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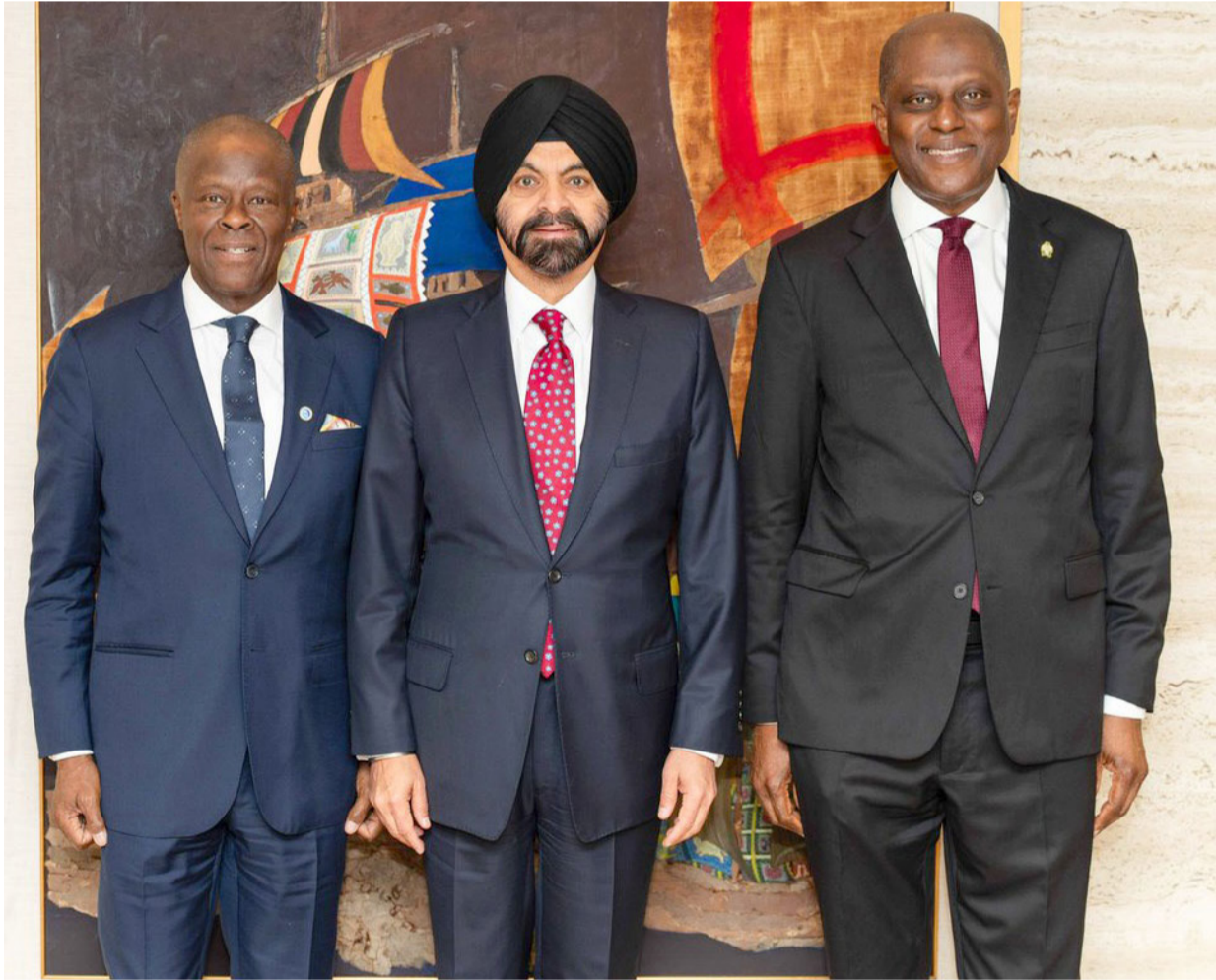
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# The Reforms

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## Global Shocks, Debt Pressures Shape Nigeria's High-Stakes IMF Bargain



L-R: Mr. Wale Edun, Honourable Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy; Mr. Ajay Banga, World Bank Group President, and Mr. Olayemi Cardoso, Governor of CBN, at the Spring Meetings.

Nigeria's presence at the recent Spring Meetings is framed by a convergence of pressures, external shocks triggered by escalating Middle East tensions and internal adjustments following a cycle of aggressive macroeconomic reforms. The federal government's position is explicit and calibrated, it seeks cheaper funding, fairer financial conditions, and accelerated global support as it navigates what it describes as a fragile transition phase.

At the centre of this engagement is Mr. Wale Edun, Honourable Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, whose intervention reflects both advocacy and caution. His framing is direct: "We are navigating a convergence of reforms and external shocks. What Nigeria requires is not just access to funding, but access at a fair cost." The emphasis here is structural, not transactional. Nigeria is not arguing for exceptional treatment, but for a recalibration of how risk is priced against developing economies.

Edun's argument extends into the operational realities of the crisis. "Volatility in global energy markets is already transmitting into domestic inflation, while shifts in global capital are tightening financial conditions for emerging markets," he notes. The implication is clear, external shocks are being internalised through inflation, liquidity constraints, and weakened investment flows. His conclusion sharpens the policy demand: "Lower cost of capital, fairer financial architecture, and timely support for economies in transition."

This position is would be reinforced at the highest political level by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu who has framed the issue as one of systemic imbalance rather than cyclical difficulty. "African countries continue to pay an unjustifiable premium on borrowed funds, and this undermines development," he asserts. The language is deliberate, it situates Nigeria's challenge within a broader continental grievance.

Tinubu's domestic policy choices provide the

At a moment defined by intersecting crises rather than isolated disruptions, Nigeria's engagement at the 2026 Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank reflects a recalibration of both urgency and strategy. The country is not merely seeking financing, it is negotiating its position within a shifting global financial architecture

where geopolitical volatility, debt asymmetries, and capital flight increasingly define outcomes for emerging economies. **Enam Obiosio** captures how the meetings, held in Washington, D.C., function less as routine multilateral dialogue and more as a contested arena over cost of capital, access to liquidity, and structural fairness.

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**BANK OF INDUSTRY**  
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counterpoint to this external critique. “We have taken difficult but necessary decisions, subsidy removal, foreign exchange reforms, and fiscal adjustments,” he states. These reforms are positioned as prerequisites for stability, but they come with immediate social costs. “Without a supportive global environment, the burden on citizens becomes excessive.” The tension between reform and welfare is therefore not abstract, it is central to Nigeria’s negotiating logic.

The immediate catalyst for these positions is the economic fallout from the US –Israel – Iran conflict. Oil prices have surged sharply, with Nigeria’s Bonny Light crude rising above \$110 per barrel. Ordinarily, this would imply fiscal relief. However, the domestic transmission has been inflationary. Petrol prices have climbed by more than 50 percent, diesel by over 70 percent, compressing household consumption and raising production costs across sectors.

This dynamic exposes a structural paradox. Higher oil prices increase government revenues but simultaneously elevate domestic costs, particularly in a deregulated pricing regime. The government identifies three key transmission channels, energy prices, capital flow reversals, and logistics inflation. Each channel reinforces the others, creating a compounded effect on inflation and growth.

The capital flow dimension is especially critical. As global risk rises, investors shift toward safe-haven assets, reducing exposure to emerging markets. For Nigeria, this creates a contradiction. Reform measures have improved macroeconomic fundamentals, yet external sentiment constrains capital inflows. The result is tighter financial conditions and elevated borrowing costs.

This is where Mr. Yemi Cardoso, Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, becomes central. His focus is on preserving financial system credibility amid volatility. “Nigeria’s monetary and financial positioning is anchored on credibility and coordination,” he explains. The emphasis is on aligning monetary policy with fiscal reforms to stabilise expectations.

Cardoso’s position underscores the technical dimension of Nigeria’s strategy. “The reforms in the foreign exchange market and broader policy alignment are designed to restore investor confidence and improve capital flow dynamics.” In effect, while fiscal authorities negotiate externally, the central bank is tasked with maintaining internal coherence.

The broader global context reinforces Nigeria’s concerns. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), a United Nations (UN) body responsible for trade, investment and development issues, external debt across developing economies has reached \$11.7 trillion, with debt servicing costs nearing \$920 billion. More critically, dozens of countries now allocate more resources to debt servicing than to health or education.

It is within this context that a significant institutional response has emerged. The launch of a

At the administrative level, Raymond Omachi, Permanent Secretary at Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Finance, reinforces this commitment. “The infrastructure is in place, the institutional commitment is clear, and the timeline is defined,” he states. The emphasis is on readiness, positioning Nigeria as both a participant and a driver of continental financial reform.

From the African Union’s perspective, Francisca Tatchouop Belobe, Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry and Minerals at the African Union Commission, frames the initiative in broader terms. “A single African currency is not merely an ambition, it is a strategic necessity,” she argues. Monetary fragmentation, in her view, continues to constrain economic integration and policy coordination.

This position is reinforced by Professor Kevin Urama, Chief Economist and Vice President at the African Development Bank Group, who situates the Institute within a longer-term structural framework. “Without monetary coordination, issues such as inflation convergence, debt sustainability, and exchange rate stability will remain unresolved,” he notes. The implication is that regional integration is not optional, it is foundational to resilience.

Despite these strategic layers, the immediate challenge remains domestic. Inflationary pressures continue to erode purchasing power, raising concerns about the social impact of ongoing reforms. Edun acknowledges this tension directly, noting that the critical question is how reforms translate into tangible welfare improvements.

Nigeria’s position at the Spring Meetings is therefore both defensive and strategic. Defensive in its effort to mitigate the impact of external shocks, strategic in its attempt to reshape the terms of en-

**Nigeria’s position at the Spring Meetings is therefore both defensive and strategic. Defensive in its effort to mitigate the impact of external shocks, strategic in its attempt to reshape the terms of engagement within the global financial system**

Borrowers’ Platform, coordinated by UNCTAD and endorsed by António Guterres, Secretary-General of UN, signals a shift toward collective negotiation. Guterres describes it as “a platform in which borrowing countries sit together, learn from each other, and speak with a collective voice.”

This development aligns with Nigeria’s evolving strategy. Rather than isolated engagement, the country is positioning itself within a coalition of developing economies seeking systemic reform. The objective is not only to reduce borrowing costs but also to influence the architecture of global finance.

Parallel to its global positioning, Nigeria is advancing a regional strategy anchored on financial integration. The proposed African Monetary Institute, to be hosted in Abuja, represents a key element of this approach. Muhammad Sani Abdullahi, Deputy Governor (Economic Policy) at CBN, frames its significance in operational terms: “This is not a symbolic project, it is a practical instrument... Nigeria has moved beyond declarations to execution.”

agement within the global financial system. The emphasis on fairness, coordination, and systemic reform reflects a shift from passive participation to active negotiation.

The outcome of this engagement remains uncertain. It will depend on the responsiveness of multilateral institutions, the cohesion of developing country coalitions, and the trajectory of geopolitical tensions. What is evident, however, is that the traditional framework of global finance is under strain.

Nigeria’s intervention is part of a broader redefinition. As developing economies confront overlapping crises, debt, inflation, and capital volatility, the demand for a more equitable system is intensifying. The Spring Meetings, in this sense, are less about immediate resolutions and more about setting the terms of future engagement.

For Nigeria, the stakes are clear. The question is not whether support will come, but whether it will come on terms that reflect the realities of a changing global economy.



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Dakwo, Abuja.**EDITORIAL****Nigeria Finally Moves To Shut The Door On Certificate Fraud**

Nigeria's persistent credibility crisis in academic certification has forced a long overdue policy shift, and the Federal Ministry of Education's move to automate verification processes represents a necessary, if belated, intervention. We consider this reform not as innovation, but as correction, a response to years of systemic weakness that has eroded trust in the country's educational credentials.

For too long, the verification of academic certificates in Nigeria has been defined by manual processes, bureaucratic delays, and vulnerabilities that enabled fraud. The consequences have been far-reaching. Employers have struggled to validate qualifications, foreign institutions have questioned the integrity of Nigerian certificates, and genuine graduates have been subjected to avoidable scrutiny. This new digital framework attempts to confront that reality directly.

By shifting the entire authentication and evaluation process online, the government is attempting to eliminate the inefficiencies and opacity that characterised the previous system. The introduction of a centralised verification portal establishes a structured pathway for applications, documentation, and institutional engagement. In principle, this reduces discretion, limits human interference, and creates a more traceable system.

We see particular value in the requirement that academic tran-

scripts must be transmitted directly by awarding institutions through official channels. This introduces a critical layer of institutional accountability, reducing reliance on applicant-submitted documents that have historically been prone to manipulation. It also places responsibility on universities and other institutions to maintain credible records and participate actively in the verification process.

Equally significant is the removal of physical verification requirements. The old system, which required applicants to visit ministry offices, was not only inefficient but also created opportunities for rent-seeking and informal practices. By eliminating physical interaction, the new approach attempts to reduce these risks while improving accessibility for applicants across the country and in the diaspora.

However, while the policy direction is sound, we remain cautious about execution. Nigeria's public sector has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to design reforms that falter at the implementation stage. A digital platform, no matter how well conceived, is only as effective as its operational integrity. Issues such as system reliability, cybersecurity, user experience, and inter-agency coordination will determine whether this initiative delivers on its promise.

There is also the risk of digital exclusion. Not all applicants have equal access to stable internet connectivity or the technical capacity to

navigate online systems. Without adequate support structures, the reform could inadvertently create new barriers even as it removes old ones. This underscores the need for a transition strategy that accommodates varying levels of digital literacy.

Beyond operational concerns, the broader significance of this reform lies in its potential to restore confidence in Nigeria's education system. Academic credentials are a form of national currency in the global knowledge economy. When their credibility is compromised, the implications extend beyond individual graduates to the country's overall competitiveness.

We therefore view this initiative as a foundational step rather than a complete solution. Digitising verification processes addresses a critical weakness, but it must be complemented by stronger institutional governance, improved record-keeping, and consistent enforcement of standards across the education sector.

Ultimately, the success of this reform will not be measured by the existence of a digital platform, but by its outcomes. If it delivers faster processing, greater transparency, and reduced fraud, it will mark a meaningful shift in how Nigeria manages academic credentials. If it fails, it will reinforce a pattern where structural problems are merely repackaged rather than resolved.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

That President Tinubu's reforms are part of the Renewed Hope Agenda, designed to reposition Nigeria across critical sectors including education, energy, infrastructure, and innovation.

Stay tuned for more updates on reform milestones, policy impact, and opportunities for Nigerian citizens. Have feedback or questions? Send us an email at: [editor@thereforms.ng](mailto:editor@thereforms.ng)

**Time to Tell Nigeria's Story — The Position of The Reforms Newspaper**

For far too long, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has been misunderstood, misrepresented, and misquoted — not for a lack of achievements, but for a tragic deficit in communication. Today, *The Reforms*, a National Newspaper, rises not as a mouthpiece, but as a credible national platform to correct the narrative and restore public confidence in Nigeria's reform-driven trajectory.

Let us be blunt: in the past, government's communication structures had been lethargic, inconsistent, and often reactive. Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), despite overseeing groundbreaking reforms across agriculture, power, finance, education, digital innovation, energy, and infrastructure, had largely failed to communicate their successes with clarity and consistency. In their silence, distortions flourished. In their delays, misinformation had taken root.

This was not just a national communication failure — it was a vacuum of narrative power.

It is precisely in this void that *The Reforms* has emerged as a strategic imperative. Our mandate is not to whitewash governments' actions or spread propaganda. We are beholden to spin doctors or political handlers. We are beholden only to the truth — the verifiable, policy-driven, people-impacting truth of Nigeria's reform journey.

The FGN has rightly endorsed *The Reforms* as the non-partisan channel through which MDAs and private sector partners can boldly articulate the ongoing transformation of the Nigerian economy and society. From economic diversification and tax reforms to housing delivery, digital governance, energy transition, and ease of doing business, among others, — we are committed to amplifying facts, not fiction.

Nigeria is not standing still. The country is moving — and moving fast. But without strategic story-

telling rooted in fact and transparency, that movement may be missed or, worse, maligned.

To the MDAs: You are implementing reforms. But reforms do not speak for themselves. You must. And *The Reforms* is here to help you do just that — professionally, objectively, and impactfully.

To the private sector: You are stakeholders in the reform process. Let your voice be heard. Let your innovations and contributions to national development be documented in a newspaper founded on the principle of national interest above noise.

It is time we tell our own story — the Nigerian story — not through borrowed voices or external media filters, but through a deliberate, intelligent platform that understands the nation and its nuances.

This is not a plea. This is a national call to action. Partner with *The Reforms*. Let the story of Nigeria's rebirth be told by those who live it, lead it, and believe in it.



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# BoI, GIZ Alliance Targets MSME Growth, Climate Finance Expansion



Mr. Olasupo Olusi, MD/CEO of BoI

By Ahmed Ahmed

The Bank of Industry (BoI) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) have formalised a new partnership framework aimed at strengthening Nigeria's entrepreneurship ecosystem, with a focus on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

The recent agreement reflects a coordinated attempt to address structural constraints limiting business growth, including access to finance, technical capacity, and market integration.

The collaboration spans financing access, enterprise development, capacity building, and market expansion, while incorporating climate finance and renewable energy investment. This alignment places MSMEs within a broader sustainability framework, positioning them as both economic drivers and participants in the transition toward cleaner energy systems.

A core element of the framework is the strengthening of the BoI's advisory ecosystem. The partnership is expected to enhance the technical and institutional capacity of Business Development Service Providers, improving the quality of support delivered to enterprises. It also includes structured vocational and entrepreneurship training under the ICSS programme, aimed at improving productivity, workforce quality, and competitiveness.

Speaking on the initiative, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the BoI, Mr. Olasupo Olusi said: "This partnership is about closing the gap between enterprise potential and enterprise reality. Too many Nigerian businesses, particularly MSMEs, have the ideas, the drive, and the market opportunity, but lack the financing, technical capacity, or market access needed to scale.

This partnership reflects our unwavering commitment to constantly form new partnerships to

strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Nigeria. By combining our financing expertise with our partner's international development experience, we are building a comprehensive framework that will directly translate into jobs, innovation, affordable, long-term financing and sustainable growth for MSMEs in Nigeria."

Also speaking, Country Director of GIZ Nigeria and ECOWAS, Mr. Magnus Wagner, said: "This partnership demonstrates our joint commitments to strengthening Nigeria's private sector and to advancing sustainable and inclusive economic growth."

"Through this partnership, we aim to support small and medium enterprises. We are trying more to look at SME, formalised business, which is the resilient backbone of Nigeria's economy. So, we would like to work, we have decided in areas such as climate and sustainable finance, renewable energy and energy efficiency, entrepreneurship and innovation, women's economic empowerment, agribusiness and rural transformation, and digital trade and market access," he also said.

In his words, Magnus said: "We look forward to a close and successful collaboration with the Bank of Industry, one that delivers tangible results for business, communities, and the country and the population as a whole."

According to him, the agreement also places emphasis on women's economic empowerment, agribusiness development, and rural enterprise growth, alongside efforts to expand climate-focused investments. These priorities reflect a targeted approach to sectors with high employment and development impact.

In addition, the partnership is expected to support the Bank of Industry's efforts to secure accreditation with the Green Climate Fund, with technical backing from GIZ. This could expand access to international climate financing and strengthen Nigeria's capacity to fund renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.

Overall, the BoI-GIZ framework represents a structured attempt to integrate financing, capacity development, and sustainability into a unified support model for MSMEs.

## NRS Unveils Rev360 Platform To Deepen Digital Tax Administration

By Majeed Salaam

The Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS) prepares to roll out Rev360, a next-generation revenue platform scheduled to go live on April 30, 2026. The initiative marks a continuation of the agency's digital reform agenda, with a sharper focus on automation, data integration and user experience.

In a statement announcing the launch, the service described Rev360 as a structural shift in how tax processes are designed and delivered. The platform is positioned as an evolution from earlier systems such as TaxPro Max, which had already moved filing and compliance processes online, reducing physical interactions and improving accessibility for taxpayers.

Rev360, however, goes further. It introduces what the agency calls a transition to "Tax Administration 3.0," a model built on end-to-end automation and real-time reporting. The objective is to embed tax processes directly into the operational systems of taxpayers, allowing for more seamless compliance and faster processing cycles.

"This shift enables faster processing, improved decision-making, enhanced compliance, and a more seamless user experience," the service stated, emphasising that the platform is designed to respond to the growing complexity of Nigeria's economy.

At a technical level, the emphasis on integration suggests a move toward a more data-driven tax system. By consolidating taxpayer information and automating workflows, the platform is expected to reduce manual intervention, limit errors and strengthen audit capabilities. For regulators, this creates better visibility. For taxpayers, it could simplify compliance, provided the transition is well managed.

The rollout strategy reflects this caution. According to the NRS, implementation will follow a phased approach, beginning with medium and emerging taxpayers. This segment is often seen as a bridge between large corporates and small businesses, making it a practical starting point for system testing and refinement.

The agency noted that the decision follows a successful pilot phase, indicating that core functionalities have already been tested in controlled environments.

A structured deployment, supported by training and stakeholder engagement, is expected to reduce disruption and improve adoption rates.

Institutionally, the platform aligns with the reform direction under the leadership of Dr. Zacch Adedeji. The service has increasingly prioritised technology as a lever for expanding the tax base, improving compliance and strengthening public confidence in revenue collection systems.

According to NRS, transparency is a central theme in this transition. By digitising and standardising processes, Rev360 is expected to reduce opacity in tax administration, a long-standing concern for both businesses and individuals. Automated systems leave clearer audit trails, which can improve accountability within the system.

There is also a broader fiscal context. Nigeria's revenue-to-GDP ratio remains relatively low compared to peer economies, placing pressure on authorities to enhance domestic revenue mobilisation without overburdening compliant taxpayers. Digital platforms like Rev360 are designed to close gaps by improving efficiency rather than simply increasing rates.



Funding Nigeria's Agriculture, Growing Prosperity

# NDIC Moves To Conclude Liquidation Of 89 Banks As Sector Clean-Up Deepens



Mr. Thompson Oludare Sunday, Managing Director of NDIC

By Musa Ibrahim

**T**he Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC) is set to seek court approval to formally wind down 89 microfinance and primary mortgage banks (PMBs) whose operations have already transitioned to new owners.

The Corporation disclosed that it will approach various divisions of the Federal High Court to obtain dissolution orders, a step that effectively closes the books on institutions previously resolved under its Purchase and Assumption framework. The move signals a shift from resolution to closure, as regulatory authorities tighten the structure of the country's lower-tier banking system.

NDIC noted that the affected institutions were

part of a broader intervention that followed the revocation of licences of 179 microfinance banks and four PMBs by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in May 2023. That action, one of the most extensive in recent years, was aimed at addressing persistent weaknesses in governance, capital adequacy and operational sustainability within the segment.

Under the NDIC's resolution model, the distressed banks did not simply disappear. Instead, their assets and liabilities were transferred to newly licensed entities through Purchase and Assumption agreements. In practical terms, this ensured continuity for depositors while allowing stronger operators to take over viable portions of the failed institutions.

According to the Corporation, 89 new banks

have since emerged from this process, each assuming the balance sheets of the defunct entities and commencing operations under new identities. This approach reflects a regulatory preference for stability, limiting systemic disruption while enforcing accountability.

With these transitions largely completed, the NDIC now seeks to be discharged from its role as liquidator. The court orders it is pursuing will formalise the dissolution of the old entities, marking the end of their legal existence and enabling the Corporation to conclude its liquidation responsibilities.

The significance of this development lies in what it reveals about regulatory direction. Nigeria's financial authorities are not only resolving failing institutions but also restructuring the market to favour resilience. The microfinance and mortgage banking segments, often critical for financial inclusion, have faced recurring challenges ranging from weak risk management to inadequate capital buffers.

By combining licence revocation with structured asset transfers, regulators are attempting to reset standards without eroding public confidence. Depositors, in particular, are shielded through continuity arrangements, while new operators inherit both opportunity and responsibility.

A breakdown of the transitions shows the geographic spread of the reform. In Lagos, several defunct institutions such as Bridgeway Microfinance Bank and Mercury Microfinance Bank have re-emerged under new names and ownership structures. Similar changes have taken place across states including Anambra, Ogun, Kaduna and the Federal Capital Territory, reflecting a nationwide recalibration rather than a localised intervention.

In the Federal Capital Territory, for instance, entities like Mainsail Microfinance Bank and Ally Microfinance Bank have been replaced by new operators now carrying forward their financial intermediation roles. In northern states such as Kano and Kaduna, the restructuring has also introduced fresh institutions expected to operate under stricter regulatory expectations.

The NDIC's decision to proceed with court-backed dissolution highlights the legal and procedural discipline required in bank resolution. Liquidation is not merely administrative. It is a judicial process that ensures transparency, creditor settlement and final closure in line with statutory requirements.

Beyond compliance, the exercise carries broader implications for market confidence. A clear and predictable resolution framework reassures investors and depositors that failures will be managed in an orderly manner. It also signals to operators that regulatory forbearance has limits.

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# Vice President Shettima Pushes Structured Pathway For Youth Leadership



Vice President Kashim Shettima

By Benson Kingsley

In Abuja, a familiar refrain about Nigeria's youthful population was given sharper meaning and urgency. At the Abuja Dialogue 2026, Vice President Kashim Shettima made it clear that demographic advantage, on its own, is not a strategy. Without structure, he warned, it risks becoming an empty statistic.

The Dialogue, convened by the Office of the Vice President in partnership with Vice President Shettima's message was direct. Nigeria's youth population must be treated as a "national condition with profound consequences," not as a convenient talking point. "We are one of the youngest nations on earth. That fact should not be treated as a line for conferences or a statistic for brochures," he said. The implication was clear. Policy must now catch up with population realities.

At the centre of his address was a call for a deliberate framework for youth leadership development. He argued that leadership cannot be left to chance or time. It must be built through systems that identify, prepare and integrate young people into decision-making processes. "Youth leadership must be understood with clarity. It is not a ceremonial handover waiting for age to perform its arithmetic," he said.

This framing shifts the conversation from aspiration to design. According to the Vice President, leadership pipelines should be embedded within education, public service and enterprise systems. The goal is continuity. The method is structured exposure, responsibility and accountability.

He stressed that leadership matures through practice. Young people, he said, must be given room to

contribute and to make decisions, with clear expectations attached. "Responsibility is the workshop where capacity is refined," he noted, reinforcing the idea that competence grows within institutions, not outside them.

The Dialogue also served as a reflection point on governance in a changing world. Vice President Shettima described it as timely, noting that governments globally are under pressure to respond to rapid shifts in technology, economics and public expectations. In such a context, leadership must be intentional and adaptive.

For young Nigerians, his remarks carried both encouragement and caution. Leadership, he said, is not defined by age but by readiness to bear consequences and prioritise the common good. It was an invitation to participate, but also a reminder that participation requires discipline and preparation.

Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu, reinforced this position, pointing to institutional

models already in motion. He described the Lateef Jakande Leadership Academy as more than a fellowship. In his words, it is a talent incubator that provides public sector immersion, policy exposure and mentorship, while allowing participants to tackle real societal challenges through capstone projects.

Mr. Sanwo-Olu situated the Academy within a broader youth development ecosystem in Lagos.

**Nigeria's youth population must be treated as a "national condition with profound consequences," not as a convenient talking point**

This includes initiatives focused on employment, digital skills and entrepreneurship. His argument was that leadership development works best when supported by interconnected programmes that address both capability and opportunity.

He also made a policy case. For youth leadership to scale, governments must commit resources and political will. "Good intentions for young people must translate into functioning institutions," he said, pointing to the need for frameworks backed by funding and execution discipline.

Other speakers aligned with this institutional approach. Senator Ibrahim Hassan Hadejia, Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, described youth leadership as infrastructure that shapes the strength of institutions and the trajectory of national development. His emphasis was on intentionality. Leadership development, he noted, cannot be symbolic.

Honourable Minister of Youth Development, Mr. Ayodele Olawande, stated a government perspective, stating that young Nigerians are ready to take on leadership roles. He pointed to ongoing efforts by the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu to create enabling platforms across sectors.

From the programme's institutional side, Ayisat Agbaje-Okunade, Executive Secretary of the Academy, focused on outcomes. She said the Dialogue presents an opportunity to move youth leadership from the margins of policy into the centre of governance. Her emphasis was on alignment, ensuring that policy statements translate into programmes that deliver measurable impact.

**... the Lateef Jakande Leadership Academy, brought together policymakers, development actors and young leaders to examine how Nigeria can translate its youth bulge into governance capacity and long-term stability**

## Nigeria Deepens Power Reforms, Moves To Integrate Local Gov'ts



Mr. Adebayo Adelabu, Honourable Minister of Power

By Majeed Salaam

Nigeria's electricity reform programme is entering a more localised phase, as the federal government moves to integrate local governments into the country's evolving power sector.

The initiative reflects a shift from high-level restructuring toward grassroots participation, aimed at improving electricity access and addressing persistent distribution gaps.

Speaking recently in Abuja at the inauguration of the board of the Nigeria Electricity Management Services Agency (NEMSA), Honourable Minister of Power, Mr. Adebayo Adelabu, stated that decentralisation efforts would increasingly accommodate local actors. The proposal builds on recent reforms that have already empowered state governments to participate in electricity generation, transmission, and distribution.

The extension to local governments is designed to address inefficiencies in last-mile delivery, particularly in rural and underserved communities. While national and state-level reforms have created a more flexible regulatory environment, access to electricity remains uneven, suggesting that structural changes have yet to fully translate into service delivery.

Adelabu's approach positions local governments as supportive participants, with responsibilities likely to focus on rural electrification, mini-grid deployment, and local distribution networks. These areas require proximity to end-users and a clearer understanding of local demand patterns, making them suitable entry points for grassroots involvement.

The policy direction aligns with the broader reform agenda of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, under which the Electricity Act 2023 decentralised the sector and enabled subnational entities to establish regulatory frameworks. So far, at least 17 states have begun developing local electricity markets, signalling a gradual transition toward a more distributed system.

However, extending participation to local governments introduces new challenges. Compared to states, local authorities have more limited financial

and institutional capacity, raising questions about execution and sustainability. Their effectiveness will depend on clearly defined roles, regulatory coordination, and access to financing, particularly through partnerships with private investors.

Alongside governance reforms, the government is also targeting infrastructure gaps. Adelabu disclosed plans to procure at least 10 million electricity meters over the next five years to address a deficit estimated at over seven million units. Closing this gap is critical to improving billing accuracy, revenue collection, and consumer trust in the system.

The minister also emphasised the need to reduce reliance on imported power equipment, noting that a significant proportion of sector inputs are sourced from abroad. This dependence increases costs and exposes the industry to foreign exchange pressures. In response, the government is prioritising domestic production of meters, batteries, and other components to build local capacity and retain economic value.

Renewable energy development forms another component of the reform agenda. Nigeria's lithium deposits present opportunities for local battery production, while ongoing solar panel manufacturing indicates early progress in clean energy adoption. These initiatives suggest an effort to align power sector reforms with broader industrial and energy transition goals.

Despite these advances, the success of the reform strategy will depend on implementation. Expanding participation to local governments increases the complexity of coordination across multiple tiers of governance. It also raises the need for a coherent framework that balances decentralisation with regulatory consistency.

Nigeria's power sector is therefore moving toward a hybrid model, combining centralised grid infrastructure with decentralised, locally managed systems. If effectively executed, this approach could improve access, enhance system resilience, and reduce pressure on the national grid. The challenge remains ensuring that policy ambition translates into measurable improvements in electricity supply for end-users.

## Inflation Climbs To 15.38% As New CPI Framework Sharpens Price Signals

By Ahmed Ahmed

March 2026's inflationary trend in Nigeria extended with a fresh data pointing to sustained pressure on consumer prices and household budgets. The latest figures from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) show that headline inflation rose to 15.38 percent, up from 15.06 percent recorded in February.

At the centre of this increase is a notable jump in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which climbed to 135.4 from 130.0 in the previous month. The 5.4-point rise reflects a broad-based acceleration in the cost of goods and services, reinforcing concerns about weakening purchasing power across income groups.

On a month-on-month basis, inflation rose sharply by 4.18 percent. This indicates that price increases are not only persistent but also gaining pace, a pattern that complicates efforts to stabilise the macroeconomic environment.

Food prices remain a critical pressure point. The food inflation rate stood at 14.31 percent in March, with a corresponding month-on-month increase of 4.17 percent. Given the weight of food in household expenditure, especially among lower-income groups, this trend continues to drive overall inflation and deepen cost-of-living concerns.

The data arrives alongside a significant methodological shift by the NBS. The agency recently rebased the CPI, replacing the long-standing 2009 reference period with updated benchmarks that better reflect current consumption patterns. This adjustment is not merely technical. It changes how inflation is measured and interpreted.

Under the revised framework, the weight reference period has been updated to 2023, while the base year for prices is now 2024. The CPI basket has also been expanded to include 934 product varieties, structured across 13 divisions in line with the COICOP 2018 classification system.

This broader and more current dataset is designed to improve accuracy, capturing shifts in consumer behaviour, urbanisation and evolving spending patterns. It also introduces a more granular set of indices, including urban and rural measures, core inflation, energy prices and imported food costs.

For analysts, the combination of rising inflation and a rebased index presents a more precise, though less forgiving, picture of economic conditions. The updated framework reduces statistical distortions but also makes underlying price pressures more visible.

The policy implications are immediate. Inflation at current levels places the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in a tighter position. Monetary authorities must balance the need to contain inflation against the risk of constraining economic growth. Higher interest rates, while effective in moderating demand, can also increase borrowing costs for businesses and households.

Beyond monetary policy, the data signals continued strain on consumer spending. As prices rise faster than incomes, discretionary spending typically contracts, with potential spillover effects on retail activity, small businesses and overall economic momentum.

The persistence of food inflation also points to structural issues within the supply chain. Factors such as transportation costs, market inefficiencies and production constraints continue to influence pricing, suggesting that monetary tools alone may not be sufficient to ease pressures.

There is also a forward-looking dimension. With the rebased CPI offering a clearer lens, future inflation readings are likely to carry greater analytical weight. Policymakers, investors and businesses will rely more heavily on these figures to guide decisions on pricing, investment and risk management.

# IMF Projects Nigeria's Debt -to - GDP At 33.1% By 2027, Flags Tightening Fiscal Space



L-R: Tatiana Mossot, IMF senior communications officer; Rodrigo Valdés, IMF fiscal affairs department director; Era Dabla Norris, deputy director; and Davide Furceri, division chief, brief the press on the latest IMF Fiscal Monitor report during the 2026 spring meetings of the IMF and the World Bank Group in Washington, DC, April 15, 2026

By Jennete Ugo Anya

Nigeria's public finance outlook is entering a more delicate phase, with new projections from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) pointing to a gradual rise in the country's debt burden relative to its economic output. In its latest Fiscal Monitor Report, the IMF estimates that Nigeria's debt-to-GDP ratio will climb to 33.1 percent by 2027, a politically significant year as the country prepares for general elections.

While the figure represents a downward revision from the Fund's earlier 35.3 percent estimate, it still signals a steady upward trajectory from the 32.3 percent projected for 2026. The shift suggests that, although debt growth may be moderating, fiscal pressures remain firmly in place.

The report was unveiled in Washington DC during the recent IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings, where policymakers are assessing the resilience of economies against a more uncertain global backdrop.

Recent domestic data highlights the scale of Nigeria's debt expansion. According to the Debt Management Office (DMO), total public debt rose to N159.27 trillion at the end of the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2025. This marks an increase of N5.98 trillion within a single quarter and a N14.6 trillion rise compared to the same period in 2024. The pace of accumulation reflects both new borrowing and the fiscal demands of a large and growing economy.

At the federal level, financing needs remain high. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has already sought legislative approval for external loans totalling \$6 billion, signalling continued reliance on borrowing to support budgetary obligations and development priorities.

Beyond Nigeria, the IMF's report paints a broader picture of mounting fiscal strain. Global public debt reached nearly 94 percent of GDP in 2025 and is projected to approach 100 percent by

2029. The Fund notes that such levels were last seen in the aftermath of the Second World War, highlighting the scale of current fiscal exposure.

More concerning is the concept of "debt-at-risk," which captures the likelihood of debt rising sharply under adverse conditions. The IMF places global debt-at-risk at around 117 percent of GDP over the next three years, with significant downside risks driven by geopolitical and financial uncertainties.

Among these risks is the potential escalation of conflict in the Middle East, which could push up

valuations. A sharp correction in artificial intelligence-related assets, especially if accompanied by a 20 percent drop in US equities, could ripple across global markets and further raise debt risks by an estimated 2.4 percentage points.

Against this backdrop, the IMF is urging governments to act with discipline. Rodrigo Valdés emphasised the importance of rebuilding fiscal buffers once immediate economic pressures ease. His message is rooted in timing and credibility. Countries that delay consolidation, he warned, risk entering future crises with limited room to respond.

"Crisis require emergency support, but the ability to respond depends on pre-existing fiscal space," Valdés said, noting that postponing reforms only tightens constraints over time.

For developing economies such as Nigeria, the Fund's guidance is specific. Strengthening domestic revenue mobilisation is critical, both to sustain public spending and to reduce reliance on external financing. This becomes more urgent as global aid flows remain uncertain.

At the same time, the IMF cautions against policy choices that could worsen fiscal imbalances. Broad-based energy subsidies and tax reductions, often used to ease short-term pressures, are described as inefficient and difficult to reverse. According to Valdés, such measures distort price signals, strain public finances and tend to benefit higher-income groups disproportionately.

The policy direction, therefore, is one of balance. Governments must protect vulnerable populations while maintaining credible medium-term fiscal frameworks. Clear communication, the IMF argues, is essential to anchor expectations and sustain investor confidence.

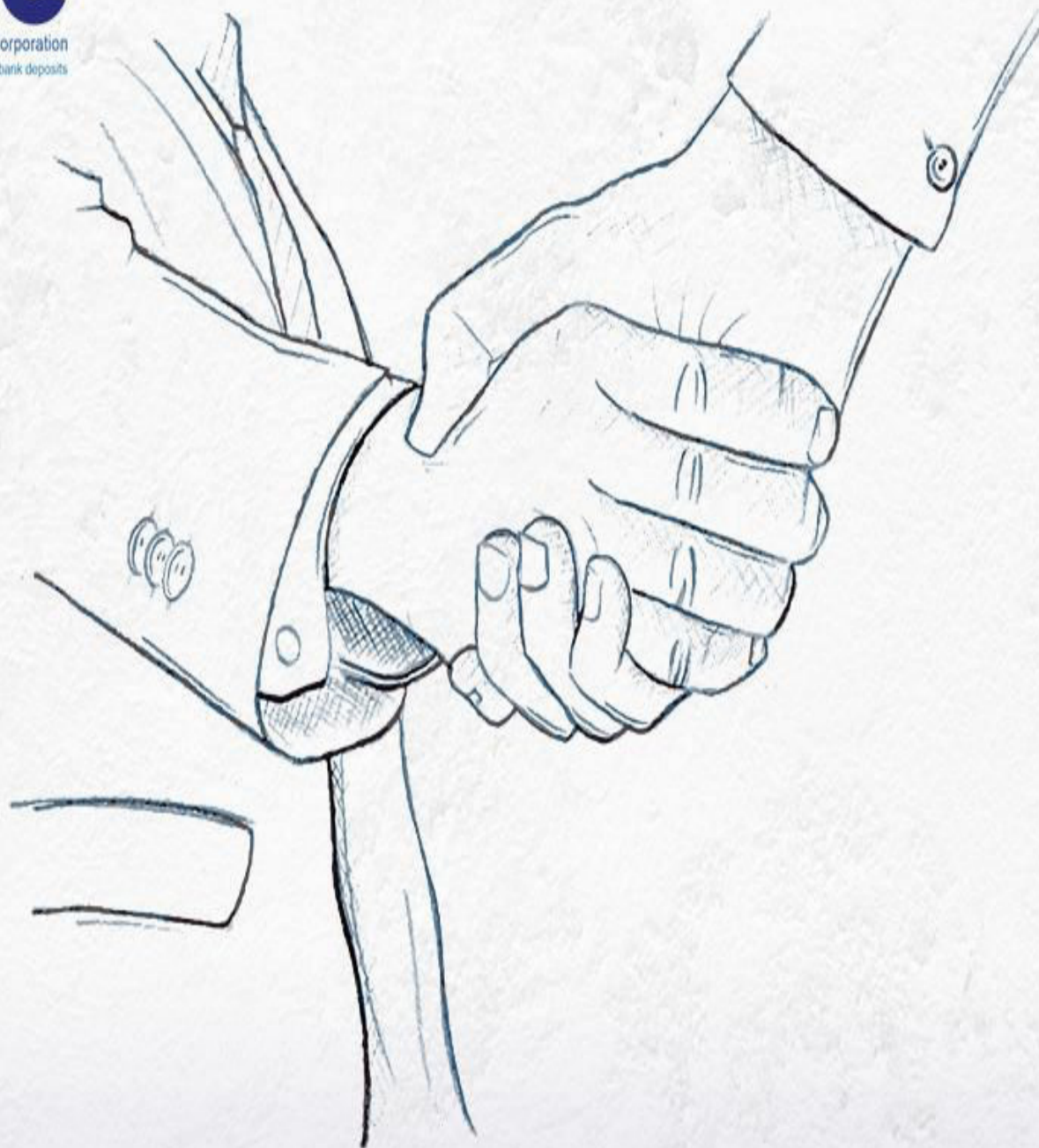
For Nigeria, the implications are immediate. The projected rise in debt-to-GDP may still sit below some peer economies, but the course matters more than the level. As borrowing continues and global risks intensify, the margin for policy error narrows.

food and fuel prices, tighten financial conditions and force higher government spending. The Fund warns that a prolonged conflict could add up to four percentage points to global debt-at-risk levels.

Another emerging vulnerability lies in financial markets, particularly around technology

**For developing economies such as Nigeria, the Fund's guidance is specific. Strengthening domestic revenue mobilisation is critical, both to sustain public spending and to reduce reliance on external financing**

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# FG Approves 2026 Budget, Boosts Capital Spending To N32.2trn



President Bola Ahmed Tinubu

By Ahmed Ahmed

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has signed the 2026 Appropriation Act into law, setting a record expenditure framework of N68.32 trillion and signaling a stronger fiscal push toward infrastructure, stability and inclusive growth.

The decision was accompanied by a measured extension of the 2025 budget cycle, a move designed to protect ongoing capital investments from disruption.

The 2026 budget is a clear allocation strategy. Statutory transfers stand at N4.799 trillion, while debt servicing will absorb N15.8 trillion. Recurrent spending is projected at N15.4 trillion. The most striking component is capital expenditure, which takes N32.2 trillion through the Development Fund. This accounts for roughly half of the total budget and highlights a policy tilt toward long term assets rather than consumption.

Government officials frame this structure as deliberate. It seeks to balance legal obligations with growth priorities. A senior official involved in the budget process noted that “the allocations are designed to stabilise the economy while unlocking productivity across key sectors.” The emphasis on capital spending aligns with the administration’s stated objective of improving infrastructure, strengthening security and expanding economic opportunity.

The President also approved an amendment to extend the implementation of the 2025 Appropriation Act. Initially set to end on March 31, 2026, the capital component will now run until June 30, 2026. This extension is not procedural. It responds to execution realities across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), many of which are managing projects at advanced stages.

According to government sources, the extension will “ensure effective utilisation of funds tied to critical infrastructure and development projects.” It is expected to reduce abandoned projects and improve value for public spending. MDAs now have a defined window to complete projects without the pressure of premature closure of budget lines.

With the 2026 fiscal year taking effect from April 1, attention shifts from legislation to execution. The President issued a directive to MDAs to prioritise transparency and discipline in the use of public funds. He stressed the importance of value for money and timely delivery, stating that agencies must align spending with measurable outcomes.

This directive reflects a broader reform narrative within the administration. Fiscal credibility has become a central theme, especially in a context of high debt obligations and public demand for visible development. Analysts note that execution, rather than appropriation, will determine

**MDAs now have a defined window to complete projects without the pressure of premature closure of budget lines**

the real impact of the budget.

The President also acknowledged the role of the National Assembly of Nigeria in the process. He commended lawmakers for what he described as a timely review and passage of the bill. He further called for sustained cooperation between the executive and legislative arms to maintain budget discipline and policy continuity.

Beyond the numbers, the administration is positioning the budget as an instrument for economic transformation. There is a renewed focus on revenue mobilisation and targeted investments. The goal is to stimulate growth, create jobs and expand social protection systems.

A policy adviser close to the process summed up the direction: “This budget is not just about spending. It is about sequencing investments in a way that drives growth and improves living standards.”

## Quotes of the Week

### Vice President Kashim Shettima

Leadership grows when young people are given room to learn, to contribute, to make decisions, and to be held accountable for results. Responsibility is the workshop where capacity is refined.

### Dr Zacch Adedeji, Executive Chairman of NRS

When this administration assumed office, Nigeria faced a critical inflexion point marked by fiscal constraints, weakened investor confidence and structural distortion across key sectors. What followed was not an incremental adjustment but a comprehensive concept of the nation’s economic and financial architecture.

### Mr. Rodrigo Valdés, IMF’s Director of Fiscal Affairs

In low-income developing economies, a priority is to strengthen domestic revenue mobilisation to protect social and development spending, and also because we have to recognise that external aid is the gap with that.

## President Tinubu Links Tax Reform To Prosperity As New Revenue Era Takes Shape



L-R: Hon. Tajudeen Abbas, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Dr. Zacch Adedeji, Executive Chairman of NRS; President Bola Ahmed Tinubu; Sen. Godswill Akpabio, Senate President; Gov. Hope Uzodimma, Governor of Imo State; Mr. Nyesom Wike, Honourable Minister of the FCT, and others, during the commissioning of the 16- storey headquarters of NRS in Abuja.

By Anita Dennis

The country's fiscal reform agenda moved into sharper focus recently as President Bola Ahmed Tinubu declared that outdated tax laws had long constrained economic growth and deepened inequality, while new reforms are now positioning the country for broader prosperity.

Speaking at the commissioning of the 16-storey headquarters of the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS), the President framed the moment as more than a ceremonial milestone. It was, in his words, a turning point in Nigeria's effort to rebuild its revenue architecture and restore confidence in public institutions.

President Tinubu traced the roots of the problem to colonial-era tax frameworks, describing them as fragmented and inconsistent. According to him, these structural weaknesses limited efficiency, reduced compliance and ultimately weakened the economic potential of both individuals and businesses. "We are not gathered here merely to commission an edifice. We are here to mark a milestone in a larger national journey," he said.

At the fundamental of the administration's response is a redesigned tax system that seeks to simplify processes, eliminate distortions and create a more transparent environment for taxpayers and investors. The President emphasised that the reforms are not driven by higher tax burdens but by improved structure and governance.

"The reforms are designed to simplify our system, eliminate distortions and create a fair, transparent and investment-friendly environment," Tinubu stated, adding that early indicators point to improved fiscal stability and rising investor confidence.

The new framework, which became fully operational in January, consolidates more than 60 pre-

viously fragmented tax laws into a unified system. This restructuring aims to improve predictability, reduce administrative bottlenecks and strengthen compliance across sectors.

For the President, the reform agenda is tied directly to his broader economic commitments. He reiterated that his administration's objective is to move Nigeria toward a system anchored on discipline, equity and opportunity. "I stand before you to reaffirm that these words were not rhetoric; they were a covenant with the Nigerian people," he said.

### The commissioning of the NRS headquarters provided a physical symbol of this transition

The commissioning of the NRS headquarters provided a physical symbol of this transition. Completed within 30 months after decades of delay, the facility is designed to support a modern revenue system, with capacity for about 3,000 staff and integrated infrastructure including a data processing centre and training facilities.

President Tinubu also used the occasion to underline institutional expectations. He urged the revenue agency to go beyond collection and focus on trust-building. According to him, credibility in taxation depends not only on efficiency but also on fairness and accountability.

Supporting the President's position, Senate President Godswill Akpabio called for patience, arguing that the administration's reforms are beginning to yield visible results. He pointed to improvements in fuel availability and increased domestic production as indicators of policy impact.

Similarly, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Tajudeen Abbas, described the reforms as a shift from fragmented policy frameworks to a more coherent system. "We operated multiple regimes and overlapping mandates. The result was high effort and low yield," he said, noting that the new approach aligns rules, institutions and incentives.

At the implementation level, Executive Chairman of the NRS, Dr. Zacch Adedeji, provided insight into the scale of transformation underway. He described the reforms as comprehensive, extending beyond taxation to broader fiscal governance.

Dr. Adedeji noted that revenue collection has grown significantly, from N6.8 trillion five years ago to N28.7 trillion in 2025. He also pointed to improvements in federation revenue, which rose from N711 billion in May 2023 to N3.6 trillion by September 2025, attributing the increase to policy coherence and improved financial management.

Beyond revenue figures, he highlighted structural reforms such as the launch of the National Single Window, aimed at modernising trade processes and reducing inefficiencies. These measures, he argued, are reinforcing transparency and strengthening Nigeria's position as a market-driven economy.

The broader message from the event is one of transition. Nigeria is moving from a legacy system defined by fragmentation to a more integrated and technology-driven model. The success of this shift will depend on sustained policy discipline and institutional performance.



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”

# Nigeria Opens Nationwide Applications For Second Phase Of TVET Programme



Dr. Tunji Alausa, Honourable Minister of Education

By Ahmed Ahmed

The federal government has commenced applications for the second phase of its Technical and Vocational Education and Training programme, expanding efforts to strengthen skills development and address unemployment across Nigeria.

Announcing the rollout recently, Honourable Minister of Education, Dr. Tunji Alausa, described the initiative as a critical intervention in building the country's human capital base. According to him, "the initiative is a major step in strengthening Nigeria's human capital base."

**The first is a six-month short-term certificate course designed for beginners, while the second is a one-year vocational education and innovation track tailored for individuals with prior knowledge or informal experience in specific trades**

The programme builds on the first phase, which recorded significant uptake nationwide. The minister disclosed that "more than 1.3 million applications were submitted nationwide," an outcome he said reflects growing demand for practical, job-oriented skills.

Alausa further noted that the application portal for the new cohort officially opened at 4:00 p.m. (WAT) on April 13, 2026, urging Nigerians across different backgrounds to participate. He encouraged eligible

candidates to take advantage of the opportunity to acquire technical and vocational competencies that align with labour market needs.

The TVET programme offers fully funded training across a wide range of fields, with participants receiving free tuition, monthly stipends, and hands-on instruction. Successful candidates will also be awarded nationally recognised certifications upon completion, positioning them for employment or enterprise development.

Programme details indicate two structured training pathways. The first is a six-month short-term certificate course designed for beginners, while the second is a one-year vocational education and innovation track tailored for individuals with prior knowledge or informal experience in specific trades.

Eligibility requirements include possession of a valid National Identification Number (NIN) and Bank Verification Number (BVN). Applicants seeking entry into the advanced track may also be required to provide evidence of prior learning or basic academic qualifications.

Beyond technical training, the programme incorporates post-completion support mechanisms, including access to start-up funding and business loans. This component is intended to enable participants to transition from training into self-employment or small business operations.

The training spans multiple sectors, including electrical installation, welding and fabrication, automobile maintenance, digital media, agriculture, fashion design, and renewable energy. Delivery will take place across centres located in Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, including federal and state technical colleges as well as accredited private institutions.

The initiative forms part of the broader economic agenda of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, which places emphasis on job creation, skills acquisition, and economic empowerment as drivers of inclusive growth.

In a related development, the minister recently engaged with international partners in the United Kingdom to deepen collaboration on vocational training reforms. The engagement is aimed at aligning Nigeria's skills development framework with global standards and strengthening the long-term impact of the programme.

## Reforms Nuggets

### World Bank, AfDB Anchor New Jobs Framework Across Developing Economies

A new coalition led by the World Bank Group and African Development Bank is reframing how development finance delivers employment outcomes, placing jobs at the centre of investment strategy rather than as a secondary outcome.

#### Key Highlights

- **Shift to outcomes, not just funding**  
The initiative introduces a common framework to measure how investments translate into "more and better jobs," signalling a move away from traditional metrics focused mainly on capital deployment.

- **Broad institutional alignment**  
The coalition includes the Asian Development Bank, European Investment Bank and Islamic Development Bank, creating a unified front among major multilateral development banks.

- **Coordinated global approach**  
Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) will deepen collaboration across governments, private sector actors and development partners to improve project design and scale impact across regions.

- **Iterative implementation model**  
The framework will evolve over time, with lessons from ongoing projects shaping future interventions and refining methodologies.

- **Focus on job quality**  
Engagement with the International Labour Organization ensures emphasis on wages, productivity and working conditions, not just job numbers.

- **Policy and investment linkage**  
The initiative is designed to strengthen policy dialogue with governments, aligning national strategies with employment-focused financing.

- **Targeting inclusive growth**  
By prioritising sectors with high labour absorption, the framework aims to boost earnings, reduce poverty and improve economic resilience.

- **Strategic relevance for Africa**  
With population growth outpacing job creation, African economies stand to benefit from more coordinated financing and clearer employment-focused policy support.

- **Improved accountability**  
Standardising measurement across institutions is expected to enhance transparency and ensure resources are directed to high-impact sectors.

- **Bottom Line**  
The collaboration marks a structural shift in development finance. Job creation is no longer treated as a byproduct of growth but as a primary benchmark for success.

## Nigeria Cannot Import Its Way Out Of A Palm Oil Crisis



### REFORM TALKS

with

Enam Obiosio

It is becoming increasingly difficult to justify Nigeria's continued dependence on imported palm oil, especially when the numbers are this stark. We produce roughly 1.4 million metric tonnes annually, yet demand exceeds 2.5 million metric tonnes. That leaves a deficit of over one million metric tonnes every year, a gap that translates into as much as \$600 million in import costs. For a country that once dominated the global palm oil market, this is not just an economic inefficiency, it is a structural failure.

What concerns me more is not the deficit itself, but the persistence of it. This is not a sudden shock. It is a long-standing imbalance that has been allowed to deepen over time. Every year we import what we should be producing, and in doing so, we export jobs, weaken our currency, and suppress the development of a critical agro-industrial value chain.

So, when I see the Federal Government and private sector investors moving to scale up domestic production, I do not interpret it as a breakthrough. I see it as a long overdue correction.

The intervention, anchored on the National Oil Palm Development Strategy, signals a shift toward coordinated action. What stands out to me is the attempt to move beyond fragmented initiatives into a more structured framework that aligns government institutions, private investors, and smallholder farmers. This matters, because Nigeria's problem has never been the absence of policy ideas. It has been the absence of alignment and execution.

The Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Abubakar Kyari, puts it in clear terms: "This strategy is practical, inclusive, and action-oriented. It brings together government institutions, research bodies, private sector operators, commodity associations, and development partners under a shared framework designed to expand production, improve yields and strengthen processing capacity." I take that statement seriously, but I also read it with caution. Nigeria has seen many strategies described in similar terms. The real test is whether this one moves beyond articulation into measurable outcomes.

Still, there are elements of this initiative that suggest a more grounded approach. The proposal by Mass Industrial Development and Logistics Limited to establish seven integrated oil palm estates of 10,000 hectares each is not incremental. It is industrial in scale. These are not just plantations, they are designed as agro-industrial hubs that combine cultivation, processing, logistics, and community development. That integrated model is exactly what has been missing in Nigeria's agricultural sector.

I have always believed that agriculture in Nigeria suffers less from lack of land and more from lack of structure. We have over three million hectares of suitable land for oil palm cultivation, yet we remain a net importer. That contradiction can only exist in a system where production is disconnected from processing, and where smallholders are left outside organised value chains.

What this initiative attempts to do is close that gap. By integrating smallholder farmers into structured systems, it creates a pathway for scaling production without excluding the very people who dominate the agricultural landscape. That is critical. Large-scale estates alone cannot solve Nigeria's production deficit. Inclusion is not a moral argument here, it is an economic necessity.

The numbers attached to the project are also difficult to ignore. The minister projects over 100,000 direct and indirect jobs, alongside potential savings of up to \$500 million annually through import substitution. If achieved, that would significantly reduce pressure on foreign exchange and create new streams of export revenue. But again, I am cautious. Projections are easy. Execution is where Nigeria often struggles.

From the private sector side, the model appears more deliberate. Engr. Emmanuel Obiorah, Managing Director of Mass Industrial Development and Logistics Limited, emphasises inclusive ownership and local participation, with about 350,000 beneficiaries projected across the seven estates. That scale of participation suggests that the initiative is not just about production, but about distribution of economic value.

What I find particularly compelling is the production potential. Each 10,000-hectare plantation is expected to yield up to 40,000 metric tonnes of crude

**Nigeria is not just trying to meet domestic demand, it is attempting to re-enter a highly competitive international market**

palm oil annually. Multiply that across seven estates, and the output begins to meaningfully close the national deficit. More importantly, it feeds downstream industries, from food processing to manufacturing, creating a multiplier effect that extends far beyond the farms.

This is where I think the conversation needs to shift. Palm oil is not just an agricultural commodity. It is an industrial input. When we import it, we are not just importing food, we are importing raw materials for entire sectors. That has implications for manufacturing costs, competitiveness, and ultimately, economic growth.

mately, economic growth.

I also see this initiative within a broader global context. Demand for palm oil is estimated at over \$70 billion globally. Nigeria is not just trying to meet domestic demand, it is attempting to re-enter a highly competitive international market. That is an ambitious goal, and one that requires more than increased production. It requires efficiency, quality standards, and export infrastructure.

This is where I remain sceptical. Scaling production is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Nigeria must also address issues of logistics, processing capacity, and market access. Without these, increased output could simply create new bottlenecks rather than new opportunities.

There is also the issue of time. Oil palm is not a crop that delivers immediate returns. It requires years of cultivation before reaching full productivity. This means that the benefits of this initiative will not be immediate. It requires patience, consistency, and policy stability, all of which have been in short supply in Nigeria's agricultural sector.

Yet, despite these concerns, I see this as a necessary direction. Nigeria cannot continue to import its way out of structural deficits. The current model is unsustainable. It drains foreign exchange, limits domestic value creation, and exposes the economy to external shocks.

What this initiative represents, at its core, is an attempt to rebuild a lost advantage. Nigeria was once a global leader in palm oil production. That position was not lost due to lack of capacity, but due to policy neglect and structural inefficiencies. Reclaiming it will require more than isolated projects. It will require sustained commitment across multiple fronts.

I also think this initiative sends an important signal. It suggests a recognition that government alone cannot drive agricultural transformation. The involvement of private sector investors introduces capital, efficiency, and accountability that are often missing in public sector-led projects. At the same time, government's role in providing policy direction and coordination remains critical.

The real question, in my view, is whether this partnership can be sustained. Nigeria has a history of strong starts followed by weak follow-through. If this initiative is to succeed, it must avoid that pattern. It must be insulated from policy reversals, funding disruptions, and bureaucratic inertia.

Ultimately, I see this as a test case. If Nigeria can successfully scale palm oil production through a coordinated public-private model, it provides a template for other sectors. If it fails, it reinforces a pattern that has held the economy back for decades.

For now, I remain cautiously optimistic. The scale is right. The structure appears more coherent than past efforts. The alignment between government and private sector is a positive development. But optimism alone is not enough. Nigeria does not need another strategy. It needs results.