and reducing forex flight.
- CNG/LPG Auto Conversion Centre: Promoting cleaner, cost-effective transportation through alternative fuels.
- Reverse Engineering Programme: Establishing technical capacity for the conversion and repair of mobility systems.

Aviation Sector

NASENI has recorded a milestone in local aviation technology through the development of the Made-in-Nigeria H3 Ultralight Helicopter, in collaboration with the Caverton Offshore Group. This project enhances indigenous capacity and contributes to the vision of self-reliance in aviation technology.

Manufacturing Sector

The Agency continues to expand its manufacturing base with innovative products that address local and global market needs.

- NASENI Cookstove Plants: Producing clean cookstoves and biomass pellets to reduce CO₂ emissions.
- NASENI Troment Factory: Domestication of medical diagnostic kits production.
- Rotary Furnace and Bricks Moulding Machines: Strengthening local industrial capacity and technology adaptation.

Education Sector

NASENI's contributions to education aim to bridge theory and practical application in science and engineering.

- Educational Science Laboratory Equipment.

- Transmission Line Trainer and Power Electronics Kits.
- Solar Modular Trainer (Mobile Stand-Alone Power System).
- Establishment of Mini-Foundries in tertiary institutions to support engineering learning and research.

Agricultural Sector

NASENI's agricultural interventions directly contribute to President Tinubu's Food Security Agenda by supporting mechanized farming and rural industrialization.

- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for Agriculture.
- NASENI Organic Fertilizer and Liquid Fertilizer Plants.
- Smart Irrigation Pumps and Processing Machines.
- National Tractor Rehabilitation Programme.
- NASENI AgriTech Hub for research, innovation, and farmer support.

Technology And Digital Innovation

NASENI has taken major steps toward digital inclusion and technology self-sufficiency through its ICT and consumer electronics production lines.

- NASENI Laptop and Tablet production line to promote digital literacy.
- NASENI Innovation Hub and InnovateNaija programme to support youth innovators.
- Development of homegrown software for project tracking and enterprise operations.

Flagship Projects And National Impact

Some of NASENI's landmark projects include:

- 40-hectare Solar Industrial Park in Gora, Nasarawa State (4,000 jobs).
- CNG Reverse Engineering Centre, Abuja which trained hundreds of engineers.

- Irrigate Nigeria Project in Bauchi and Jigawa.
- NASENI-Caverton Technologies.
- Troment Diagnostic Factory, Abuja.
- National Asset Restoration Programme (1,000 tractors restored).

Strategic Partnerships And Global Collaboration

NASENI has entered over 50 strategic partnerships with local and international organizations. Local partners include REA, MECA, DICON, ICPC, and major universities. International collaborations span Haier, Chery, Caverton, Dongfeng, and China's Z-Park, covering EVs, solar technology, and agritech manufacturing.



National Footprint And Infrastructure Expansion

NASENI now operates 18 R&D institutes, six Centres of Excellence (95% completed), and new facilities such as the Agritech Centre in BUK and UNI Abuja, the UAV Centre in Kaduna, and the NASENI Showroom in Abuja. These expansions ensure the Agency's physical presence in all 36 states and the FCT.

Social Impact And Inclusion Programmes

NASENI's gender and youth empowerment initiatives include:

- **SheFly:** Empowering women in drone technology for agriculture.
- **DELT-Her:** Supporting young female engineers.

- **Reverse Japa Programme:** Mobilizing diaspora professionals for local innovation.
- **Nationwide Clean Cookstove Deployment:** Empowering over 10,000 women with access to clean energy.

Performance Metrics (2023-2025)

- Indigenous Products Commercialized: 44
- National Projects Being Implemented: 55
- Strategic Partnerships: 50+
- Policy Frameworks: 5
- Direct Jobs Created: 30,000+

- Indirect Jobs: 2,000,000+
- Women and Youth Empowered: 7,500+
- Assets Restored: 1,000+
- National Coverage: 36 States + FCT

From policy to action, NASENI under Khalil Suleiman Halilu has demonstrated that Nigeria possesses the capacity to build, innovate, and industrialize using homegrown technology. The Agency stands today as a symbol of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope vision, one that translates innovation into industry, policy into progress, and ideas into measurable impact.

NNPC Limited

Restructuring Nigeria's Oil Engine

Since July 2023, NNPC Limited has undergone structural, leadership, and fiscal reform at a pace unmatched in its 49-year history. A new GCEO, a landmark Executive Order, record production output, and commercial independence have repositioned the company as a reform flagship under President Tinubu's *Renewed Hope Agenda*.

<h3>355K bpd</h3> <p>Record daily output Dec 2025</p>	<h3>+52%</h3> <p>Production increase 2023→2025</p>	<h3>₦5.4T</h3> <p>Net profit FY 2025 (highest ever)</p>	<h3>₦0</h3> <p>Federal allocations drawn since 2023</p>
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Executive Order No. 9 · February 2026

President Tinubu signed the Executive Order on Direct Remittance of Oil & Gas Revenues on 13 February 2026, decisively correcting fiscal distortions embedded in the PIA 2021.

- **30% Management Fee Abolished:** NNPC's automatic retention from PSC profit oil/gas — paid directly to Federation Account.
- **30% Frontier Fund Scrapped:** Speculative inland basin deductions ended; future allocations via transparent appropriation.
- **Direct Remittance Mandated:** All royalty oil, tax oil, profit oil, and profit gas paid directly to FAAC — no intermediary.
- **Gas Flare Penalties Redirected:** MDGIF deductions suspended; penalties rerouted to Federation Account.
- **PIA Review Ordered:** A comprehensive stakeholder-led review of the PIA initiated by the President.

Why it matters

Under the PIA, only 40% of PSC profit oil reached FAAC. The Order restores full constitutional entitlement to federal, state, and local governments — directly boosting monthly FAAC allocations for all 36 states.

Leadership Reset · April 2025

President Tinubu dissolved the NNPC board, appointing Engr. Bashir Bayo Ojulari (former MD, Shell Nigeria E&P) as GCEO with a mandate to restore transparency and boost production.

2025 Operational Highlights

- **Record Output:** 355,000 bpd on 1 Dec 2025 — highest in 36 years. Driven by Madu First Oil, Soku optimisation & Akpo West Start-up.
- **Monthly Reports:** NNPC resumed public monthly operational and financial disclosures — a major transparency milestone.
- **AKK Pipeline:** ANOH-OB3 commissioned; Niger River crossing completed under the \$2.8B Ajaokuta-Kaduna Kano gas pipeline.
- **1,000 "Tigers":** 1,000 young professionals recruited as part of a deliberate next-generation talent pipeline.
- **Subsidy Fully Removed:** Petrol subsidy completely dismantled by October 2024; NNPC now operates on full market pricing.

2026-2030 Strategic Targets

- **2M bpd by 2027:** Presidential mandate for national crude oil production, rising to 3M bpd by 2030.
- **Gas Master Plan:** 10 bcf/day gas output by 2027; underpinned by Nigeria's 210 Tcf of proven reserves.
- **\$60B Investment:** NNPC targets \$60B in new oil & gas investment by 2030. Shell committed \$20B in Jan 2026.
- **Possible NSE Listing:** A partial NNPC stock exchange listing is under consideration — a key governance milestone.

Inside the Mind of a Lawyer, Political Operator and Public Servant: The Femi Gbajabiamila Story

In the theatre of Nigerian politics, influence is rarely accidental. It is built over time through discipline, relationships, strategy, and an ability to understand both people and institutions. Few political figures in contemporary Nigeria embody this quiet but deliberate rise like Femi Gbajabiamila, the current Chief of Staff to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. His story is not one of sudden political fame but one of steady preparation, service, and leadership across different layers of public life. From his early days in private legal practice to two decades in the National Assembly and now to the centre of executive governance, Gbajabiamila's career reflects a deep understanding of how power works and how institutions must function to sustain democracy.

Born on June 25, 1962 in Lagos, Gbajabiamila grew up in an environment where public service was not unfamiliar. His father, the late Chief Abdul Raheem Gbajabiamila, served as a minister in Nigeria's First Republic, a legacy that exposed him early to the responsibilities and expectations that come with leadership. Yet before politics entered the picture, Gbajabiamila pursued the discipline of law. His educational journey took him through Igbobi College in Lagos before further studies at King William's College in the United Kingdom. He later returned to Nigeria to study law at the University of Lagos where he obtained his law degree and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 1984.

Like many ambitious Nigerian professionals of his generation, Gbajabiamila sought further legal training abroad. He moved to the United States where he attended the John Marshall Law School in Atlanta, Georgia, earning a Juris Doctor degree. After completing his studies, he was admitted to the Georgia Bar and began practicing law in Atlanta. Those years in legal practice would later influence his approach to politics. The courtroom taught him that arguments must be structured, persuasion must be



▲ Femi Gbajabiamila

thoughtful, and success often belongs to those who prepare the most carefully. These lessons would follow him into public service.

Despite building a promising career abroad, Gbajabiamila made the decision to return home at a time when Nigeria was rediscovering democratic governance. The return to civilian rule in 1999 opened a new chapter in the country's political life, particularly in the South West where progressive politics rooted in the philosophy of Chief Obafemi Awolowo continued to shape public discourse. Gbajabiamila aligned himself with this progressive tradition which would later evolve into the All Progressives Congress.

His entry into elective politics came in 2003 when he contested for a seat in the House of Representatives of Nigeria representing Surulere I Federal Constituency in Lagos State. Surulere is one of Lagos' most vibrant districts, a community known for its mix of culture, commerce, and politically conscious residents who pay close attention to the performance of their representatives. Winning the election was significant, but what followed was even more remarkable. Gbajabiamila would go on to represent Surulere in the House of Representatives for twenty consecutive years.

In a political environment where electoral victories are often uncertain,

such consistency reflects something deeper than political fortune. It reflected performance and connection with the grassroots. Throughout his time in the National Assembly, Gbajabiamila built a reputation as a lawmaker who maintained strong ties with his constituency. Education support initiatives, healthcare programs, youth empowerment opportunities, and community development projects became recurring features of his representation. For many residents of Surulere, their representative in Abuja was not a distant political figure but someone whose presence and contributions were felt at home.

His work in the constituency earned him a reputation as a performer, a legislator who understood that representation meant more than debates and motions on the floor of parliament. It meant responding to the everyday needs of the people who entrusted him with their mandate. Over time, his contributions to community development, empowerment, and legislative representation ensured that his name became closely associated with the political history of Surulere. Long after the electoral cycles have passed, the imprint of his work will remain firmly etched in the story of that constituency.

Within the National Assembly, Gbajabiamila's rise followed a steady trajectory. By 2007 he had become Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, leading opposition lawmakers during a period when the ruling party maintained overwhelming influence in national politics. The role required strategic thinking and resilience. Leading the minority meant advocating alternative perspectives while navigating a legislative chamber where numbers were not always on your side. The experience sharpened his negotiating skills and strengthened his ability to build alliances across political divides.

Years later, as Nigeria's political landscape



evolved and the progressive coalition that formed the All Progressives Congress gained national prominence, Gbajabiamila transitioned into the role of Majority Leader. In that capacity, he played a key role in coordinating legislative priorities for the governing party within the National Assembly. It was a position that required balancing political interests with legislative discipline, ensuring that parliamentary processes remained functional while advancing the agenda of the administration.

In June 2019, Gbajabiamila reached a defining moment in his legislative career when he was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. The position placed him at the helm of a chamber of 360 lawmakers representing diverse constituencies, cultures, and political affiliations across Nigeria. Managing such an institution requires more than procedural knowledge. It demands diplomacy, patience, and the ability to build consensus in a space where disagreements are inevitable.

During his tenure as Speaker, Gbajabiamila focused on strengthening legislative engagement with national development priorities while ensuring that the House maintained its oversight responsibilities. Beyond legislative work, he also sought to invest in leadership development through the

Legislative Mentorship Initiative. The program created opportunities for young Nigerians interested in governance to learn directly from experienced lawmakers and gain practical exposure to democratic institutions. By nurturing future leaders, the initiative reflected his belief that strong institutions are sustained by deliberate mentorship and preparation.

After twenty years in the legislature, another chapter awaited. In 2023, following the inauguration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Gbajabiamila was appointed Chief of Staff to the President. The position is widely regarded as one of the most strategic offices within the Nigerian presidency. The Chief of Staff coordinates presidential activities, manages administrative processes within the executive office, and ensures effective communication between the presidency and other arms of government.

For someone who had spent two decades navigating the complexities of legislative politics, the transition to executive coordination brought both familiarity and new challenges. His experience in parliament provided him with an intimate understanding of policy processes, political negotiation, and institutional management. These skills have become valuable assets in the day-to-day functioning of the presidency.

Observers of Gbajabiamila's career often highlight his measured approach to leadership. He is known for strategic thinking, patience in decision making, and a preference for building consensus rather than pursuing confrontation. His ability to maintain relationships across political lines has been one of the quiet strengths of his public life.

From a young lawyer building a career in Atlanta to a legislator representing Surulere for two decades, from Speaker of the House to Chief of Staff at the Presidential Villa, the rise of Femi Gbajabiamila illustrates the power of preparation and persistence in public service. His journey reflects a leadership philosophy that values institutions, invests in people, and recognizes that meaningful influence is built gradually over time.

In the end, the measure of a public servant is not only the offices held but also the communities served, and the systems strengthened. In Surulere, in the National Assembly, and now within the presidency, Gbajabiamila's contributions continue to shape the landscape of Nigerian governance. His story remains one of the most compelling examples of how steady leadership, grounded in service and strategy, can leave a lasting mark on both community and country.

A Conversation on Nation-Building, Youth Leadership, and Civic Reorientation

With:
Rinsola Abiola
Director-General, Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre (CLTC)



▲ Rinsola Abiola
Director-General, Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre (CLTC)

Nigeria's democratic future will be shaped largely by how well it prepares its young people for leadership, civic responsibility, and public service. At a time when questions around trust in public institutions, youth participation in governance, and national values are increasingly prominent, the role of leadership development institutions has become more critical than ever.

In this conversation, Rinsola Abiola, Director-General of the Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre (CLTC), reflects on her journey through advocacy, public engagement, and public administration. She shares insights on the importance of civic education, youth participation in governance, leadership training, and the urgent need for renewed civic reorientation in Nigeria. Drawing from her experience in government and youth development initiatives, Abiola discusses how strategic partnerships, institutional reforms, and structured leadership programmes can help build a generation of responsible citizens and nation-builders.

You've had a journey that spans advocacy, public engagement, and now institutional leadership. What experiences have most shaped your understanding of service and nation-building?

I have learned that public service revolves not around occupying leadership positions, but around the people, both in terms of those you work with like civil servants and other youth advocates and government stakeholders; and the Nigerian people whom we all are accountable to as public servants. As such, being willing and able to work with others, and to prioritise collective benefit over personal interest is an essential part of developing the required mindset for public service and, by extension, nation-building.

In the roles that I have occupied, particularly in the current administration, I have had to work a great deal to engage stakeholders in a bid to mobilise resources and support for reforms. It has been a masterclass in how public service requires taking initiative and forging partnerships.

In my current role, I am also the accounting officer for the Centre and I have learned a lot about financial management and how to prioritise the needs of a government organization, while also considering staff welfare, operational expenses and commitments to service providers. Therefore, I would also say that a key part of public service and nation-building is learning to manage resources prudently.

In all, it is a selfless thing that requires building and maintaining relationships, staying focused on the common good and managing resources effectively.

Nigeria faces a growing trust gap between young people and public institutions. From your perspective, how can civic education help rebuild that trust?

Civic education is essential to building a well informed and active populace. However, I believe that in response to prevailing conditions and the trust deficit, there is a need to engage more proactively with young people, beyond just sharing ideas and updates about general civic matters.

The average citizen does not really understand what branch of government is responsible for what, so a lot of the time, you find that angst and criticism are directed at the wrong quarters. Therefore, there is a need to make knowledge of how government works and which actors bear responsibility for different things more accessible, but I'm afraid young people also must be interested in such details for such an effort to make the needed impact.

Beyond citizens' enlightenment, fidelity is also key. Many have developed a strong sense of apathy because they have seen promises go unkept for a long time, so they don't believe that any public official means well. However, we have examples like the newly appointed (Acting) IGP, whose appointment was lauded across party lines, largely because many see him as a good and efficient police officer who puts citizens first.

We also have an example in Mr. President, whose mentorship and support for young people – many of whom are now leaders in their own right – has earned him admiration and support from many.

What this tells us is that as public servants, we also have a key role to play in dispelling the negative stereotypes about politicians and government officials, by serving diligently and mentoring others.

How can structured leadership development contribute to addressing youth unemployment and social instability?

The great thing about leadership development is that it helps those who undergo it develop transferable skills such as critical thinking, discipline, teamwork and resilience. These competencies are directly linked to employability and entrepreneurship, and responsible citizenship.

I also believe that there is a need to modify the trainings that we deliver at CLTC, for instance, so that in addition to

our traditional leadership trainings, we also have modules on entrepreneurship, job readiness and other soft skills which are useful in the workplace.

In what ways should citizenship training align with Nigeria's broader national development agenda?

Citizenship training must support national priorities including economic growth, security, innovation and social cohesion. We already do this at CLTC; a few months ago, there was a peace building training which took place at our facility in Jos, in partnership with the Plateau State Peace Building Agency and other development partners, so we understand our role in fostering peace and other developmental goals through our training programmes.

Do you believe Nigeria has invested enough in civic reorientation as a policy priority? What needs to change?

We have key elements of civic education in our school curriculum that is taught to children across different age groups. We have agencies like NOA that execute campaigns on reorientation and developmental issues, and others – like CLTC – that provide structured trainings to different groups of people.

However, I believe that there is a need for stronger reinforcement, especially in light of the social ills and degradation that we are witnessing, in a way that will enable us properly engage the adult population and also inculcate the right values into upcoming generations. We need sustained policy commitment, curriculum integration, measurable outcomes and consistent institutional support.

To this end, I believe that legislation is needed to make civic reorientation and training compulsory at certain levels, particularly at developmental stages, and this agenda is currently being pursued through the National Assembly, via the CLTC Repeal and Reenactment Bill. Work on the bill began while I served as SSA to the President and efforts are currently on in both chambers of the National Assembly.

With over 60% of Nigeria's population under 30, what is your strategy for ensuring young people see themselves

as stakeholders in governance rather than spectators?

Ownership comes from participation. Through dialogue platforms, leadership programmes, political participation and community-based projects, young people can move from being spectators to stakeholders.

I have also prioritized youth consultation as DG of CLTC; last year, we held a conference on restoring values and volunteerism, and we are now working to implement the ideas proposed by the young people who attended.

I also do my bit to mentor and provide leadership platforms for young people, and I am aware that many others do the same.

the needs of a 28-year-old with a Master's degree, for instance, and they would understand things differently. Therefore, it is key that we communicate concepts to different groups in ways that would make it easy for them to assimilate.

What role should discipline, resilience, and community service play in shaping the next generation of Nigerian leaders?

Discipline ensures sustainability, resilience prepares youth to keep pushing despite challenges and setbacks, and community service builds empathy and collective responsibility. These are foundational leadership competencies.

How can youth organizations become platforms for nation-building rather than channels for political manipulation?



Many young Nigerians are politically aware but institutionally disengaged. How can leadership institutions bridge that gap?

Leadership institutions have to develop trainings that are responsive to the current realities and needs of young people, and also make these programmes accessible.

Civic processes need to be simplified and engagement should also be decentralized. We need to leverage technology to enhance access and reach, and develop structured mentorship programmes.

We also need to fully grasp the diversity of the youth demographic and design initiatives that take these unique qualities into account. The needs of a 20-year-old with only junior secondary education would differ significantly from

Youth organizations must strengthen internal governance, transparency and value-based leadership. They should prioritise issue-based engagement and civic education over patronage, misinformation and disinformation. They have to remain focused on developmental issues instead of being used to further an agenda that is detrimental to national progress and our collective wellbeing as a people.

Youth organisations – and those who lead them – also need to understand that succession is a key part of leadership development.

Social media has amplified youth voices but also deepened polarization. How can civic training adapt to the digital age?

Civic training must incorporate digital literacy, critical media consumption and



responsible engagement, as the digital space is now a primary civic arena requiring structured guidance.

What policies or collaborations are necessary to promote responsible digital citizenship among Nigerian youths?

Partnerships with technology companies, educational institutions, civil society and government agencies are essential to promote digital ethics, fact-checking initiatives and responsible online participation.

As a young female leader heading a national institution, what reforms are needed to ensure more women participate meaningfully in leadership and governance?

We need the enactment and stronger enforcement of inclusion laws and policies, mentorship and leadership pipelines for young women, financial access for female aspirants, and cultural reorientation that normalises women in leadership roles.

How can leadership training help dismantle structural barriers that limit youth and women's participation in public life?

Leadership training equips youth and women with confidence, networks, policy literacy and negotiation skills, and these help to combat systemic disadvantages and create structured pathways to leadership.

What partnerships – public or private – are critical to scaling youth-focused leadership development in Nigeria?

I would say partnerships with the private sector and development organisations are key. The economic concepts of opportunity cost and needs and wants apply to government as well; government has rather limited resources and a long list of priorities, and the private sector can contribute their innovation and resources, either through Corporate Social Responsibility or mutually beneficial agreements that also enable them to earn profit.

Development and Civil Society Organisations can also contribute immensely via funding, extending reach and trust. In all of these scenarios, government provides scale and policy backing.

How can institutions like yours work more closely with universities, NYSC, and civil society to create a pipeline of responsible leaders?

As a sister organization, we have a longstanding relationship with NYSC. CLTC plays a key role across orientation camps, both through Man O War training – as CLTC is the supervisory body of Man O' War – and through leadership trainings held in camp as well.

However, in line with the vision of a stronger and more impactful CLTC, we are also exploring further youth-focused partnerships and initiatives, and have recently concluded a curriculum review exercise.

As we speak, we are working on launching our online school, to make CLTC training more accessible to Nigerians, both young and elderly. We

are also working on partnerships with tertiary institutions which will enable us deliver on degree-awarding modules, which would help greatly with career advancement for a wide array of citizens, and make our work even more valuable.

We also have other projects in the pipeline which we have partnered with civil society organisations on.

If Nigeria gets youth leadership right in the next decade, what kind of country do you envision by 2035?

A country with ethical, innovative and resilient leaders across sectors. Youth-led enterprises would flourish, civic participation would deepen and governance would reflect competence with greater trust between leaders and citizens.

If you had the opportunity to influence one major national policy reform that directly affects young Nigerians, what would it be and why?

A comprehensive National Civic and Leadership Development Framework embedded across primary, secondary, tertiary, and post-tertiary institutions would drive sustainable transformation at scale. This framework would also cover those outside of the formal school system.

As Nigeria continues to navigate complex political, social, and economic challenges, the conversation around youth leadership and civic responsibility remains central to the country's future. For Rinsola Abiola, the pathway forward lies in strengthening civic education, expanding leadership development opportunities, and building partnerships that empower young Nigerians to actively participate in governance and nation-building.

Her vision underscores a broader truth: that sustainable national development depends not only on policies and institutions, but on citizens who are informed, engaged, and prepared to lead. If the foundations of civic responsibility and leadership development are strengthened today, Nigeria could emerge by 2035 with a generation of ethical, innovative, and resilient leaders capable of transforming the nation's trajectory.

Free Data for Learning: Nigeria's Most Urgent Digital Bet

Article by:
Chief Idris Olorunnimbe,
Chairman, Nigerian
Communications Commission

There is a moment in every generation when a country gets the chance to make a decision that reshapes the trajectory of millions of lives. Nigeria is at that moment now, and the decision is simpler than most people think.

Zero-rate educational websites. Make learning data-free. Let's do it now.

When ALTON paid me a courtesy visit recently at the NCC's Ikoyi office, I used the occasion to issue a clear charge: telecom operators must prioritise the zero-rating of credible educational platforms as a near-term, high-impact intervention. The response was encouraging. But encouragement is a starting point. What Nigeria needs is coordinated action across government, regulators, operators, and state houses across the federation.

The NCC is ready to lead. I am honoured to drive this work, but the vision we are executing belongs to President Bola Tinubu. He set the direction. Our role is to ensure every Nigerian child feels its impact.

The cost of data is the cost of a future

For a student in Katsina, Ebonyi, or Ekiti, the barrier to online learning is rarely motivation or intelligence. It is arithmetic: data costs money, and many families do not have that money. Asking a child to buy data before accessing a textbook is the digital equivalent of charging school fees at the gate of a public school. We decided long ago that was wrong. We must now make the same decision about data.

Zero-rating means this precisely: telecom operators allow users to access designated educational websites and digital libraries without those visits counting against their data balance. No subscription. No bundle. Just access.

This is not a radical idea. It is already working elsewhere. In 2016, South Africa worked with mobile operators to zero-rate critical educational websites,



▲ Chief Idris Olorunnimbe
Chairman, Nigerian Communications Commission

including platforms used by university students. The initiative emerged partly in response to the #FeesMustFall movement and measurably increased access to course materials among students in rural and peri-urban areas. India's experience is instructive on both sides. When Jio arrived in 2016 with aggressively low data pricing, it triggered one of the most dramatic expansions of digital learning the world has seen. Hundreds of millions of Indians who had been priced out of the internet gained access overnight; EdTech platforms like BYJU's, Unacademy, and Vedantu built entire businesses on the back of that newly connected population. When you lower the cost of access, you ignite an economy. India's telecoms regulator TRAI did, however, ban Facebook's Free Basics in 2016 precisely because it created differential access favouring particular commercial interests. Nigeria's approach differs: our proposal is publicly governed, government-led, and built on transparent criteria. That distinction matters.

Rwanda offers the most instructive African model. Its Smart Classroom Programme worked with operators to zero-rate the Rwanda Education Board's digital content in government schools, combined with teacher training and device provision. Rwanda today consistently ranks among Africa's most

competitive digital economies. Connectivity and education were the foundation.

Awolowo's lesson, and a President who already understands it

A friend, responding to my public charge to ALTON, described this initiative as "Awo's free education policy in the digital age." The framing is exactly right.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo's decision to introduce free primary education in the Western Region in 1955 was opposed, debated, and dismissed as unaffordable. He pressed on. The results were generational. The West produced a workforce that drove Nigeria's early post-independence economy and contributed disproportionately to its professional class for decades. The dividends of that single decision are still being collected today.

Zero-rating educational websites is the digital equivalent of that bet. Operators will absorb a portion of foregone revenue in the short term; comparable analyses from South Africa and Rwanda suggest this cost, when structured properly with government support, is manageable relative to the long-term subscriber base it creates. Those same young Nigerians, educated and empowered, return to those networks as paying subscribers.

This conversation did not start here, either. I remember a session we held during President Bola Tinubu's journey to Aso Villa, where he spoke with obvious pride about the free WAEC and NECO policy he had implemented in Lagos, then shared his vision for student loans: access to tertiary education should not depend on family finances. What was then a proposal is now operational. Close to 2 million students are already benefiting from NELFUND. We also spoke that day about data costs as a barrier to learning. That conversation is now policy in motion. President Tinubu's commitment to inclusive education is evidenced in the free WAEC policy, in NELFUND, and in this initiative. Free data for learning is one of the most direct ways to give the

Renewed Hope Agenda practical, daily meaning.

What we are asking, and what we will do

To Nigeria's governors: in the coming weeks, I will be visiting Your Excellencies alongside Dr. Aminu Maida and other NCC board members to seek your partnership in something that can genuinely transform your states.

We will ask for your support in lowering entry barriers for operators deploying infrastructure in unserved communities. Right-of-Way costs are among the most significant obstacles to network expansion in Nigeria today. Where these fees are reduced or waived for deployments in low-connectivity areas, the effect is immediate. Connectivity does not only serve education; it opens commerce, attracts investment, and improves quality of life across every sector of a state's economy. With it, a boy or girl in a remote village stands beside their contemporaries in any city in the world, accessing the same lectures and opportunities. We will also count on your support to protect existing and new infrastructure. Vandalism of telecoms assets is a real and costly problem, and strong state-level enforcement is a statement about what kind of future your state is committed to building.

To Engineer Gbenga Adebayo and the ALTON membership: the alignment we have reached is a foundation to build on. We see the pressures you are managing: elevated energy costs, forex pressure on equipment imports. The ask commitment from government, and we are prepared to deliver that. The NCC will work with operators to monitor traffic impacts and ensure capacity planning in underserved areas runs parallel to zero-rating rollout. We will work with the Federal Ministry of Education, state education boards, and civil society to identify credible platforms, publish the list, and zero-rate it under a transparent governance framework with clear eligibility criteria, a published review cycle, and an open entry pathway for Nigerian EdTech companies that meet the standard. We are also aware that zero-rated domains create VPN routing incentives; the NCC will work with ALTON on a shared enforcement approach so operators do not carry that burden alone.

To civil society and the private sector: this initiative needs champions beyond government and telecoms. Nigerian EdTech companies, development finance institutions, and corporate social responsibility programmes all have a role. Adopt a platform. Fund devices for a school. Sponsor a teacher training programme. Beyond infrastructure, every state has the opportunity to build

something lasting: devices in schools, Wi-Fi in public libraries, and curated local content reflecting state languages, histories, and curricula. Zero-rated access to an empty platform helps no one. Access and content must grow together.

UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimate that Nigeria has approximately 20 million out-of-school children. Millions more are in school but learning below their potential because resources that could help them sit behind a paywall called data. That is a crisis with a known, affordable solution. The question is no longer whether we can do this. The question is whether we will choose to.

As Chairman of the Nigerian Communications Commission, I will continue to push for this with every platform available. We will engage operators formally on timelines and implementation frameworks, work with education counterparts to identify the right content, track progress, and report it publicly. Accountability is not optional here.

The Awolowo generation built the future on free schools. The Tinubu generation will build it on free data. We have made our choice.



Under Kuku, Nigeria's Airports Are Rising to Global Standards



▲ **Olubunmi Kuku**
Managing Director of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria

The Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) continues to drive a comprehensive transformation of the country's aviation sector, strengthening airport infrastructure, enhancing passenger experience, and positioning Nigeria as a leading hub for air travel and logistics in West Africa. Under the leadership of the Managing Director and Chief Executive, the Authority is executing a modernisation agenda guided by six core values: Customer-Centric Service Delivery, Operational Excellence & Innovation, Effective Governance & Workforce Excellence, Airport Viability, Infrastructure Modernisation & Expansion, and Safety & Security.

“We are uncompromising about these principles,” the MD emphasises. “Every decision—whether operational or strategic—is rooted in these values. Aviation is globally regulated, so collaboration with partners at home and abroad is essential.”

“With the unwavering support of His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR; our dynamic Honourable Minister of Aviation, Mr Festus Keyamo, SAN; and our tireless and indomitable Board Chairman, His Excellency, Dr Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, we have truly caught the wind in our sails. We are navigating boldly and heading firmly in the right direction.”

A Nationwide Upgrade: Revitalising Nigeria's Airports

Across its 22 airports, FAAN has launched major rehabilitation and modernisation projects. Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Enugu, and Port Harcourt remain key priority hubs receiving extensive upgrades. Several secondary airports—including Akure, Owerri, and Calabar—are also undergoing improvements to support growing regional passenger movements and commercial activity.

In Abuja, increasing domestic traffic has necessitated terminal expansion and upgrades to surrounding infrastructure, including new access roads, intermodal rail connections, and planning for a secondary runway.

MMIA Lagos: A Landmark Transformation in Progress

One of the most ambitious and visible projects is the ongoing overhaul of Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMIA) in Lagos—the busiest airport in West Africa. Originally built in the 1970s and modelled after Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, MMIA had long awaited a comprehensive modernisation.

FAAN has now accelerated reconstruction of the old international terminal, including:

- A complete redesign of the arrival and departure halls
- New ceilings, flooring, lighting, and passenger flow systems
- Expanded check-in counters and improved ventilation

- Upgraded baggage handling systems
- Reconfigured access roads and improved drop-off and pick-up zones
- Integration of advanced safety and security infrastructure

“We are modernising MMIA while keeping operations running,” the MD explains. “This is not just a facelift—it's a structural transformation. We want concessionaires and the travelling public to inherit a world-class facility.”

The modernisation is complemented by the fully operational new international terminal, giving Lagos dual-terminal capacity for the first time.

Technology-Driven Passenger Facilitation

FAAN has launched a decisive shift toward automation across its airports, including:

- Biometric access gates to replace traditional boarding pass scans
- Cashless payment systems at toll gates, car parks, and access points
- Deployment of advanced screening machines capable of detecting explosives, organic materials, currency, and prohibited substances
- Progressive automation of check-ins, payments, parking, and access control

“Our target is an end-to-end digital passenger experience,” the MD says. “Seamless, secure, and efficient.”

Driving Cargo and Trade Competitiveness

Recognising the untapped potential of Nigeria's agricultural and industrial exports, FAAN is prioritising cargo development. Initiatives include:

- Completion of long-abandoned cargo terminal projects
- Construction of temperature-controlled facilities
- Modern packaging and processing centres



- Quality testing and certification labs to meet global export standards

The Authority is working closely with federal and state ministries to strengthen farm-to-market supply chains.

Building Regional Transfer Hubs

FAAN is positioning two major airports as regional transfer hubs, drawing lessons from successful models in Ethiopia and Egypt. This includes:

- Route development strategies
- Competitive pricing incentives for international airlines
- Support for domestic airlines in fleet expansion and route optimisation

“This is how we will make Nigerian airports competitive on the global stage,” the MD explains.

Safety First: Strengthening the Airside

Safety remains the foundation of FAAN’s reforms. Major achievements include:

- Upgraded airfield lighting across the busiest airports

- Ongoing runway rehabilitation to meet ICAO standards

- Expansion of aircraft aprons to support rising traffic, including private jet operations

- Elevation of several airports to Category II operations

“These upgrades ensure that Nigerian airports can operate safely and reliably in all conditions,” the MD notes.

Sustainability and Green Airport Initiatives

FAAN has advanced to Level 3 of the Airport Carbon Accreditation program, signalling measurable progress in emissions reduction. Recent steps include:

- Deployment of CNG-powered shuttle buses in Lagos and Abuja

- Expansion of solar power and battery storage solutions

- Ongoing efforts to align airport operations with global net-zero targets

“Our airports must reflect modern environmental responsibility,” the MD affirms

A Clear Path Forward

With strong federal support and a clear strategic direction, FAAN is reshaping Nigeria’s aviation landscape—modernising infrastructure, enhancing safety, improving customer experience, and strengthening the country’s competitiveness in global aviation.

Nigeria’s airports are not just being upgraded—they are being reimagined for the future.



DigiTax

Powered by Namiri



We make **NRS E-Invoicing** Compliance your competitive advantage.

Who we are

Namiri Technology (DigiTax) is an approved NRS Access Point Provider (APP) and licensed System Integrator (SI) for NRS MBS e-invoicing compliance in Nigeria.

What we do

We Make NRS MBS e-invoicing Compliance Simple. We help Nigerian businesses stay compliant without delays or penalties. With DigiTax, you can start issuing NRS -approved e-invoices instantly—through our one in town intuitive Dashboard, Versatile APIs, and Bulk Upload tools, while integrations run in the background.

What's In it for you?

Instant Compliance

Start issuing NRS -approved e-invoices right away with our Dashboard.

Versatile Integration

Plays well with SAP, Oracle, Xero, Sage, Microsoft Dynamics, QuickBooks, Odoo & custom-built systems.

Scales with You

Upload hundreds or thousands of sales and items at once

APIs that Work

Stress-free, developer-friendly APIs built for Nigerian businesses compliance with public API documentation

Trusted Across Africa

Proven expertise in e-invoicing across multiple Countries.

Want to get started and beat the NRS audits, deadlines and penalties?



Nigerians Are Not as Poor as Our Lives Suggest

Over my time in the Nigerian government, I have travelled to 33 states (of 36), many of them multiple times. I've spoken with traders under umbrellas at bus stops in Lagos, at teachers' cooperatives in Enugu, across market tables in Gombe, young professionals in Warri, and in crowded living rooms in Abuja. One truth is so self-evident it is easy to miss: Nigerians' deeper problem is not low income. What we lack is the ability to turn that income into a comfortable life. Most of the essentials that give basic comfort (e.g. appliances, a keke or car, solar power, education, etc) last for years. Yet Nigerians are forced to pay for them entirely out of today's income. We live poor, because we lack credit; consumer credit.

A ₦300,000 Salary in Akure vs. New York

Take Biodun who I met in Akure. An Assistant Director at a government agency, he earns ₦318,000 monthly. Empirically, he is middle class. Now compare him to a Brandon in New York, earning Biodun's PPP-equivalent of \$1,559 monthly. [PPP (purchasing power parity) simply means both incomes buy the same basket of goods and services locally, e.g. Biodun pays ₦500 for the same haircut that costs Brandon \$65]. On paper they have the same earning power. In reality, they are in opposite worlds.

In New York, the \$1,559 earner can: finance a used Toyota for \$240/month, furnish an apartment on 12-24 month plans, pay rent monthly, buy a phone through a carrier plan, spread healthcare and utility bills, access a \$1,000 credit line for emergencies. His income unlocks a life 3-4x his income because the system gives him time. Back in Akure, Biodun wants the same things: a used Corolla, a fridge, a small AC, a generator. But everything requires full cash upfront. A used Toyota is ₦6-₦8 million. A fridge is ₦250,000. A small generator is ₦500,000. A basic AC unit: ₦180,000. His rent must be paid one or two years upfront, totalling ₦1.6 million to ₦2.4 million in parts of Akure. Most of these become impossible for Biodun for a long time, or forever. Little wonder he delays routine approvals at his civil service job, so contractors can "sort him out."

We are seeing same income levels, but



▲ Uzoma Nwagba
MD/CEO, CREDICORP

worlds apart in lived experience. This is the poverty Nigerians feel: not poverty of earnings, but poverty of access.

What People Said Across Nigeria

In Ojuwoye (Mushin), Lagos, I met Ayobami. She spends more on food each week because she has no freezer. Without ₦170,000 to buy one, she shops daily, loses perishables, and pays the poverty premium three hundred naira at a time. In Kano, Yusuf lives in a one-room apartment with his wife and two daughters. A ₦250,000 solar system would give them steady power, but there's no one to lend to someone like him. So they sleep in heat and study in darkness many times. And in every state I visited, the story was the same: Nigerians earn better than they live. What we lack is leverage, which is very much the grease of every modern life.

What Other Countries Built, and Why It Matters

The US built a credit system where 89% of adults have credit and lenders trust borrowers. Brazil normalized installment payments — parcelado — for almost everything. South Africa built total credit reporting, allowing even taxi drivers to finance vehicles. China built an inescapable credit system covering over 1.1 billion people. These are not magically richer human beings. They simply live in systems that translate earnings into comfort.

Where Nigerian Consumer Credit Corporation (CREDICORP) Fits In — Quietly, Practically.

This is the backdrop against which President Bola Ahmed Tinubu established the Nigerian Consumer Credit Corporation (CREDICORP) — not as a silver bullet, but as a catalyst. We were created to drive three things:

- **Infrastructure** — galvanize all parties towards a national consumer credit plumbing system that actually works
- **Capital** — wholesale funds and guarantees to financial institutions to make consumer credit affordable now; in the process, greatly incentivise purchase of locally-made goods.
- **Cultural Reorientation** — helping citizens and lenders think differently about credit

What we have shown is quiet, steady progress ready for exponential leap: Over 187,000 Nigerians have now accessed affordable vehicles, solar systems, home upgrades, digital devices, micro enterprise tools, life essentials via CREDICORP. They have also become the largest offtakers of locally-assembled vehicles.

YouthCred, our youth credit intervention, has become the most popular resettlement programme in NYSC nationwide; beyond corpers, over 1.6 million employed youth (ages 18 to 40) are on our backlog seeking affordable credit.

Through our lending partnerships, and guarantees via our portfolio company — National Credit Guarantee Company — more than 30 financial institutions are beginning to lend more cheaply and confidently. With the CBN and industry players, we are enabling a unified credit infrastructure, with a NIN-backed credit score, that enforces responsible behaviour and empowers lenders to grow credit decisively for individuals. That is when the exponential shift happens. But even with these strides, one truth remains: Government cannot drive or fund Nigeria's credit needs alone — not today, not ever. Nigeria needs banks, MFIs, fintechs, cooperatives, investors, capital markets — the entire financial ecosystem — to lean in, together. CREDICORP is re-laying the foundation and culture. But the building must be raised by all of us.

Between Washington and Beijing: Nigeria Turns to Europe for its Digital Economy

Article by:
Tolu Grey



Nigeria's digital economy runs on an unusual stack: Chinese hardware, American software, and increasingly, European ideas.

Huawei, a Chinese company, increasingly provides hardware and sometimes software for telecommunications and banking across the country. Consumer-facing software, cloud platforms, and startup culture wear a distinctly American accent. Google, Microsoft, Meta, and a constellation of US platforms dominate how Nigerians build, deploy, and interact online.

Yet when Nigeria's current administration began thinking about digital public infrastructure (systems for identity, payments, and data sharing), data exchange, and broadband infrastructure, it did not double down on either Washington or Beijing. Instead, it turned to Europe. This is yet to be a clean pivot, but a live experiment.

Between the United States and China, both locked in a deepening technological and geopolitical rivalry, Europe offers Nigeria something different: deployable technology, development finance, and regulatory norms without the overt coercion or strategic entanglements that accompany the other two powers. Whether that difference translates into outcomes — fibre in the ground, platforms launched, systems maintained

by Nigerians — is the question this partnership must answer.

For Nigeria, these partnerships will determine whether 220 million people will have affordable internet access in the next decade, and whether Nigerian developers maintain or merely use the systems they build.

Nigeria's Pragmatic Tech Positioning

Nigeria's relationship with global technology powers has always been divergent. Public sector preference for China is evident in \$1.4 billion in financing from Chinese entities between 2002 and 2018 — NIGCOMSAT, security communication systems and the ICT Backbone Project — as Chinese partnerships are usually via direct state-to-state engagement, executed by Chinese firms.

In parallel, Nigeria's technology startup ecosystem adopted the aesthetics and operating logic of Silicon Valley. One driven by American venture capital, education, platforms, and developer tools. Today, a network of founders, funders, operators and trainers exists on an American foundation. American companies — Microsoft, Google, Oracle, and Amazon — have all expanded cloud services in Nigeria. But they are software-first businesses. They do not build backbone infrastructure or

government data centres, nor does the US typically sign sovereign infrastructure contracts executed by its own firms.

The result is a hybrid system where Nigerian consumers and software developers live in an American digital world, while banks, telecoms operators, and critical infrastructure rely on Chinese hardware and enterprise systems.

Thus, it is not entirely inaccurate to say Nigeria runs on Chinese hardware and American software. Tecno and Redmi phones sit in Nigerian pockets, but Google and Meta apps shape daily digital life.

Europe, until recently, occupied a marginal position in this arrangement.

Why Europe, and Why Now?

What has changed is Nigeria's policy focus. As the global technology order fragments, avoiding entanglement in US-China competition has become a strategic objective. Europe presents a third path: slower, more procedural, more regulated, but also more transparent, less securitised, and often tied to implementation rather than rhetoric.

That shift is visible most clearly in the travel patterns and partnerships of Nigeria's Minister of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy, Dr. Bosun Tijani.

Dr Tijani's professional formation is deeply European. Early in his career, he worked with European universities as a research network engineer before founding CcHub. By the late 2010s, CcHub's PitchDrive programme had taken Nigerian startups across multiple European cities, where Tijani articulated an innovation campus model aimed at embedding African startups into global research and industrial networks. By 2018, he was already advocating for Africa-Europe research and innovation partnerships. With a British citizenship and two UK degrees, he is notably

comfortable navigating European policy institutions.

Since his appointment as minister, Europe has become his most visited region. Between April 2024 and December 2025, he made over a dozen trips to ten European countries, met with several foreign ministers and ambassadors, engaged senior EU officials, and signed a Digital Economy Package in Brussels. No other region has received comparable attention.

Intensity, however, does not guarantee outcomes. The relevant matter is whether these engagements have moved beyond dialogue.

Partner 1: Estonia



The clearest example of Europe translating engagement into delivery is Estonia. With a population of just 1.3 million – smaller than Ekiti state – Estonia has built the world’s most advanced digital government where citizens receive a digital identity at birth, can vote online, sign documents electronically, and access many public services without physical visits. The system is built on X-Road, an open-source data exchange layer that allows government databases to communicate securely without centralization.

Nigeria is now adopting a version of this architecture to complete the final piece of its Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) puzzle: data exchange.

The Nigerian Data Exchange (NGDX) is being developed with support from the EU and will use X-Road technology to enable secure data sharing across ministries, departments, and agencies. In principle, a citizen applying for a passport would no longer need to resubmit documents already held elsewhere in government. The system queries the relevant database, verifies the information, and proceeds.

Dr Tijani’s visit to Estonia in May 2024 included a tour of e-Estonia’s showroom and engagements with its e-Governance Academy. Estonia’s development agency (EstDev) issued a procurement for X-Road advisory services in Nigeria. The contract was won by Digital Nation, an Estonian

consultancy that has implemented similar systems in other markets. By August 2025, an EU-backed stakeholder workshop on NGDX was underway in Lagos.

The minister’s claim that NGDX would go live by the end of 2025 has clearly not materialised. At the earliest, the first use cases of Nigeria’s “X-Road” will begin in 2026.

Estonia’s footprint in Nigeria is not new. Nortal, another Estonian firm, built Nigeria’s Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS) as part of the country’s effort to digitise its public sector financial management system. The development of GIFMIS included the

creation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA), through which Nortal uncovered tens of thousands of ghost workers and non-existent agencies that were drawing salaries. The system saved Nigeria over \$23 million.

The value of the Estonian partnership will ultimately be measured by how NGDX completes Nigeria’s DPI and elevates government-to-government, government-to-business, and government-to-citizen services. But deploying an X-Road-like solution verbatim outside Estonia – where trust in government is high, connectivity is reliable, population is small, and every citizen has a documented address – may not work in Nigeria, where those conditions don’t exist. Contextual redesign will determine whether this becomes transformative infrastructure or an expensive pilot program.

Partner 2: The Nordics

Beyond e-governance, European engagement increasingly targets Nigeria’s physical and human infrastructure. The minister has visited four of the five Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In August 2024, all five foreign ministers were at a dinner reception with Dr Tijani, hosted by the Swedish ambassador, an early signal of coordinated Nordic interest in Nigeria’s digital economy.

Ericsson and Nokia, long-standing players in Nigeria’s telecoms sector, have renewed relevance. While in Sweden in 2024, Dr Tijani visited Ericsson’s Imagine Live Studio to view 6G prototypes and sign a 5G development and deployment MoU, including a 5G innovation lab. Ericsson committed \$19 million to building a tech hub in Nigeria; whether this will be a manufacturing plant, R&D centre, or training facility remains to be clarified.

Engagements in Finland included a visit to Nokia’s headquarters and an MoU with the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) on training young people in 4G/5G radio and transmission, and establishing a 5G test lab. In the same year, the NCC’s unused annex building was converted to a Centre of Excellence for technical training in 5G, completing a component of the MoU. Noteworthy is that Cisco, an American company, is also setting up a cybersecurity and broadband lab in Abuja.

Denmark’s engagement accelerated sharply in 2025. During a two-day visit to Copenhagen, Dr Tijani met with Digital Hub Denmark, Danish technology firms operating in Nigeria, universities, data centre operators, and broadband providers. The discussions culminated in an MoU on digital cooperation signed at the Nordic Nigeria Connect in Lagos, where Denmark’s earlier €12 million support for Nigeria’s 3 Million Technical Talent (3MTT) programme was disclosed. This was followed by a visit from Anders Holch Povlsen, Denmark’s richest person and CEO of the Bestseller Group, to discuss digital connectivity and the creative economy, amongst others.

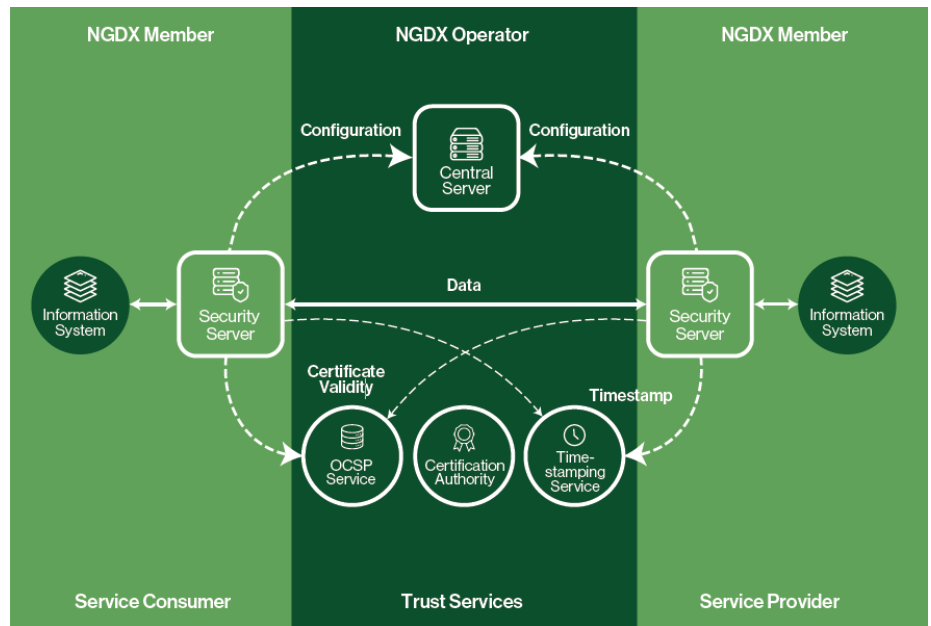
Partner 3: The Funders

The most consequential expression of Europe’s role is Project BRIDGE – Nigeria’s plan to deploy 90,000 kilometers of fibre optic cable nationwide. It is structured through a special-purpose vehicle in which the Nigerian government retains a minority stake of up to 49%.

The project is supported by a \$500 million commitment from the World Bank, alongside up to \$200 million in potential financing from the African Development Bank. In addition, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is planning to provide a sovereign loan of up to \$100 million, complemented by up to €22 million in EU grants to support project design and capacity building. Nigeria, which only recently became a country of operations for the EBRD, is expected to secure approval for this financing in the first quarter of 2026.

“At \$800 million in commitments, this sum puts the Federal Government funding at 40–50% of the project cost (The Digital Economy Ministry and World Bank cite figures between \$1.6–2 billion). The ministry says it has secured \$845 million in commitments from the World Bank Group, AfDB, AFC, and the EU.”

For context, the US Trade and Development Agency committed \$2.095 million in a grant in January for a feasibility study for the project. The Multilateral Cooperation Center for Development Finance (MCDF) – a China-led institution – approved a



\$2.625 million grant for the project in June 2025.

These grants are dwarfed by the EU’s provision of a €45 million grant announced at the EU–Nigeria Digital Open Day, completing its Digital Economy package launched in 2022 with €820 million. The funding will support Project BRIDGE preparation through network design, skills development, and supply chain mobilization with European private sector participation.

The EU is also providing €15 million for the Africa-BB-Maps project, an ITU-implemented initiative to establish harmonized broadband mapping systems across 11 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria. The project is part of the Africa-Europe Digital Regulators Partnership under the EU’s Global Gateway strategy.

If project BRIDGE succeeds, Nigeria gains backbone infrastructure financed largely through concessional loans (low-interest, favourable terms) and grants rather than commercial debt. However, pace remains the biggest hurdle. With funding deployed into design, feasibility studies, and advisory services, the project could slip into extended cycles of studies, workshops, and meetings with little fibre in the ground. Nigeria needs to deploy 90,000 kilometers fast to catch up in a sector where technology evolves rapidly.

Conversations That Have Not Converted

Not all engagements have yielded concrete outcomes. Some partnerships remain

exploratory, and some critical opportunities remain unexploited.

In April 2024, DrTijani met with FrieslandCampina in the Netherlands to discuss leveraging technology for food security. Similar discussions occurred with Arla in Sweden. Despite Nigeria’s recent establishment of a Livestock Ministry, no deliverables have emerged.

France hosted Dr Tijani three times – for a presidential visit in November 2024, the AI Action Summit in February 2025, and VivaTech in 2025, where 17 Nigerian startups participated. Meetings in Sweden with Swedfund, Business Sweden and the Scania group have also not resulted in any announced investment or partnerships.

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Foreign Accent, Nigerian Vocabulary

Europe offers Nigeria real advantages: open-source software, transparent financing processes, and regulatory credibility that attracts global investment. But these come with trade-offs that deserve scrutiny.

European development finance moves deliberately, and environmental and social safeguards are comprehensive. These are features when building sustainable systems, and can slip into box-ticking instead of prioritising outcomes. Thus, Project BRIDGE's eventual groundbreaking could happen later than it should.

Contextual redesign, when adopting European solutions and ideas, is not an option; it is a prerequisite. The Nigerian state lacks capacity in many areas, a context that is downplayed too many times. Altering input requirements and output measures to match the state's present abilities is a better approach than hoping the state can rise to match the ideal

Thus, all partnerships must lead with "this is what we intend to achieve, and this is where we need input or support".

Where partners drive programs and design projects end-to-end, the risk of achieving success on paper, but not in practice, is high.

Estonia's success rests on conditions Nigeria does not share: a small population, universal literacy, high institutional trust, and reliable connectivity. In replicating X-Road in Nigeria, where many homes have no clear address, institutional distrust is high, and internet connectivity is imperfect, contextual redesign must shape outcomes, not afterthought adaptation.

Nigeria's identity enrollment leveraged an agent-based system, blending online and offline to achieve nationwide rollout. This same approach has been adopted by betting companies and financial services players. Jumia relies on a similar model in its pursuit of profitability. This is not to say NGDX needs agent touchpoints, but understanding how solutions get diffused nationwide clarifies why contextual design cannot be avoided.

Innovation, whether in the public or private sector, must acknowledge constraints and build with them in mind,

not fight them. The popularity of pidgin English, the pervasiveness of Android devices, the comfort in providing sensitive data (NIN and BVN) to providers, and high trust in AI-generated content are very Nigerian. These are considerations that will not be present in an EU or Nordic policy deliberation.

Between Washington and Beijing, Europe represents a different route—not apolitical or without an agenda. The challenge is whether Nigeria can absorb European technology and digital standards without losing its own voice and build systems that work without getting stuck in "best practice" processes that optimize for ideal scenarios.

Building a digital economy is like building a railway. Nigeria provides the land, and the passengers and European partners provide engineering, financing, and specialized components. But the system must run on Nigerian time, stop at Nigerian stations, and serve Nigerian destinations.

Gaining a European accent is fine. Losing Nigerian vocabulary, with its pragmatic, constraint-driven innovations, would be a strategic failure.



▲ Nordic Nigeria Connect 2025

Presidential Community Engagement Office (South West): Summary of Key Initiatives and Impact



▲ Ms. Moremi Ojudu
Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement (South West)

The Presidential Community Engagement Office (South West) has been actively engaged in various initiatives aimed at promoting community development, social welfare, and inclusivity in the Southwest region of Nigeria. Under the leadership of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement (South West) Ms. Moremi Ojudu, the office has implemented a range of programs and projects aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, promoting economic growth, and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.

This report provides a summary of 18 key activities undertaken by the Presidential Community Engagement Office (South West), highlighting the office's commitment to grassroots engagement, social welfare, and development. The activities showcased in this report demonstrate the office's efforts to bridge the gap between the federal government and grassroots communities, promote inclusivity, and support the most vulnerable members of society.

1. Ramadan Food Sharing (TAG) - March 26, 2024

The Presidential Community Engagement Office (South West) distributed 9,750 cartons of food items to vulnerable households, the aged, and people with

disabilities across the Southwest region, providing support during Ramadan.

2. Change the Narrative Now Malaria Campaign - April 24, 2024

The Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement (South West) launched a malaria campaign, distributing insecticide-treated mosquito nets and sanitation materials to households in the Ago-Egun community.

3. PCEO Stakeholders' Breakfast Meeting - May 31, 2024

The Presidential Community Engagement Office (Southwest) met with corporate organisations to discuss potential partnerships, presenting the office's S.W.I.F.T. project, which aims to bridge the gap between the federal government and grassroots communities.

4. Community Engagement in Agboyi Ketu - August 15, 2024

The SSA to the President on Community Engagement (South West) engaged with the Agboyi Ketu community, listening to their concerns and pledging support for infrastructure development, youth empowerment, and women's representation.

5. Visit to Yaba Market and Yaba College of Technology - August 2, 2024

The Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement (South West), Moremi Ojudu, engaged with the Yaba market community and the Staff and Student Union body of Yaba College of Technology. The visit aimed to promote understanding and support for the Renewed Hope Agenda by listening to their needs and concerns, driving meaningful progress, and promoting peace and unity in the communities.

6. Spencer Street Football Match - August 11, 2024

The Presidential Community Engagement

Office (Southwest) participated in a street-friendly football match, connecting with young individuals and encouraging them to pursue their passions.

7. BAT-STEM Back to School Initiative Phase I - September 25 - October 3, 2024

The Presidential Community Engagement Office, led by Moremi Ojudu, launched the BAT-STEM initiative, empowering over 5,000 indigent pupils in Ibarapa, including students from Community High School, Nomadic School Owode Lanlate, St. Michael Cherubim & Seraphim Primary School Eruwa, Anwar-ul-Islam Primary School Eruwa, and Baptist Primary School Maya Lanlate, through scholarships to deserving students, writing materials, and food items to parents and teachers, demonstrating the government's commitment to bridging the educational gap and promoting community development.

8. Batstem Initiative Phase II - October 8-10, 2024

The Presidential Community Engagement Office, led by Moremi Ojudu, implemented the BAT-STEM initiative in Osun State, providing educational materials and support to over 5,000 students in several schools, including A.U.D Primary School, Modakeke High School, and Moremi High School. The initiative distributed 20,000 exercise books, 1,000 school bags, and other materials, while also providing food palliatives to teachers and community members, promoting the Renewed Hope Agenda's goals of bridging the educational gap and fostering community development.

9. Citizen Assembly/Enterprise Development in Ado Ekiti - August 20, 2024

The Office of the President on Community Engagement South-West, organized a Citizen's Assembly Engagement in Ado Ekiti, discussing the Federal Government's Renewed Hope Agenda with stakeholders in Ekiti State government. Over 150 participants attended, sharing concerns

and recommendations on key initiatives. The event concluded with the distribution of vocational empowerment kits to over 100 participants, incentives, and food, fostering a sense of community and hope.

10. Udiroko Festival in Ado Ekiti - August 21, 2024

The Special Assistant to the President (SSAP), accompanied by her team, attended and supported the vibrant Udiroko Festival in Ado Ekiti, showcasing her commitment to the community's cultural heritage. As a proud indigene, she generously donated to the event planning committee and distributed food items as palliatives to traders and vulnerable individuals, fostering unity and hope in celebration of the community's rich traditions.

11. Community Engagement Ramadan/ Lent food sharing - March 1-10), 2025

The Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement demonstrated its commitment to religious inclusion by distributing food relief packages to communities across the South-West region. This initiative supported Muslims during the Ramadan fasting period and Christians during the Lenten season, promoting unity and interfaith harmony across the 6 states in the region.



12. Tax Reform Bill Sensitization - July 15, 2025

The Presidential Community Engagement Office (South-West) conducted a grassroots sensitization drive on the new Tax Reform Bill in Ibadan, educating citizens on its impact and sharing food items with the vulnerable in the state.

13. Ondo State Gubernatorial Election Monitoring - November 16, 2024

The SSA to the President on Community Engagement (South West) joined the election committee to monitor and mobilize for the Ondo State gubernatorial election, representing the

President and the Southwest region.

14. Light-Up Ibeju Lekki - June 3, 2025

The Presidential Community Engagement Office (South-West) launched the Light-Up Ibeju Lekki program, distributing solar systems to residents and improving their quality of life and livelihood.

15. Eid Celebration in Lagos - June 6, 2025

The Presidential Community Engagement Office celebrated Eid with the Shasha community in Lagos, sharing meat and food items with the people and praying with them.

16. Lagos-Calabar Coastal Road Inspection and Opening. May 31, 2025

The SSA to the President on Community Engagement (South West) joined the Minister of Works to inspect and open the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Road.

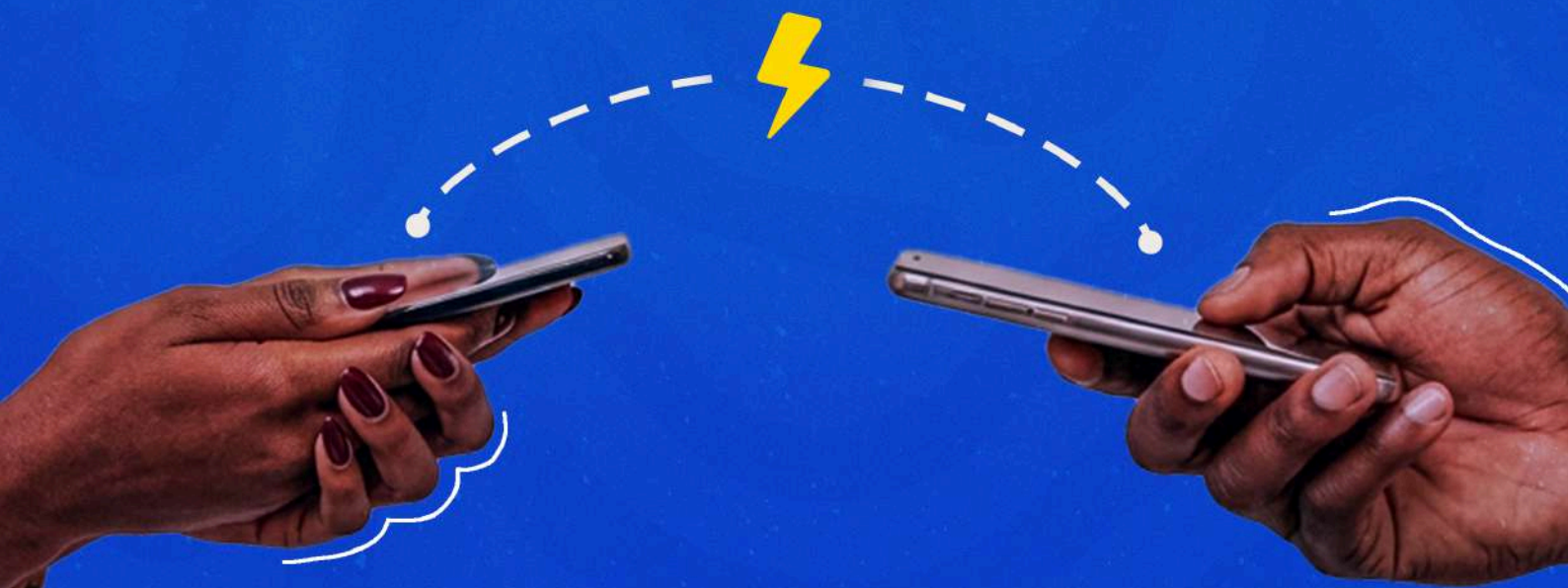
17. Deaf Support Outreach - June 14, 2025

The SSA to the President on Community Engagement (South West) donated care packages to the Lagos APC Deaf Support Group, promoting inclusion and support for vulnerable groups.





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Fixing Nigeria's Tax System: Tinubu, Zacch, and Oyedele's Winning Formula

Series 2 by:
Akin Akinwale CNA ACTI ANIPR,
Accountant, Tax Professional

For decades, Nigeria's tax system struggled under the weight of complexity, inefficiency, and public distrust. Businesses complained about multiple taxation, individuals often found the system confusing, and government revenues consistently fell short of the country's development needs. While several administrations acknowledged these problems, meaningful structural reform remained elusive.

Today, however, Nigeria appears to be witnessing a different approach; one that combines political leadership, institutional execution, and technical expertise. At the center of this evolving reform effort are President Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR, Dr. Zacch Adedeji of the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS), and fiscal policy expert Mr. Taiwo Oyedele (now Minister of State for Finance).

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration has made fiscal reform a central pillar of its economic agenda. Recognizing that a sustainable economy cannot depend excessively on borrowing or volatile oil revenues, the government has prioritized building a more efficient and reliable tax system. The goal is not merely to increase revenue but to create a system that is simpler, fairer, and more supportive of economic growth.



▲ Akin Akinwale CNA ACTI ANIPR
Accountant, Tax Professional

Political will, however, is only the starting point. Translating policy ambitions into measurable results requires strong institutions. This responsibility largely falls on Dr. Zacch Adedeji, the Executive Chairman of the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS). Under his leadership, the country's revenue administration is undergoing a transformation aimed at improving efficiency, transparency, and taxpayer experience.

The evolution from the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) to the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS) represents more than a change in name. It signals a broader

institutional shift toward a modern revenue authority that leverages technology, streamlines processes, and places greater emphasis on service delivery to taxpayers.

Complementing the political and institutional dimensions of the reform is the technical work led by Mr. Taiwo Oyedele, Chairman of the Presidential Fiscal Policy and Tax Reforms Committee. His committee undertook a comprehensive review of Nigeria's tax framework and developed proposals aimed at simplifying tax laws, eliminating multiple taxation, protecting small businesses, and creating a more investment-friendly environment.

The strength of the current reform effort lies in the convergence of these three forces. President Tinubu provides the political direction and commitment needed to push difficult reforms forward. Dr. Adedeji leads the institutional machinery responsible for implementing these policies. Meanwhile, Taiwo Oyedele and his committee supply the technical expertise required to design reforms that are both practical and sustainable.

In public policy, such alignment is rare. Many reform efforts fail because they lack either the political courage to initiate change, the institutional capacity to implement it, or the technical expertise to design it effectively. Nigeria's ongoing tax reform effort appears to be benefiting from the presence of all three.

As the reform process continues to unfold, its true impact will ultimately be measured by how it affects everyday Nigerians; from small business owners navigating tax compliance to salary earners seeking a fairer system. If the current momentum is sustained, the country may finally be on the path toward building a tax system that supports growth, fairness, and national development.



From Policy to Impact: Driving Nigeria's Youth Agenda Through Monitoring, Delivery, and Systems Reform

Article by:
Dr. Titilope Gbadamosi,
Special Assistant to the President on
Youth Initiatives (Monitoring & Delivery)



▲ Dr. Titilope Gbadamosi
Special Assistant to the President on Youth Initiatives
(Monitoring & Delivery)

In a governance landscape often defined by ambitious announcements and uneven execution, the Office of the Special Assistant to the President on Youth Initiatives (Monitoring & Delivery) has taken a systems-first approach: measure what matters, track what is promised, and ensure that delivery reaches real young Nigerians.

Operating under the administration of His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the Office has repositioned youth development from isolated programming to coordinated, data-driven execution. During the reporting period, its work has centered on institutional accountability, structured engagement, and scalable opportunity creation.

Building a Digital Backbone for Youth Governance

At the heart of this transformation is the Youth Activities Dashboard (YAD), a national digital tracking platform designed to consolidate youth-focused programmes across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs).

Rather than relying on fragmented reporting systems, YAD provides centralized oversight of federal youth

interventions. Programmes are tracked against timelines, outputs, and beneficiary reach. Gaps are flagged. Duplication is identified. Underperformance becomes visible.

The result is not merely data collection, but governance discipline, ensuring that youth initiatives are not just announced, but implemented and evaluated with measurable rigor.

Listening Before Leading: Institutionalising Youth Feedback

Understanding that policy must be co-created to be effective, the Office implemented a multi-state Youth Engagement & Needs Assessment Programme. Through town halls, structured consultations, and stakeholder dialogues, young Nigerians were engaged directly on issues ranging from employability and skills gaps to access to capital and civic participation.

These engagements did more than gather opinions; they created feedback loops. Insights collected were translated into advisory recommendations and programme adjustments, embedding participatory governance within youth policy delivery.

Skills for a Changing Economy: Automotive Sector Intervention

Economic transformation demands technical competence. In collaboration with the National Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDCC) and private-sector partners, the Office delivered the Automotive Skills Upgrade & Certification Programme.

One hundred young Nigerians were trained in modern automotive diagnostics and clean mobility technologies. Participants received industry-recognised certification, professional toolkits, and structured pathways into employment or enterprise.

This initiative reflects a deliberate alignment between youth capacity development and sectoral growth priorities, preparing participants not just for today's labour market, but for emerging industries.

Tapping into the Creative and Digital Economy

Through the Skill Aid Initiative, the Office supported creative and digital skills development programmes aimed at positioning young Nigerians within the fast-expanding digital economy.

From design and media production to entrepreneurial fundamentals, participants were equipped with practical competencies for self-employment and MSME participation. The focus extended beyond training to income viability, bridging the gap between skill acquisition and sustainable earning capacity.

Strengthening Sub-National Coordination

Recognising that federal programmes often encounter implementation friction at sub-national levels, the Office launched the Youth Initiatives Liaison Officer (YILO) Programme.

State-level liaison officers now provide real-time reporting, beneficiary verification, and coordination between MDAs and local stakeholders. This structure reduces information asymmetry and ensures that youth programmes reflect state-specific realities while maintaining federal standards.

Digital Dialogue: The Youth Pulse Initiative

To sustain continuous engagement, the Office introduced the Youth Pulse Initiative, a digital communication and sentiment-tracking platform.

Youth Pulse disseminates verified information on government opportunities while collecting feedback on awareness, perception, and trust levels.



Beyond outreach, it functions as a policy intelligence tool, helping refine communication strategies and programme design based on real-time sentiment data.

Elevating Nigeria's Youth Agenda on the Global Stage

Nigeria's youth delivery model was also positioned within international discourse through participation in:

- Commission on the Status of Women 69 (CSW69), New York
- Youth-focused engagements at the World Bank IMF Spring Meetings

These platforms provided opportunities to share Nigeria's monitoring-driven approach, explore partnerships, and align

domestic youth programming with global development frameworks.

A Shift from Promises to Performance

What distinguishes this reporting period is not the volume of activities, but the architecture behind them. The Office has prioritised:

- Data-backed oversight over fragmented reporting
- Participatory engagement over assumption-driven design
- Cross-agency coordination over siloed implementation
- Measurable outcomes over activity counts

In a country where young people represent both demographic strength and developmental urgency, the emphasis on monitoring and delivery is not procedural, it is strategic.

By institutionalising accountability systems, strengthening feedback loops, and aligning youth skills with economic opportunity, the Office has advanced a core principle: youth development must be intentional, measurable, and scalable.

As Nigeria continues to deepen its democratic and economic trajectory, translating policy into tangible opportunity for its young population remains central. The work underway signals a shift from ambition alone to structured impact.



From Passion to Policy: Inside Nigeria's Unprecedented Push to Make the Creative Economy a National Priority

Nigeria's creative industries – from music and film to fashion, photography, and digital content – have become powerful hallmarks of the country's cultural identity and economic potential. Increasingly, government policy is recognising creativity not just as artistic expression, but as a strategic driver of jobs and development. In this conversation with Benchmark Magazine, Ayo Adeagbo reflects on the Presidency's vision for strengthening Nigeria's creative economy and empowering young creators as both an economic engine and a tool of diplomacy in shaping Nigeria's global narrative.

Before stepping into this role, what did the creative economy mean to you personally – culture, commerce, or something deeper?

The creative economy for me was not simply about commerce, though the economic dimension is important. The creative economy for me was personal and connected to passion. Back in Ibadan and specifically in the University, I was drawn to taking moments on camera, observing life, and preserving the textures of everyday experience, either for conferences, weddings, campus life, beauty, and many more.

Then, as I studied history in depth as a major, I began to see how profoundly philosophical the creative economy really is. Creativity is a way of thinking, a way of knowing, a method for engaging with society and memory. Every photograph, every piece of art, every narrative is part of a larger conversation about identity, values, and legacy. Culture and commerce intersect, yes, but at its core, the creative economy is about human expression, social dialogue, and the preservation of memory.



▲ Ayo Adeagbo
Special Assistant to the President on Art, Culture and Creative Economy

When you engage with artists, filmmakers, designers, and digital creators across Nigeria, what common concern or aspiration do you hear most often?

To be honest, most of the creatives I engage with start with financial concerns. They're thinking about how to sustain their projects, fund their initiatives, or turn their passion into something that can support them. But it doesn't stop there. Often, these financial questions come hand-in-hand with deeper concerns: policy support, institutional backing, and the structures that allow their work to thrive in the long term.

First of all, I have an open-door policy in my Office for deeper engagement with creatives at all levels, they see me as someone in a position within Nigeria's first-of-its-kind creative economy government ecosystem, and they know I can help not just with immediate challenges, but with shaping the environment so their work has space to grow and endure.

What strikes me is how consistent this is across disciplines, whether it's an artist, filmmaker, a designer, or visual artist, they're all navigating the same questions: How do I make this sustainable? How do I make it meaningful? And how do I make it last?

That's where our work in government becomes critical, not just providing immediate support, but building the framework that lets creativity flourish in a way that's respected, protected, and recognized as a serious driver of culture and economy.

Nigeria's creative economy has been elevated to a national policy priority under the current administration. How would you describe the President's broader vision for positioning arts and culture as drivers of economic growth and national identity?

Honestly, what has happened and is still happening with Nigeria's creative economy right now is unprecedented under the leadership of His Excellency, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR. We have a first-of-its-kind ministry, the Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy, and no one has done this before. That alone tells you a lot about how seriously the President takes creativity, culture, and the arts as drivers of national growth and identity. It shows a recognition of culture and its central nature to how we define ourselves as a nation and how we project ourselves to the world.

The ambition of the ministry is broad and encompassing. We're talking about creating 2 million jobs by 2030 and contributing 100 billion USD to Nigeria's GDP, numbers that reflect the real, tangible impact that the creative economy can have on people's lives. But beyond the numbers, it's about creating a system where talent is nurtured, ideas are protected, and creativity is recognized as both a national asset and a strategic tool for development. The President's vision is about identity, heritage, and storytelling. When we elevate creativity to a national policy priority, we are effectively saying: we understand the power of narrative, of culture, of history, of imagination, and we are deliberately investing in it as part of our nation-building agenda.

What makes this work exciting is that it's both structural and human. The policies, frameworks, and institutions we're putting in place aim to create pathways for creative Nigerians to succeed, from mentorship and education to access to funding, platforms, and markets. In short, the President's vision is holistic and transformative. It's about jobs, GDP, and economic growth, but it's also about legacy, identity, and ensuring that the story of Nigeria is told authentically, vibrantly, and sustainably, by Nigerians themselves.

The Federal Government has set ambitious targets, including generating significant revenue and millions of jobs from the creative and tourism sectors by 2030. What practical steps are being taken to translate these projections into measurable outcomes?

The Federal Government's approach is anchored in the Presidential priorities, which move from driving economic growth, to creating jobs, to ensuring inclusiveness, and to implementing targeted, actionable plans through the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy. Practically, this means supporting programs that professionalise the creative sector, provide mentorship and skill development, and create market access for artists and cultural entrepreneurs.

We are also investing in infrastructure and platforms that allow tourism and creative activities to thrive, festivals, exhibitions, cultural hubs, and digital marketplaces. Partnerships with the private sector, international collaborators, and institutions like Lend for Good, Tikera, NESG by the Ministry ensure that opportunities translate into real revenue and employment. Every initiative is designed to move the needle on measurable outcomes: increasing earnings for creatives, creating sustainable jobs, and positioning Nigeria as a global hub for arts, culture, and tourism.

One of the headline initiatives under the administration is the Creative Economy Development Fund and the Intellectual Property Monetization framework. How will these initiatives directly empower young creatives and creative businesses?

You are correct to state that the Creative Economy Development Fund (CEDF) is a headline initiative as it rightly represents a transformative initiative that has the potential to redefine Nigeria's creative sector. It is a strategic lever designed to unlock the economic potential of creative talent across the country and I have 5 points to establish this for you.

First, it expands access to capital - you see, one of the greatest barriers young creatives face is access to financing. Traditional financial institutions often perceive creative enterprises as high-risk and require collateral that many young creators cannot provide. The CEDF directly addresses this gap by offering affordable loans, equity investments, and grants tailored to creative projects. This allows filmmakers, designers, musicians, and digital content creators to access the capital needed to scale their ideas and grow sustainable businesses.

Second, and very innovative for the progressive future we are moving towards, it leverages IP as an asset: I can say that historically, the intellectual property of Nigerian creatives, music catalogs, film rights, literary works, and digital content, has been undervalued and underutilized. The Framework transforms this paradigm by enabling creatives to use their work as bankable assets. Through mechanisms that allow IP to serve as collateral for financing, artists and creative enterprises can unlock capital to invest in production, distribution, and innovation. This approach positions creative output as a formal economic asset, opening doors to both domestic and international investment.

Third, CEDF is designed to serve both large-scale projects and micro and small creative enterprises. This inclusive structure ensures that grassroots innovators, emerging SMEs, and established creative businesses can access support appropriate to their scale.

Fourth, it would be driving Jobs, Skills Development, and Economic Diversification, by the provision of financial support and professional infrastructure, these initiatives create new employment opportunities, stimulate skills development, and foster enterprise formation. They help integrate Nigeria's creative output into global

value chains, strengthen the informal creative economy, and contribute to economic diversification beyond traditional sectors like oil and agriculture.

Fifth and lastly, it signals confidence to investors as the Fund establishes institutional confidence in Nigeria's creative economy. Transparent structures, standardized IP valuation, and clear pathways for return on investment attract both domestic and international investors, positioning Nigeria as a leading hub for cultural and creative industries.

Access to finance has historically been a challenge for creatives. What safeguards are being introduced to ensure funding reaches genuine creators and not just intermediaries?

Access to finance has always been one of the biggest hurdles for creatives in Nigeria. The reality is, a lot of talented young people struggle not because they lack ideas, but because the system hasn't been built to support them. That's exactly what initiatives like the Creative Leap Accelerator Programme (CLAP) seeks to address.

CLAP is designed to make funding and support directly accessible to creators themselves. It's not just about handing out money, it's about creating a structured platform where creatives can apply, get mentorship, build skills, and actually grow their businesses. There's a real emphasis on verification and accountability, so the funds reach people who are genuinely producing work and scaling their creative ventures. Beneficiaries have been identified from this.

When you look at the funding programs of the Ministry, what's really happening is that Nigeria is saying to its young creatives: "We see you, we value your work, and we're giving you the tools to grow and compete globally."

Intellectual property protection remains a major issue in Nigeria. What reforms are underway to strengthen enforcement and help creatives retain long-term value from their work?

Intellectual property in Nigeria has long been a challenge, but let me be clear, this

isn't something we're just talking about. Reforms are happening right now, the enactment of the Copyright Act 2022 was a reform for IP. I say that to appreciate the efforts of the Nigerian government on past efforts and what's happening in present time too. Through the Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy, we're strengthening the legal framework for copyright and intellectual property, modernising enforcement systems, and providing practical tools for creatives to register, license, and monetise their work. This is being done in close collaboration with stakeholders, the private sector, industry associations, and international partners like NESG, to make sure the protections aren't just theoretical, but actionable and sustainable.

We're also building capacity within the sector, so that creatives understand their rights and can leverage them. At the end of the day, it is all about trust, respect, and permanence. A creative should never have to worry that their work can be appropriated or undervalued. These reforms are ensuring that their innovation is recognized, protected, and can serve as a lasting archive of Nigeria's culture, a legacy not just for them, but for the nation.

The creative economy is overwhelmingly youth-driven. What targeted strategies are being championed to equip young creators with business skills, digital tools, and global competitiveness?

When we talk about the creative economy in Nigeria, we're really talking about our youth. More than half of Nigerians are under 30, and a huge portion of those powering the creative industries, ranging from filmmakers to designers, photographers to content creators, are the youth. Across Africa, creative industries generate tens of billions of dollars annually and are widely recognised by UN agencies as a major engine for youth empowerment and sustainable development, that's why it's not just arts, it's development work too.

The Federal Government's strategies are built with that reality front and centre. Every step we take in the creative economy agenda is about equipping young creators with the tools they need,



sustainable business skills, digital capacity, and competitiveness. That's why skills development is one of the core pillars of the 8-Point Plan by Hon. Hannatu Musa Musawa, Minister of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy. Prioritization of creative financing and access to capital, so promising young creators aren't held back because of lack of funds. And of course, strengthening policy frameworks, including intellectual property rights and digital rights, means young creators can retain long-term value from their work and participate fully in the economy as entrepreneurs, not just producers.

So when we talk about equipping young creators, it's not about one isolated program. It's a holistic approach: skills, digital tools, infrastructure, finance, partnerships, and policy, all in alignment, to give Nigerian youth not just opportunities, but sustainable careers with global reach.

Beyond talent development, how can policy help creatives transition from informal hustle to structured, scalable enterprises?

In Nigeria, clear policies help change the narrative, transitioning creatives from hustling, experimenting, and making brilliant work without structure, implementing simplified business registration, support for creative startups, and frameworks that recognise creative work as a legitimate, revenue-generating enterprise.

The second thing policy does is open doors to finance and market opportunities. When governments in places like South Korea or the UK support creative clusters with grants, tax incentives, and access to global

distribution networks, suddenly artists are building scalable enterprises that export culture and generate jobs. That's exactly what we're aiming for in Nigeria: giving creatives tools to think beyond the next gig, to plan, invest, and grow.

Finally, policy gives protections and guidance that make scaling possible. With the right policy in place, talent moves from informal hustle to structured enterprise, and the sector as a whole becomes a real engine for economic growth, cultural influence, and global recognition.

Nigerian music, film, fashion, and digital content are increasingly global. How is the Presidency positioning Nigeria to capture a larger share of the global creative economy?

The Office of Special Assistant on Art, Culture, and the Creative Economy is, in many ways, a direct reflection of the Presidency's commitment to elevating arts and culture as central to nation-building. Everything we do, from policy engagement to exhibitions, summits and symposiums, is tied to the broader vision of the Presidency: that art, culture, and creativity are engines for economic growth, diplomacy, and social cohesion.

Take *iki Àsà* Photo Exhibition for instance, it wasn't just about showcasing Nigerian and Turkish photographers. It was a platform for cultural dialogue, showing the world that our art, heritage, and creativity can sit alongside global standards while telling uniquely Nigerian and Turkish stories. Beyond being a showcase of photography, it was a demonstration of how culture can bridge

nations, spark dialogue, and create a shared platform for learning and collaboration.

Similarly, our work with the Goethe-Institut and Africa-Europe Partnerships for Culture (West Africa Component - Nigeria) on the Festival Symposium was a strategic intervention. It brought together festival policymakers, creatives, and investors from across Nigeria, creating opportunities for co-productions, residencies, and export of Nigerian music, film, fashion, and digital content.

The office also ensures that our creatives benefit from a structured ecosystem through inquiry and feedback. By doing this, we're positioning Nigerian creativity to compete and thrive on the global stage, while also reflecting the Presidency's broader goals of economic growth, youth empowerment, and soft power diplomacy.

In short, the office is a living demonstration of the idea that creativity is a tool for national strategy, influence, and sustainable development. Every project we execute through facilitation, collaboration, advocacy and diplomacy are about building bridges, creating markets, and ensuring that Nigerian arts and culture are recognised, respected, and truly global.

What lessons can Nigeria adopt from countries that have successfully institutionalized their creative industries as major economic contributors?

When you look at countries that have institutionalized their creative industries successfully, South Korea often comes to mind, consistently ranked as one of the top creative economies worldwide. Their approach is deliberate: government, private sector, and educational institutions work in lockstep to nurture talent, protect intellectual property, and export culture. The Hallyu wave, K-drama, K-pop, fashion, and content, didn't happen by chance; it was built on long-term strategy, investment in infrastructure, and global marketing, all supported by strong policy frameworks.

First, institutional support is key, creating ministries, agencies, and frameworks that treat creativity as an economic sector.

Second, intellectual property enforcement and rights management are non-negotiable for turning talent into sustainable businesses. Third, skill development and global positioning.

Thankfully, the first and most important step has already been taken under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria has formally institutionalized the creative economy. For the first time in our history, we have a dedicated ministry for Art, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy, a Presidential office, and clearly defined policies and programs that treat creativity as a serious economic sector. That alone is transformative; before this, creatives operated largely without a formal home or strategic support.

From here, the government is building momentum in multiple ways. We're strengthening policy frameworks, including copyright and intellectual property protections, to ensure creatives can retain long-term value from their work. We're investing in skills, infrastructure, and access to finance, so that talent can turn into sustainable, scalable enterprises. Programs like Skill Sync, mentorship initiatives, and youth-focused training are specifically designed to equip the next generation of creators.

How can arts and culture be intentionally deployed as tools of diplomacy and soft power in advancing Nigeria's international image?

I've often said that culture is the new diplomacy, and I truly believe it. In today's world, influence isn't only measured by treaties or trade agreements, it's also measured by how your stories, your creativity, and your heritage resonate globally. Arts and culture are tools that can project a nation's values, identity, and innovation in ways that are subtle, enduring, and profoundly human.

In practice, my Office is using culture intentionally as soft power. We've engaged with foreign missions and cultural attachés from Türkiye, South Africa, Canada, Spain, and more, creating platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and shared projects. We've developed initiatives like iki Ásà and collaboratively worked with institutions like the Goethe-Institut, but these are part of a broader strategy: to ensure that Nigerian

creatives are recognized globally as innovators, ambassadors, and contributors to international cultural discourse.

Diplomacy through culture is about building networks, fostering co-productions, and establishing platforms where Nigerian creativity can influence, connect, and inspire globally. At the end of the day, this approach positions Nigeria to not only export culture but to shape the global narrative about our people, values, and vision, making culture an indispensable arm of national strategy and international engagement.

On a lighter note, Nigeria's food culture, especially Jollof Rice, has become a global cultural symbol. Do you think it's possible to institutionalize a globally recognized "World Jollof Day"? What cultural and economic opportunities could that unlock?

Absolutely, why not? Think about it, globally, there's St. Patrick's Day, and countless other "symbolic" days that aren't about politics or independence but about culture, identity, and shared enjoyment.

That said, there's an important underlying factor to be highlighted: Jollof is not just Nigerian; it's enjoyed across West Africa. A "World Jollof Day" would really celebrate what makes us uniquely African, the shared culinary heritage, the flavors, the stories, and the creativity behind it. It's about highlighting a tradition that resonates across borders while giving Nigeria a platform to showcase its own style, its own story, within that broader African identity.

In fact, there's already a World Jollof Day on August 22nd, implemented by Asoebi Africa & West Afrikan Man. The real opportunity is to create a movement, culinary festivals, social media campaigns, competitions, and collaborations, that positions Jollof as an African cultural symbol people everywhere can experience and enjoy, even if it's not a formal "holiday."

At the end of the day, it's less about claiming ownership and more about celebrating identity, sparking engagement, and unlocking economic and cultural opportunities for creatives, tourism, and national branding.

Why Are Nigerian Cultures Dying?

A Food for Thought

Article by:
Akin Akinwale



Across Nigeria today, there is a growing concern that many of our cultures are slowly fading. From language and traditional practices to customs and values, things that once defined communities are gradually being replaced or forgotten. It is not that Nigerian culture disappeared overnight. Rather, it is being diluted, neglected, and in some cases abandoned by the very people who inherited it.

One of the clearest signs of this decline is the gradual loss of indigenous languages. Many Nigerian parents now speak primarily English to their children at home, believing it gives them an advantage academically and socially. While English is important, language is more than a means of communication. It carries proverbs, folktales, wisdom, humor, and the philosophy of a people. When a child grows up unable to speak his or her mother tongue fluently, that child loses direct access to centuries of cultural knowledge. Over time, culture becomes reduced to clothing and food rather than a complete worldview.

Urbanization has also played a role. Major cities such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt bring together people from different ethnic backgrounds. This diversity is one of Nigeria's strengths, but it also creates a neutral social environment where many traditional practices are no longer observed. Children raised in cities often grow up far removed from their ancestral villages, festivals, and customs that once formed the backbone of community life.

Another powerful influence is the dominance of global popular culture.

Today, young Nigerians are heavily influenced by social media and international entertainment platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Netflix. These platforms shape trends, fashion, and even identity. As a result, many young people are more familiar with global pop culture than with the stories, traditions, and values that shaped their own communities.

Religion has also contributed to the decline of certain cultural practices. Another powerful influence is the dominance of global popular culture. Today, young Nigerians are heavily influenced by social media and international entertainment platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Netflix. These platforms shape trends, fashion, and even identity. As a result, many young people are more familiar with global pop culture than with the stories, traditions, and values that shaped their own communities.

Religion has also contributed to the decline of certain cultural practices.

With the expansion of Christianity and Islam, many indigenous traditions are often dismissed as pagan or incompatible with modern religious beliefs.

Yet many of these practices were not purely religious rituals. They served as systems for conflict resolution, social organization, environmental preservation,

and communal celebration. When they disappear, communities sometimes lose structures that once maintained social balance.

Nigeria's colonial history also left a lasting impact on cultural perception. Colonial education systems promoted European knowledge and values as superior while portraying indigenous knowledge systems as backward. Generations grew up internalizing the idea that progress meant distancing themselves from traditional ways of life. Even today, many students know more about European history than about the histories of their own ethnic groups.

Economic realities further complicate cultural preservation. In a country where many families struggle with the demands of daily survival, paying rent, school fees, and feeding their households, cultural education often becomes a lower priority. Teaching children proverbs, participating in festivals, or maintaining traditional crafts can easily be overshadowed by the immediate pressures of making a living.

Yet it would be inaccurate to say Nigerian culture is completely dying. In many ways, it is evolving. Contemporary music, fashion, and storytelling are rediscovering and repackaging cultural identity for modern audiences.

Perhaps the real question is not whether Nigerian culture is dying, but whether Nigerians still see value in preserving it. Cultures rarely vanish solely because of outside influence. They fade when the people who inherited them stop practicing, teaching, and passing them on.

If Nigerian culture is to endure, its preservation must begin within families, communities, and everyday life. Language must be spoken, stories must be told, traditions must be practiced, and heritage must be valued. Without these deliberate efforts, culture gradually slips away, often without people realizing what has been lost until it is gone.

Nollywood as a National Asset: Measuring Its Real Contribution to Nigeria's Economy

Article by:
Prince Onyekachukwu Ogbonna

Nigeria's film industry, Nollywood, did not begin with investors or government blueprints. It began on street corners and bus stops, with filmmakers selling VHS tapes out of sheer creative necessity. Three decades later, that hustle has grown into Africa's largest film industry by volume, the world's second most prolific film industry after Bollywood, and one of Nigeria's most significant non-oil economic engines. The numbers demand attention: over one million Nigerians employed, annual revenue between \$500 million and \$590 million, and approximately 2,600 films produced per year. Nollywood is Nigeria's second largest employer, trailing only agriculture. Yet the industry continues to operate well below its potential, constrained by piracy, underfunding, and the absence of structured institutional support.

The Economic Footprint

Nollywood's economic contribution extends far beyond cinema screens. A single mid-scale production engages technical crews, drivers, caterers, costume designers, location managers and artisans, creating a multiplier effect that reaches deep into local economies. With proper investment and structured support, industry analysts project the sector could double its workforce, adding another one million jobs to an economy struggling with youth unemployment.

The box office tells a story of accelerating momentum.

Total cinema revenue grew from N7.36 billion in 2023 to N15.64 billion in 2025, a figure projected to reach N20 billion by the end of 2026.

In the same period, the number of operational cinemas rose from 91 to 122,



with projections of 135 cinemas and 390 screens by year-end 2026. Most significantly, 2025 marked the first time in Nigeria's recorded history that Nollywood outperformed Hollywood at the local box office, capturing 49.4% of total West African box office revenue against Hollywood's 48.8%. Sixteen Nollywood titles crossed the N200 million threshold. Funke Akindele's *Behind The Scenes* grossed N2.407 billion, making her the first filmmaker to rank number one at the African box office for three consecutive years.

Distribution, Streaming and the Shift in Power

Nollywood's distribution landscape has been reshaped by the rise and partial retreat of global streaming platforms. Netflix's entry in 2018, beginning with Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart*, gave the industry unprecedented global visibility and production resources. By 2023, Netflix had invested N32.8 billion in Nigerian content, enabling films like *Anikulapo* and *King of Boys* to reach worldwide audiences. However, in November 2024, Netflix halted new Nigerian commissions, followed by a similar withdrawal by Amazon Prime Video earlier that year. The abrupt pullback disrupted projects in development and exposed the industry's

vulnerability to foreign platform priorities.

In response, filmmakers have turned increasingly to YouTube's direct-to-fan model, where creator platforms paid out over N15 billion to Nigerian creators in 2024. Yet this pivot carries its own hazards. Copyright fraud has emerged as a systemic threat, with bad actors extracting soundtracks from new Nollywood releases and filing fraudulent Content ID claims to divert revenue. Actress Bimbo Ademoye's film *Where Love Lives* accumulated 18 million views on YouTube, only for its earnings to be hijacked through this mechanism. Without enforceable copyright protection and clearer licensing frameworks, Nigerian filmmakers stand to lose income even as their audiences expand globally.

The Shadow Side: Piracy and Underfunding

The World Bank estimates that for every legitimate Nollywood copy sold, nine others are pirated. This is not a peripheral inconvenience; it is a structural wound that suppresses actor earnings, discourages investors, and compresses the revenue available to fund quality productions. Even at record-breaking box office figures, the industry earns a fraction of what a properly protected

market would yield. On March 4, 2026, Nigeria's copyright enforcement took a decisive step when Emmanuel Analike, CEO of NetNaija Media Enterprises, was arraigned before the Federal High Court in Abuja on four counts of copyright infringement under the Copyright Act 2022. It was the first major detention of a prominent piracy platform operator in 2026, a signal that enforcement authorities are moving from warnings to consequences.

Financing remains equally precarious. Filmmaker Frederick Leonard's observation that "96% of Nigerian film producers are still hustlers" is borne out by data: 95% of filmmakers fund productions from personal savings. Government promises have repeatedly failed to materialise. President Jonathan's N3 billion grant and President Buhari's N22.7 billion commitment both fell largely short of reaching the intended beneficiaries. Banks are reluctant to lend because most creative enterprises lack formal business structures, bankable proposals, or scalable revenue models. Both the financial sector and the creative sector must evolve toward each other.

Infrastructure, Recognition and What Comes Next

Long-overdue infrastructure investment is now underway. In January 2026, the Directors Guild of Nigeria unveiled "Nollywood City," a 50-acre creative-industrial complex in Ogun State featuring production studios sound

stages, post-production hubs and film villages. The Actors Guild of Nigeria simultaneously announced plans for a N1.3 billion Nollywood Centre in Abuja. These projects reflect a maturing industry beginning to build the physical foundations its talent has long deserved.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), through the Bankers' Committee, led a N68 billion renovation of the National Arts Theatre in Lagos, which reopened on October 1, 2025, as the Wole Soyinka Centre for Culture and Creative Arts.

Private Infrastructural Investments like Veteran actor Ibrahim Chatta's N1.4 billion 74 acres film village in Oyo Town, Oyo State and Kunle Afolayan's KAP Film Village and Resort in Igbojaye, Oyo State, have become major production hubs for Nollywood Productions.

On the global stage, Canal+ acquired ROK Studios in July 2025, a company that has produced more than 540 films and 25 series, describing the Nigerian market as "one of the very rare pay-TV markets that is growing and growing very fast."

Cinema's reach, however, remains uneven. With fewer than one in one hundred Nigerians visiting a cinema in 2025, and most screens concentrated in upscale urban malls, access is still a privilege rather than a norm. Femi Adebayo's Agesinkole 2 demonstrated an alternative by screening in school halls and open-air venues across multiple states, grossing N417 million and proving that demand

exists far beyond city corridors. Of the nearly 2,000 films Nigeria produces annually, only 81 Nigerian titles reached cinemas in 2025, pointing to distribution bottlenecks that must urgently be resolved.

Conclusion: The Industry Has Done Its Part

In a nation working urgently to reduce dependence on oil revenues, Nollywood represents a proven, scalable and globally competitive non-oil export. The creative sector could account for 20 to 25 percent of Nigeria's GDP in the long term, approximately N345 trillion, if properly harnessed. With over one million Nigerians already employed and the capacity to create another million, Nollywood is among the country's most effective instruments for youth employment and economic inclusion.

From makeshift video parlours in Surulere to global streaming platforms, from VHS tapes sold at bus stops to a N2.4 billion box office record, Nollywood's trajectory mirrors Nigeria's own aspiration: resilient, creative and ready for prime time. The industry has told the stories, built the audiences and proven the model. It now falls to the government, investors and institutions to match that effort and finally treat Nollywood as what it has always been: one of Nigeria's most valuable national assets.





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Unlocking Youth Potential: How Government Policy Can Dismantle Barriers to Youth Entrepreneurship



▲ Balogun Danjuma

Nigeria is a young country. Not in the sense of being newly formed, but in the most literal demographic sense: more than 60 percent of its population is under the age of 25. In a nation of over 220 million people, that translates to an extraordinary concentration of energy, creativity and ambition packed into a generation that has grown up with the internet, with mobile money, with the idea that building something from scratch is not just possible but desirable. And yet, despite all of this promise, Nigeria continues to rank among the countries with the highest rates of youth unemployment in Africa. The question worth asking is not whether Nigerian youth have the potential to drive economic transformation. They clearly do. The question is what stands between that potential and its full expression, and what role government policy must play in clearing the path.

This is not an abstract policy debate. It is a conversation about the 33-year-old in Aba who has a textile idea but cannot access a loan. It is about the graduate in

Kano who understands agri-tech but has never been introduced to a mentor who can shape her vision. It is about the young developer in Lagos who wants to register a startup but spends three weeks navigating bureaucratic processes that should take three hours. The barriers to youth entrepreneurship in Nigeria are real, structural and, critically, solvable. And the government of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has, at least in its stated commitments, positioned itself to address them.

The Scale of the Problem

The National Bureau of Statistics has consistently reported youth unemployment figures that paint a troubling picture. At various points in recent years, unemployment among Nigerians aged 15 to 34 has hovered between 33 and 42 percent, with underemployment pushing that figure even higher when counted properly. These are not young people who are idle by choice. They are largely educated, aspirational and aware. But they exist in an ecosystem that has historically been indifferent to their entrepreneurial needs.

The story of Nigerian youth entrepreneurship is often told through the success of outliers: the tech founders who raised millions in venture capital, the fashion designers who built Pan-African brands, the musicians and content creators who monetised their craft globally. These stories are real and they matter. But they are the exceptions that prove the rule. For every Paystack or Flutterwave, there are thousands of equally capable young Nigerians whose businesses died at the idea stage because they could not get funding, could not navigate regulations, and had no one to guide them through the fog.

Access to Capital: The First and Deepest Wall

Ask any young entrepreneur in Nigeria what the single biggest obstacle to

starting or growing a business is, and the answer will almost always be the same: money. Not the lack of ideas. Not the absence of ambition. Money. Specifically, the near-impossibility of accessing affordable, structured capital through formal financial channels.

Commercial bank lending in Nigeria has historically been inaccessible to young people without collateral, which most of them do not have. Interest rates, even when loans are technically available, have been prohibitively high, frequently exceeding 20 percent per annum. Microfinance institutions exist but are unevenly distributed and often undercapitalised. The informal money market, while active, comes with its own dangers including exploitation and lack of legal protection.

The Tinubu administration has acknowledged this gap. The presidential initiative on student loans, which seeks to enable young Nigerians to complete higher education without financial ruin, is a step in a direction that recognises the importance of investing in young people. More directly relevant is the Renewed Hope Agenda's emphasis on economic empowerment, which has included rhetoric around expanding access to credit for small businesses. But rhetoric must become architecture.

What Nigeria needs is a properly funded, professionally managed youth enterprise capital fund, one that does not require traditional collateral, that offers concessionary interest rates capped at levels that actually allow businesses to survive, and that is administered with transparency and accountability. The Bank of Industry has done commendable work in this space but its reach relative to the scale of the problem remains limited. Expanding the BOI's youth-specific lending windows, decentralising access to state and local government levels, and integrating mobile-first application processes are all achievable reforms that could move the

needle significantly.

The Bureaucracy Problem: When Red Tape Strangles Green Shoots

Starting a business in Nigeria should not feel like preparing for a civil service examination. And yet for many young entrepreneurs, the process of formalising a business remains an exercise in patience, expense and confusion. From Corporate Affairs Commission registration to tax identification numbers, from state-level business permits to sector-specific licences, the regulatory architecture that a young founder must navigate before opening their doors is dense, inconsistent and, in many cases, designed for a pre-digital era.

The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings have repeatedly placed Nigeria in positions that reflect this reality, though the country has made incremental progress over the years. The problem is not just the number of steps required to register a business; it is the cost of those steps, the time they consume and the opacity of the process for someone encountering it for the first time without connections or legal counsel.

President Tinubu's administration came into office with a stated commitment to structural economic reform. The removal of the petrol subsidy and the unification of the foreign exchange market, whatever one's views on the immediate social cost of those decisions, signalled a willingness to make difficult structural choices. That same energy for reform needs to be applied to the regulatory environment facing young businesses. A 48-hour business registration process, fully digital, at zero or minimal cost for businesses with registered capital below a certain threshold, would send a clear message that Nigeria is serious about enabling enterprise.

The Lagos state government has in recent years made notable improvements to its business environment, including digital interfaces for some registration and tax processes. That model should be studied, adapted and adopted at the federal level. There is no reason that a young entrepreneur in Maiduguri or Makurdi should face a more punishing registration environment than one in Victoria Island. Standardisation and digitalisation of

regulatory processes across all 36 states and the FCT should be a governance priority.

The Mentorship Gap: Building Bridges Between Experience and Aspiration

Capital and regulatory ease matter enormously. But there is a third barrier that is less visible and therefore often neglected in policy conversations: the absence of structured mentorship and business development support for young entrepreneurs.

Building a business requires knowledge that is not taught in classrooms. It requires understanding of market dynamics, customer acquisition, financial management, negotiation, resilience and strategic pivoting. Much of this knowledge lives in the heads of experienced business owners and professionals who have built and survived the Nigerian business environment. The challenge is that this knowledge is not systematically transferred to the next generation of founders.

In more developed entrepreneurship ecosystems, formal mentorship is embedded in the system. Incubators and accelerators pair new founders with experienced operators. Government enterprise agencies maintain registers of volunteer mentors. Universities have commercialisation offices that connect student ideas with industry expertise. Nigeria has elements of all of these, particularly in Lagos and Abuja, but they serve a tiny fraction of the young entrepreneurs who need them.

A national mentorship programme, structured through the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria, could change this. SMEDAN has the institutional presence and the mandate. What it has often lacked is the funding, the political will and the programmatic design to make mentorship delivery systematic rather than occasional. Pairing every grant or loan recipient with a minimum of six months of structured business mentoring should be a non-negotiable condition of government enterprise support. This is not an additional burden on government; it is a condition that increases the return on every naira invested.

Education as Infrastructure: Teaching the Entrepreneurial Mindset

Nigeria cannot produce a generation of entrepreneurs if its education system continues to produce graduates who see employment as the only legitimate measure of success. The way young Nigerians are educated to think about work, value creation and risk needs to change at a foundational level.

This is beginning to happen at the edges. Some universities have introduced entrepreneurship departments and startup competitions. The National Universities Commission has in recent years encouraged institutions to integrate entrepreneurial education into curricula. But this has been uneven and largely optional. What is needed is a coherent national policy that makes entrepreneurship education not a peripheral elective but a core component of secondary and tertiary education.

Practical, hands-on entrepreneurship education at the senior secondary level, where students develop real business plans, engage with local markets and receive feedback from practitioners, would begin to reorient how young Nigerians think about their economic futures. The Tinubu administration's engagement with education reform, including ongoing conversations about vocational and technical education, provides an opening for this kind of curriculum integration.

The Digital Economy: An Opportunity That Cannot Be Wasted

One arena in which Nigerian youth have demonstrated extraordinary entrepreneurial capacity without waiting for government is the digital economy. From fintech to healthtech, from creative content to e-commerce logistics, young Nigerians have built globally competitive products and companies. Andela trained thousands of software developers who are now employed across the world. Flutterwave and Paystack built payment infrastructure that transformed commerce across the continent.

The Tinubu administration has identified the digital economy as a priority sector, and the Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy under the stewardship of Dr Bosun Tijani has

articulated an ambitious vision for Nigeria's technology future. The 3 Million Technical Talent programme, which aims to train millions of young Nigerians in technical and digital skills, is one of the most significant youth-facing policy commitments of the administration. If properly executed, it could be transformative.

But training must be paired with opportunity. Training young Nigerians to code or to build digital products is only half of the equation. The other half is ensuring that those trained individuals have access to capital to build companies, regulatory pathways that do not punish digital innovation, and markets, both domestic and export, that reward Nigerian digital products. Broadband infrastructure expansion, particularly outside major urban centres, is also a prerequisite. An entrepreneur in Sokoto with a viable software idea cannot build it if her internet connection is unreliable.

State Governments Have a Role Too

Federal policy is critical but it cannot do everything. Nigeria is a federal state and a significant proportion of the regulatory, educational and social infrastructure that shapes the entrepreneurial environment is under state and local government control. The variation in business friendliness between Nigerian states is enormous and this variation directly affects the opportunities available to young entrepreneurs in different parts of the country.

Governors who are serious about youth development and economic transformation should be asking what their states are doing to reduce the cost of starting a business, to provide business development services in local languages, to create dedicated youth enterprise zones with lower tax rates and faster registration, and to connect young entrepreneurs in their states with national and international markets.

The Anambra and Lagos models of deliberate business environment improvement are worth studying and adapting. States with high concentrations of agricultural potential, like Benue, Kebbi and Cross River, have particular opportunities to develop youth-led agri-business ecosystems with the right policy support.



Accountability and Implementation: Where Good Intentions Go to Die

Nigeria is not short of good policy documents. It has a history of well-crafted national development plans, enterprise development frameworks and youth empowerment programmes that have not achieved their potential, not because the ideas were wrong, but because implementation was weak, accountability was absent and corruption diverted resources from intended beneficiaries.

Any serious effort by the Tinubu administration to dismantle barriers to youth entrepreneurship must be accompanied by a robust accountability architecture. This means public reporting of disbursements from youth enterprise funds with names and business details of recipients. It means independent evaluation of programme outcomes. It means feedback mechanisms that allow young entrepreneurs who were denied access or who experienced corruption to report it safely. And it means consequences for officials who fail to deliver or who divert resources.

Civil society organisations, the media and the legislature all have roles to play in this accountability function. But the government must build the transparency structures that make accountability possible in the first place.

Conclusion: A Generation Waiting to Be Unleashed

The argument for investing in youth entrepreneurship in Nigeria is not a sentimental one. It is a hard-nosed economic calculation. Nigeria needs to create tens of millions of jobs over the next decade to absorb its growing working-age population. The government cannot create those jobs through public sector hiring. Only a thriving private sector, driven significantly by small and medium enterprises, can achieve that scale. And the only way to build that private sector is to ensure that the young people who have the ideas, the energy and the willingness to take risks are given a fair chance to succeed.

The Tinubu administration has the political capital, the economic reform credentials and the stated commitment to make meaningful progress on this agenda. What it needs now is the programmatic specificity, the implementation discipline and the accountability mechanisms to turn stated priorities into lived realities for young entrepreneurs across the country.

Nigeria's youth are not the problem. They are the solution. The government's job is to get out of the way of what they can build, and to actively clear the obstacles that have blocked them for too long. The moment for that work is not tomorrow. It is now.

Through A Creative Lens

Road Journey From Nigeria To Accra

Written & Photography by Walekazm · 18 Souls, One Road, 3 Countries



▲ Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park, Accra Ghana

The Road South

There is a particular kind of silence that settles over a convoy before departure — the hush before chaos, before dust, before discovery. We were eighteen in total, led by our boss Mr. Akin Akinwale — a man whose vision had brought this unlikely crew together: writers with notebooks already dog-eared at the first page, business people who somehow managed to take calls at every border post, influencers framing the world through phone screens before the rest of us had even stepped out of the vehicle, and one tour guide whose job description seemed to expand by the hour. Then there was the driver.

The driver and the tour guide argued the entire way. About roads. About stops. About whether that particular town was worth slowing down for. About fuel. About time. Their disagreements became the unofficial soundtrack of the journey — sometimes hilarious, occasionally exhausting, always a reminder that eighteen people on a shared vacation will never fully agree on anything. We set off southward toward Accra, Ghana's coastal capital, with camera bags, weekend bags,

and enough snacks to survive a small siege. We were not on assignment. We came to breathe, to wander, to discover — eighteen souls chasing the joy of the unknown.

The road itself was part of the story. We crossed at the Seme border first — cameras strictly put away, as photography is not permitted at border crossings. What the lens could not capture, the memory held: the long negotiation of paperwork, the heat, hawkers pressing cold water and phone chargers against the windows as we entered the Benin Republic. We pressed on through to the Aflao border, where Togo gave way to Ghana — again, cameras down, eyes wide open. Some moments exist only for those who were there. By the time we rolled into Ghana, we had already passed through three nations, three sets of customs officers, and more speed bumps than any of us cared to count.

Accra is a city that refuses to sit still. It heaves and hums at every hour, its skyline a jagged conversation between colonial-era forts and glass-fronted hotels. To walk its streets is to feel the full weight of African history pressing upward through the asphalt — of kingdoms risen and

fallen, of bondage and independence, of a people perpetually becoming. This is the story of what eighteen people on a vacation discovered when they stopped rushing and truly looked.

"Accra does not reveal itself to those in a hurry. It opens slowly, like a letter you were meant to read twice."

Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park

Before we unpacked a single lens, we went to find Kwame Nkrumah. To come to Accra and skip this park would be like visiting Rome and ignoring the Colosseum — possible, but unforgivable. The memorial park sits on the very spot where Nkrumah declared Ghana's independence on March 6, 1957, making Ghana the first sub-Saharan African nation to throw off the chains of colonial rule. His words that night still echo here: "Ghana, your beloved country is free forever."

The park itself is a meditation rendered

in stone and water. At its heart stands a striking black and white marble mausoleum, where Nkrumah and his wife Fathia rest beneath a sword-shaped monument that reaches skyward like a raised fist. Around it, manicured gardens unfold, reflecting pools ripple in the heat, and a museum chronicles the rise and fall of one of Africa's most visionary, and most controversial, leaders.

Nkrumah was a paradox of history: a Pan-African dreamer who built schools, roads, and the Akosombo Dam, yet whose one-party state and cult of personality ultimately led to his overthrow in a 1966 military coup while he was abroad in Hanoi. Standing before his eternal flame, I gathered the other seventeen and took our first group photograph of the journey — the crew, together, in a place that felt worthy of the moment. Around us, Ghanaians came to pay their respects — civil servants on lunch breaks, school children in uniform, elderly men who perhaps remembered the independence broadcast on a crackling radio. Their presence reminded us that this was not a museum piece. It was a living memorial.

National Museum of Ghana

Half a kilometre from the memorial park, the National Museum of Ghana sits behind a modest façade that gives no hint of the treasures within. Established in 1957 — the year of independence, as if the new nation understood immediately that freedom required memory — the museum is the keeper of Ghana's long story, from the earliest human settlements in the region to the kingdoms of the Ashanti, Dagomba, and Ga peoples.

We entered during the morning light, and the first gallery stopped us cold. Here were the tools of ancient Iron Age Ghanaians: stone implements, terracotta vessels, bronze castings so precise they embarrassed modern assumptions about pre-colonial African craftsmanship. The famous kente cloth displays occupied a central hall — those luminous strips of woven silk and cotton whose geometric patterns are not mere decoration but a language, each design carrying proverbs, histories, and clan identities that a trained eye can read like a text.

The museum also confronts the uncomfortable: a section documenting

the slave trade does not look away from the numbers, the routes, the human cost of centuries of trafficking in which the Gold Coast — present-day Ghana — was one of the most active transatlantic departure points. Standing before those maps and chains, our team fell quiet in the way that only genuine reckoning produces. Photography here felt less like a hobby and more like a responsibility — even on a vacation, some things demand to be remembered.

Makola Market

If the memorial park is Accra's soul and the museum its memory, then Makola Market is its living, breathing, sweating heartbeat. One of the largest open-air markets in West Africa, Makola occupies an entire quarter of central Accra in a

you will never capture it fully. It moves too fast, folds too much into too little space. We split into pairs and agreed to get lost. That is the only honest methodology. I found a fabric seller named Abena who had operated her stall for thirty-one years; she allowed me to photograph her hands — mapped by decades of handling cloth — wrapped around a bolt of deep indigo kente. That image, I believe, contains an entire biography.

"Makola does not want to be captured. It wants to be survived. The photographs that come out of it taste of that survival."



▲ The Palais de Lomé, Togo

sprawling, seemingly orderless labyrinth that is, in fact, perfectly ordered — just not by any system legible to an outsider.

We arrived at mid-morning, when the market is at full roar. Traders, predominantly women — the market women of Accra are an institution unto themselves, a commercial force that has underpinned the city's informal economy for generations — presided over stalls of unimaginable variety. Bolts of Ankara fabric stacked ceiling-high in colours that defy naming. Pyramids of yam, cassava, plantain, and pepper. Electronics laid out on plastic sheets beside mountains of second-hand clothing. The smell was everything at once: smoked fish, fresh ginger, petrol, perfume.

To photograph Makola is to accept that

Independence Square

Few public spaces in Africa carry the symbolic weight of Independence Square. Also known as Black Star Square — a name that nods to the Black Star Line, Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanist shipping company that inspired Nkrumah's own vision — this vast ceremonial plaza stretches along the Atlantic coast with a grandeur that is almost cinematic in its scale. The Black Star Gate rises at its northern end: a triumphal arch bearing the Black Star of Ghana, beneath which independence parades have marched since 1957.

Nkrumah conceived this space as an act of political imagination — a public square that would announce to the world that Africa's new nations could build monuments equal to any in Europe. At its



▲ Osun Castle (also known as Christiansborg Castle) Accra, Ghana

centre stands the Liberation Day Monument, and flanking the square are a series of concrete grandstands from which heads of state have reviewed military parades, national celebrations, and the solemn ceremonies that mark a young nation asserting its dignity.

We arrived at the hour before sunset, which is the only correct time to photograph this place. The Atlantic breeze comes in from the south, and the light turns the white concrete to amber. Fishermen were mending nets along the sea wall below. Children were playing football in the square's shadow. The juxtaposition — grand colonial-inflected architecture above, ordinary life below — felt like the most honest portrait of postcolonial Africa you could find in a single frame.

Accra Mall

Including a shopping mall in a vacation diary might seem an odd choice. But to omit it would be to miss one of the most important stories the city is telling about itself. Accra Mall, opened in 2008 in the Spintex Road corridor, was the first major Western-style shopping centre in Ghana. It was not merely a retail development; it was a statement — a declaration that Accra had arrived in a globalised world and intended to participate in it on its own terms.

The mall is a study in contemporary Ghanaian aspiration. Its food court serves jollof rice alongside sushi. Its supermarket stocks Milo and imported

Italian pasta on the same shelf. Young Accra professionals — the city's growing middle class, educated, ambitious, and digitally native — circulate through its air-conditioned corridors in a way that would be recognisable in any mall from Manila to Manchester. And yet it is unmistakably Ghanaian: the music drifting from a phone shop is Afrobeats, the fabric store in the corner is stocked with Dutch wax prints, and the conversation around every table is conducted in a mix of English, Twi, and Ga that no language model could replicate.

We wandered here because contrast is part of the story. The same city that holds Makola Market and Independence Square also holds this — a gleaming shrine to consumer modernity. To understand Accra, you must hold all these images simultaneously: the ancient and the brand-new, the open-air stall and the food court, the independence monument and the international franchise. That tension is not a problem to be solved. It is the city's vitality.

Jamestown

We saved Jamestown for last. Not because it is the least important — it may, in fact, be the most — but because it is the kind of place that requires everything else to have already softened you. Jamestown is the oldest quarter of Accra, a fishing settlement that predates the colonial city, pressed between the lighthouse and the sea in a tangle of lanes, painted walls, and the perpetual smell of salt and

smoked fish. It is where Accra began, and in some ways, it is where Accra's hardest truths still live.

At its edge stands Ussher Fort — built by the Dutch in 1649, seized by the British in 1868, and used as a prison until very recently, housing inmates in conditions that prompted international concern. The fort still stands, its thick whitewashed walls enclosing a courtyard where the history of the transatlantic slave trade and colonial justice are written in stone. You do not need to be told what happened here. The architecture tells you.

Yet Jamestown is also one of the most vividly alive neighbourhoods in all of Accra. The Jamestown Café has become a cultural hub; the lighthouse is an Instagram landmark; the boxing gymnasium that produced Ghanaian champions is a place of serious, sweating work where young men train with the focused intensity of people who know that talent alone is never enough. And every morning before sunrise, the fishing canoes go out — painted in bright colours, laden with nets, paddled by men whose fathers paddled the same waters. We rose early to photograph the return: dozens of canoes riding the Atlantic swells toward shore, their prows slapping the waves, the fishermen singing.

That image — the canoes coming home in the early light, Ussher Fort's walls visible in the background, the city waking behind them — felt like a summation of everything Jamestown holds. History and survival. Wound and continuance. The past that will not release its grip and the present that refuses to stop moving forward.

The Return Road — A Detour Through Togo

We left Accra the way you leave any city that has given you something important: slowly, looking back. Eighteen people reloaded into vehicles that now felt smaller for how much they needed to carry. Hard drives full of images, notebooks full of words, and the particular tiredness that only genuine attention produces. The driver and the tour guide argued about which lane to take out of the city. Some things do not change.

But the return road had a surprise written into it. We had agreed — somewhere between Jamestown and the packing of bags — that we would not rush home. Togo was waiting. We crossed back through the Aflao border and made our way to Lomé, Togo's coastal capital — and what followed was two days that none of us had fully planned for, but all of us needed.

Mercelo Beach, Lomé

We checked into Mercelo Beach and stayed for two nights. After the relentless intensity of Accra — the markets, the monuments, the heat, the history — the beach was exactly what eighteen tired souls needed. The Atlantic here felt calmer, more forgiving — or perhaps we were simply more relaxed, unburdened by itineraries and schedules. Evenings were long and unhurried, the kind that make you forget what day it is and stop caring.

Mercelo Beach became our base, our exhale. Conversations that had been cut short on the road finally found their full length. The influencers put down their phones — briefly. The business people stopped checking emails — briefly. And for a few golden hours each evening, eighteen people who had been moving constantly simply sat still and watched the Atlantic do what it has always done.

Palais de Lomé

The Palais de Lomé is one of West Africa's most elegant cultural landmarks. Originally built in 1905 as the residence of the German colonial governor, the grand white building has lived many lives — colonial headquarters, presidential palace, and now a magnificent museum and cultural centre that opened its doors to the public in 2019 after an extensive restoration. To walk through it is to walk through the layered history of Togo itself.

The palace sits within lush tropical gardens that soften its colonial architecture, and its galleries house a rotating collection of contemporary African art alongside permanent exhibitions on Togolese history and culture. For a group of creatives, influencers, and visual storytellers, it was the perfect final destination before the long road home. The light inside the galleries was exceptional — the kind that

makes every photograph look considered, every moment feel deliberate.

At the end of our visit, the Palais offered its remembrance book — a quiet invitation to leave something of yourself behind. Walekazm paused, picked up the pen, and wrote seven words that seemed to say everything about the journey, about the camera, about why we had come at all: "No complete History without picture." The book was closed. The words remained.

"No complete History without picture." — Walekazm, Palais de Lomé Remembrance Book

Then, reluctantly, we returned to the road. Back across the Seme border into Nigeria, cameras put away once more at the crossing. The road that had carried us toward something now carried us away from it — but lighter, somehow, for everything it had given us.

Ghana is not a simple story. No nation is. But Accra, in the span of our vacation days, offered itself with a generosity and complexity that no one had quite expected. We came for fun and rest. We left with something heavier and more valuable — a deeper understanding of a city that earns every hour you give it. The man at Makola who showed us how

to test fabric. The child at Independence Square who insisted on being in every photograph. The fishermen at Jamestown who waved at our cameras from the water as if to say: we see you seeing us.

We drove north into the red dust of the road, and the city shrank in the mirrors. But it did not disappear.

And then, finally, Nigeria. There is something quietly profound about crossing back into your own country — the familiar signboards, the particular chaos of home that somehow feels ordered because it is yours. The air smelled different. The roads felt different. Everything was wonderfully, unmistakably Nigerian. After days of jollof rice served Ghanaian-style and Togolese cuisine — all delicious, all appreciated — nothing could have prepared us for the sheer joy of sitting down to a proper plate of Nigerian jollof. Smoky, rich, spicy — unapologetically itself. If the journey had a final full stop, it was that plate. Home had never tasted so good.

"You never truly appreciate Nigerian jollof until you have been away long enough to miss it. Three countries later, it tasted like a standing ovation."



▲ Monument of Independence Lomé, Togo

Arsenal's title run, their approach, mentality, how far they've come... will they go all the way?

It is almost impossible to discuss Arsenal over the last two decades without the word "bottlers" slipping into the conversation. Even this season, the word resurfaced after Arsenal threw away a two-goal lead to bottom-placed Wolverhampton Wanderers. For Arsenal, the story has always been like an elephant at the top of the tree, which will eventually find its way down. The stats tell a similar story. Since 2004, Arsenal have spent almost 924 days at the top of the Premier League table without finishing the season there. "Always the bridesmaid, never the bride."

However, following three consecutive second-place finishes, Arsenal look to have finally found something different this year. With seven matches to play, they sit nine points clear of second-placed Manchester City, albeit having played a game more.

And that is not all. Arsenal stand on the verge of becoming the first club in English football history to achieve an unprecedented quadruple, remaining in contention across all four competitions.

But, what has changed?

For a team long defined by near-misses, the narrative has shifted this season. One of the most significant factors behind Arsenal's title challenge has been their mentality, and that shift began in the summer transfer window.

Unlike previous windows, Arsenal's recruitment this time was deliberately targeted at serial winners who have experienced what it takes to cross the finish line. Vitor Gyokeres came from Sporting, where he led them to two consecutive league titles. Piero Hincapie was part of the Leverkusen side that won the Bundesliga without losing a single match. Likewise Eberechi Eze, who drove Crystal Palace all the way to the FA Cup and Community Shield trophy.

Declan Rice also shared this same sentiment. When asked about what changed this season, Declan Rice didn't

mince a word when he said "more voices in the dressing room".

"More players take a leadership role, which has been really good. More voices. That's where we've sorted problems out that we haven't thought would go well.

"So yeah, I think there are so many different things, but I've really seen us evolve this year as a group in terms of leadership, you know, showing real character." Rice said.

This played out in their response to the Wolves draw, by beating North London rivals Tottenham in the next game with Eberechi Eze and Viktor Gyokeres both scoring twice.

Also, while other managers like Slot and Hurzeler are complaining about the physical nature of the Premier League, especially how much focus is now on set-pieces and man-to-man marking, Arteta has found a way to win. His team has evolved from a free-flowing attacking football we all saw in 2022/23 to an ugly and "boring" football, which is only concerned with winning.

This season, they have scored 16 times from corners, more than anyone else in

the league. While the margin between the teams is thinner than ever due to the increasing deployment of man-marking, which makes it difficult for teams to create overload and clear cut chances, Arteta's side have simply found another way to hurt them through deadballs.

As Guardiola said when asked about Premier League football this season: "Adapt or die." Arsenal adapted.

Is this finally the season?

As Patrice Evra once said: "Watching Arsenal is like watching Netflix, you always have to wait for the next season."


Even as this season feels unmistakably different, the ghosts of past campaigns have not entirely disappeared. Despite being 9 points ahead with 7 games to go, the league isn't done yet. Not because Manchester City is good enough to claw back but because Arsenal can always be Arsenal. Whether they can finally cross the finish line this season remains to be seen. But more than at any point in the last two decades, this looks like the season. Do you agree?



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