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The Reforms
Championing good governance, Driving Development

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Subsidy Endgame: Can Transparency Turn Nigeria's Painful Reforms Into Public Trust?

For more than three decades, Nigeria's economic management under previous administrations revolved around subsidies. Whether on petrol, foreign exchange or electricity, governments repeatedly deployed public spending to cushion households, stabilise prices and contain political pressure. The result was an economy that often appeared cheaper than it truly was, even as public finances weakened, infrastructure deteriorated and investment remained constrained.

Today, ***President Bola Tinubu's*** *administration is attempting to dismantle that model. Fuel subsidy has been removed, the multiple exchange rate regime has largely been abandoned, and the government is now preparing to phase out electricity subsidies from 2027.* ***Enam Obiosio*** *writes that together, the decisions represent perhaps the most comprehensive restructuring of Nigeria's fiscal architecture since the return to democratic rule.*

From Left: Mr. Taiwo Oyedele, Honourable Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy; Mr. Olayemi Cardoso, Governor of CBN, and Mr. Indermit Gill, World Bank Group's Chief Economist & Senior Vice-President for Development Economics.

The reforms in Nigeria now face a challenge that extends beyond economics. They must convince Nigerians that the sacrifices being demanded are producing measurable public benefits.

That question recently dominated discussions at the 7th Africa Emerging Markets Forum in Abuja, where government officials, international development partners and monetary authorities examined whether Nigeria's difficult reforms are beginning to deliver sustainable gains.

The sharpest question came from the World Bank Group's Chief Economist and Senior Vice-President for Development Economics, Indermit Gill.

While acknowledging improvements in macroeconomic management, Gill argued that many Nigerians remain unconvinced that higher government revenues and lower subsidy costs have translated into improvements in their daily lives.

His concern reflects a broader public debate. Inflation may be easing, foreign exchange markets have become more stable and fiscal revenues have improved, yet households continue to struggle with high living costs, weak purchasing power and expensive borrowing.

For millions of Nigerians, the success of reforms is measured less by macroeconomic indicators than by the prices they pay for food, transport and electricity.

Responding to those concerns, Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr. Taiwo Oyedele, accepted that government has an obligation to account for the proceeds generated from subsidy removal.

He disclosed that the federal government would

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soon publish a comprehensive breakdown showing how savings from both fuel subsidy removal and the elimination of what he described as the foreign exchange subsidy have been utilised.

The announcement could become one of the administration's most significant transparency initiatives since the reforms began.

Successive governments have often defended subsidy reforms by promising that the savings would be redirected towards infrastructure, education, healthcare and social investment. Yet those promises have frequently been undermined by weak public reporting, allowing scepticism to flourish.

By promising detailed disclosure, the government appears to recognise that fiscal credibility depends not only on raising revenue but also on demonstrating where every naira goes.

Oyedele argued that assessing the reforms purely by current hardship ignores the condition of the economy before the policy changes.

According to him, subsidy removal was less about generating immediate fiscal windfalls than about eliminating structural distortions that had become increasingly unsustainable.

He described the previous economic model as one built on "fiscal illusions", arguing that artificially low fuel prices, subsidised foreign exchange and expanding fiscal deficits created the appearance of stability while weakening the country's long-term economic foundations.

His explanation also illustrates why expectations of massive cash savings may not fully reflect fiscal reality.

Government revenues may have increased, but expenditure pressures have also risen sharply.

Higher domestic interest rates have expanded debt servicing obligations. The implementation of the new N70,000 national minimum wage has increased personnel costs across government. Expanded social intervention programmes, including the Nigerian Education Loan Fund, now require substantial public financing.

According to Oyedele, more than 1.5 million students have already benefited from tuition support and monthly stipends under the programme.

The minister also defended continued government borrowing despite stronger revenues. His argument is fundamentally arithmetic rather than ideological.

If expenditure continues to exceed income, borrowing remains necessary even when revenue collection improves. The more important issue, he argued, is whether borrowed funds generate returns greater than their financing costs through productive investments that strengthen future economic growth.

That reasoning reflects a wider debate confronting many developing economies.

Fiscal consolidation is rarely achieved through higher revenues alone. Governments must simultaneously reduce waste, improve spending efficiency and expand economic productivity.

Without faster growth, stronger revenue merely postpones fiscal pressures rather than eliminating them.

The administration's next reform target demonstrates how far that process is expected to continue.

Minister of Power, Joseph Tegbe, has recently announced that the federal government intends to phase out electricity subsidies beginning in 2027 while maintaining that consumers will not experience immediate tariff increases or deterioration in electricity supply. The decision carries significant fiscal implications.

Government estimates have previously placed electricity subsidy obligations at about N3 trillion, while power generation companies continue to report trillions of naira in unpaid legacy debts.

Those liabilities have become one of the largest structural weaknesses within Nigeria's electricity market, constraining investment, discouraging private capital and undermining generation capacity.

Recent government actions suggest that the transition has already begun.

A presidentially approved debt reduction programme has produced multiple bond issuances to settle verified obligations owed to generation companies, following years of accumulated arrears.

The objective is not merely debt repayment but creating a commercially sustainable electricity market capable of attracting long-term investment without continuous government intervention.

The policy direction also aligns closely with repeated recommendations from the International Monetary Fund that Nigeria gradually eliminate electricity subsidies while strengthening targeted social protection for vulnerable households.

Whether government can achieve that balance remains uncertain.

Electricity occupies a unique position in the Nigerian economy because it directly affects manufacturing, services, agriculture and household welfare.

Poorly managed reforms could increase production costs, accelerate inflation and reduce competitiveness.

From Left: Mr. Olayemi Cardoso, Governor of CBN; Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, DG of WTO, and Mr. Indermit Gill, World Bank Group's Chief Economist & Senior Vice-President for Development Economics.

Successful implementation therefore depends not simply on withdrawing subsidies but on improving supply reliability, expanding generation capacity and ensuring consumers receive better service in exchange for eventual market-based pricing.

The inflation debate also featured prominently at the Abuja forum.

Presenting findings from a new Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) study covering 36 Sub-Saharan African countries, Director of Statistics, Dr Okpanachi Moses, argued that food inflation presents a unique challenge that conventional monetary policy alone cannot easily resolve.

His research concluded that food price volatility and inflation reinforce each other across much of Africa, particularly where households devote between 40 percent and 60 percent of their incomes to food purchases.

Under such conditions, agricultural disruptions quickly become nationwide inflationary shocks. The implication is significant for policymakers.

Interest rate increases may help moderate demand, but they cannot harvest crops, rebuild disrupted food supply chains or resolve insecurity affecting agricultural production.

... subsidy removal was less about generating immediate fiscal windfalls than about eliminating structural distortions that had become increasingly unsustainable

In fragile economies, structural reforms to food systems often produce more durable inflation control than monetary tightening alone.

Nigeria's classification among the region's relatively stable economies offers some encouragement, but it also highlights the importance of sustaining reforms beyond financial markets.

Macroeconomic stability provides the foundation. Productivity, food security, employment creation and rising household incomes determine whether stability becomes genuine prosperity.

Taken together, the discussions in Abuja reveal that Nigeria has entered a second phase of economic reform.

The first phase focused on correcting distortions through difficult fiscal and monetary decisions.

The next phase demands something more challenging: proving that disciplined public finance can translate into visible improvements in living standards.

Publishing detailed accounts of subsidy savings may therefore become more than a transparency exercise.

It represents an opportunity to rebuild public confidence by connecting painful reforms with tangible outcomes.

EDITORIAL

Nigeria's Missing Are More Than Statistics. They Are National Conscience We Cannot Ignore

Every conflict leaves casualties. But there is another tragedy that rarely commands the same attention, those who simply disappear. They are neither confirmed dead nor known to be alive. They leave behind families trapped in an endless cycle of uncertainty, unable to mourn, unable to move on, and unable to find closure.

The International Committee of the Red Cross' latest update should therefore disturb the national conscience. About 17,000 missing persons cases remain under active tracing in Nigeria after a comprehensive review of case files. That figure is not evidence that fewer Nigerians have gone missing. It merely represents the number of cases in which humanitarian workers are still able to maintain contact with families seeking answers.

We must resist the temptation to see this as another humanitarian statistic. Every missing person represents a broken family, interrupted livelihoods and emotional trauma that often lasts for years. Behind every case number is a mother waiting for a child, a spouse searching for a partner, or children growing up without knowing whether a parent will ever return.

The ICRC deserves commendation for clarifying that the updated figure reflects improved case management rather than a decline in disappearances. Transparency matters. Humanitarian credibility depends on accurate reporting, and public confidence is strengthened when institutions explain what their numbers truly represent.

Yet the figures also expose deeper national failures.

Armed conflict, violent extremism, communal clashes, banditry, disasters and forced migration continue to separate thousands of Nigerians from their families. In many cases, insecurity makes tracing difficult. Families relocate, telephone numbers change and communities become inaccessible. As communication breaks down, the search for loved ones becomes even harder.

We believe that finding missing persons cannot remain the responsibility of humanitarian organisations alone. It requires stronger coordination among security agencies, emergency responders, local communities and government institutions responsible for civil registration, disaster management and social protection.

Equally important is the need to strengthen national identity systems and records management. Accurate documentation, effective population registration and reliable communication networks are not merely administrative tools. They are essential instruments for protecting lives, reuniting families and supporting humanitarian response during crises.

We also urge affected families to keep their contact information updated and continue engaging with the Red Cross whenever new information becomes available. Every detail, however small, may become the lead that reconnects a family with a missing loved one.

Ultimately, the true measure of a society is not how it responds to prosperity but how it cares for those living through its deepest tragedies.

Nigeria cannot become accustomed to the disappearance of its citizens. Missing persons are not invisible simply because they are absent. Their absence continues to shape the lives of thousands of families every day.

Until every possible effort has been made to account for them, they remain not only a humanitarian concern but also a national responsibility. We owe them more than sympathy. We owe them an unrelenting commitment to truth, accountability and the hope of reunion.

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

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 not 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 storytelling 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.

FG Pushes Stronger State Partnership To Drive Data-Led Education Reforms

Dr Tunji Alausa, Minister of Education

By Kingsley Benson

Nigeria's education system is often judged by enrolment figures, examination results and the condition of classrooms. Increasingly, however, policymakers believe that the sector's biggest challenge is not simply expanding access to education but improving how decisions are made.

Without reliable data and stronger coordination between the federal government and the states, education reforms risk becoming fragmented, uneven and difficult to sustain.

That reality shaped discussions at a five-day executive retreat for Commissioners of Education, where the federal government renewed its call for closer collaboration with state governments to accelerate reforms across the sector.

Speaking recently at the retreat organised by the Committee of States' Commissioners of Education, the Minister of Education, Dr Tunji Alausa, argued that meaningful progress in education requires shared responsibility, evidence-based planning and continuous engagement between all levels of government.

According to him, education remains the foundation upon which economic growth, national security and sustainable development ultimately depend.

His remarks reflect a growing consensus that the quality of a country's education system increasingly determines its future competitiveness, workforce productivity and social stability.

While the federal government provides national policy direction, Alausa noted that the responsibility for delivering quality education rests largely with state governments.

That constitutional arrangement, he argued, makes collaboration indispensable.

No single tier of government can independently resolve challenges relating to infrastructure, teacher deployment, school enrolment, financing and learning outcomes.

Instead, effective reform depends on coordinated planning and consistent implementation across all 36 states.

To sustain that partnership, the minister proposed a new mechanism for regular policy engagement.

"To sustain the reform agenda, I propose quarterly meetings of the Council of State Commissioners of Education to review progress, share best practices and strengthen accountability across the education sector," Alausa said.

> **... education remains the foundation upon which economic growth, national security and sustainable development ultimately depend**

The proposal signals an important shift from occasional consultation towards continuous performance review.

Regular engagement would enable states to exchange successful policy approaches, identify implementation challenges early and promote greater consistency in education reforms nationwide. The retreat itself reflects that philosophy.

Commending the commissioners, led by Dr Lawal Olohungbebe, Alausa described the gathering as an important platform for strengthening leadership, encouraging peer learning and deepening cooperation among education stakeholders.

Alongside institutional collaboration, the federal government is placing increasing emphasis on digital technology to improve planning.

The minister announced the deployment of the National Education Data Infrastructure (NEDI) and the Digitalised Nigeria Education Management Information System (DNEMIS), describing both platforms as critical tools for transforming education management.

Rather than relying on fragmented statistics, the systems will integrate information from schools, local governments, states and federal institutions into a unified database capable of providing real-time information on school enrolment, teacher distribution, infrastructure and learning outcomes.

Reliable information, Alausa argued, will enable governments to allocate resources more efficiently while strengthening planning and budgeting.

He therefore urged all states to complete their Annual School Census through the digital platform, while commending Kaduna and Borno states for the progress already achieved.

The ministry has also introduced digital dashboards and smart boards to support evidence-based decision-making, with additional analytical support provided by the National Bureau of Statistics.

Financing remains another important component of the reform agenda.

The minister encouraged states to maximise opportunities under the World Bank-supported HOPE Education Programme, which offers US$552 million in performance-based financing.

Although every state is eligible to participate, he observed that several have yet to fulfil essential requirements, including signing Subsidiary Loan Agreements, opening designated programme accounts and complying with data reporting obligations.

Ultimately, Nigeria's education reforms will not be judged by the number of new policies announced but by measurable improvements in learning outcomes, school management and access to quality education.

Achieving those goals requires more than increased funding.

It demands stronger partnerships, better information and sustained accountability across every level of government.

As the federal government intensifies its reform agenda, the success of Nigeria's education system may increasingly depend on how effectively the states and the centre work together to transform policy into lasting educational progress.

Africa's Climate Warning Is No Longer About Forecasts, But Preparedness

Moses Vilakati, African Union Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy & Sustainable Environment.

By Anita Dennis

Africa has become increasingly familiar with climate warnings. Every year brings fresh forecasts of droughts, floods, heatwaves and food shortages. Yet the continent's greatest vulnerability is no longer the absence of scientific knowledge. It is whether governments can transform early warnings into timely action before disasters unfold.

That challenge dominated discussions at an Extraordinary Ministerial Consultative Meeting on El Niño Preparedness and Continental Response convened by the African Union in Addis Ababa, where policymakers were presented with one of the starkest climate projections in decades.

According to the African Union Commission, scientific forecasts indicate a 90 percent probability that the 2026 to 2027 El Niño will become the strongest recorded since 1950, with peak intensity expected between November 2026 and February 2027.

For a continent where agriculture remains heavily dependent on rainfall and millions rely on climate-sensitive livelihoods, the warning carries implications that extend well beyond weather patterns. It is a test of governance, economic resilience and humanitarian preparedness.

Opening the meeting, African Union Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, Moses Vilakati, framed the gathering as an opportunity for Africa to prepare collectively rather than react individually.

"It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this Extraordinary Ministerial Consultative Meeting on El Niño preparedness and continental response," he said.

But his message quickly shifted from protocol to urgency.

"It is an imminent risk that demands immediate preparation," Vilakati warned.

His concern reflects lessons from the continent's recent experience.

The 2023 to 2024 El Niño devastated large parts of Southern Africa, forcing Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe to declare national disasters. Across the Southern African Development Community, more than 71 million people were affected, prompting a humanitarian appeal valued at US$5.5 billion.

The consequences extended beyond agriculture.

Food production declined sharply, hydropower generation weakened, food insecurity intensified and millions required emergency assistance. At the same time, severe flooding displaced communities across Eastern Africa, while climate-related disruptions spread into Central and West Africa.

Those experiences demonstrated that climate shocks rarely remain confined to one sector. Agricultural losses quickly affect food prices, electricity generation, public health, government finances and regional stability.

Vilakati argued that Africa now possesses something it lacked in previous decades: advance warning.

Forecasts from global, continental and regional climate centres now provide governments with months of notice before extreme weather events occur. Institutions such as the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development, regional climate centres and national meteorological agencies have significantly improved seasonal forecasting and early warning systems.

Yet the commissioner cautioned that scientific information alone cannot prevent disasters.

"The difference between a manageable crisis and a humanitarian disaster will be determined by what we do before the impacts arrive," he said.

His observation highlights a broader challenge confronting climate governance across Africa.

Early warning systems have improved considerably, but preparedness often lags behind. Forecasts frequently fail to translate into budget allocations, emergency planning, investment in resilient agriculture or coordinated disaster response.

For many countries, the weakest link is no longer predicting climate events but acting on the predictions.

Supporting that assessment, African Union Commission Director for Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy, Harsen Nyambe, said the ministerial meeting had been convened specifically to strengthen continental preparedness before the anticipated El Niño reaches peak intensity later this year.

Similarly, the ClimSA Programme Coordinator at the African Union Commission, Dr Jolly Wasambo, warned that the projected climate event could trigger widespread disruptions across the continent if governments fail to prepare adequately.

The challenge is particularly acute because Africa contributes relatively little to global greenhouse gas emissions while bearing a disproportionate share of climate-related losses.

With agriculture employing a large share of the continent's workforce and food systems remaining highly dependent on rainfall, prolonged droughts or excessive flooding can rapidly evolve into economic and humanitarian crises.

For policymakers, therefore, climate resilience has become as much an economic priority as an environmental one.

The African Union's appeal ultimately goes beyond responding to a single weather event. It calls for stronger institutions, greater investment in resilience, improved regional cooperation and political leadership capable of acting before emergencies overwhelm national capacities.

The forecast may predict another powerful El Niño, but the scale of its consequences will depend less on the weather than on Africa's preparedness. This time, the continent has advance notice. The question is whether it will use it.

NCC Strengthens Africa's Digital Future Through Landmark ATU Conference

Dr. Aminu Maida, Executive Vice Chairman/ Chief Executive Officer of NCC

By Majeed Salaam

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) has reinforced its position as a leading driver of Africa's digital transformation following Nigeria's successful hosting of the 26th African Telecommunications Union Conference of Plenipotentiaries (ATU CPL 2026), a landmark gathering that united African nations to develop a common telecommunications agenda ahead of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Plenipotentiary Conference later this year.

Held in Abuja, the week-long conference brought together telecommunications regulators, policymakers and government representatives from member states of the African Telecommunications Union (ATU) to deliberate on strategic issues shaping the continent's digital future. Under the coordination of the NCC, the conference produced a unified African position on key global telecommunications matters, reinforcing the continent's commitment to stronger regional cooperation.

Speaking after the conference, the Executive Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the NCC, Dr. Aminu Maida, described the event as a major success that reflected Africa's shared determination to advance inclusive digital transformation through collaboration.

According to him, delegates spent seven productive days exchanging ideas, debating diverse perspectives, building consensus and strengthening partnerships that will enhance Africa's engagement at the forthcoming ITU Plenipotentiary Conference.

"We exchanged ideas, debated diverse perspectives, built consensus and reaffirmed our shared commitment to advancing Africa's digital future through stronger regional cooperation," Maida stated.

For the NCC, the successful hosting of ATU CPL 2026 represents more than an international conference. It demonstrates Nigeria's growing capacity to convene high-level digital policy discussions while positioning the commission as a key institution driving regional telecommunications cooperation.

The commission noted that the conference marked a significant milestone in Africa's digital journey, with member states aligning behind a common vision for innovation, digital inclusion and sustainable connectivity.

In its assessment of the conference, the NCC stated that African countries gathered in Abuja with a shared commitment to strengthening regional collaboration and speaking with one united voice ahead of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference.

... the successful hosting of ATU CPL 2026 represents more than an international conference. It demonstrates Nigeria's growing capacity to convene high-level digital policy discussions ...

According to the commission, the meeting reaffirmed Africa's collective resolve to advance inclusive digital transformation, foster innovation and shape a stronger, more connected digital future under the theme: 'One Africa. One Voice. One Digital Future.'

The conference comes at a critical period for Africa's digital economy, as governments across the continent intensify efforts to expand broadband infrastructure, improve digital access and develop policies that support emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and satellite communications.

By facilitating consensus among member states, the NCC has contributed to ensuring that Africa enters global telecommunications negotiations with coordinated positions capable of advancing the continent's interests.

Dr. Maida also acknowledged the leadership of the Minister of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, Dr. Bosun Tijani, whose support, alongside the efforts of the Ministry and industry stakeholders, enabled Nigeria to host the conference successfully.

He said the collaborative efforts of the Ministry, the NCC and other stakeholders ensured that Nigeria provided an excellent platform for one of Africa's most important telecommunications policy engagements.

Beyond the formal sessions, Dr. Maida said the conference created valuable opportunities for regulators to exchange experiences and strengthen professional relationships across the continent.

According to him, discussions with counterparts from other African countries offered fresh perspectives on common regulatory challenges while reinforcing the importance of collaboration in addressing shared priorities such as spectrum management, consumer protection, digital infrastructure and regional connectivity.

These engagements, he noted, will further enhance cooperation among African regulators as the continent continues to pursue digital integration and economic development.

Looking ahead, the NCC reaffirmed Nigeria's commitment to representing Africa effectively at the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference scheduled for November.

Dr. Maida said Nigeria remains committed to serving as a strong, constructive and reliable voice for Africa while pursuing re-election to the ITU Council, where the country seeks to continue contributing to global telecommunications policy and promoting Africa's collective interests.

The conference also witnessed a significant leadership transition within the African Telecommunications Union.

The NCC congratulated Engr. Kezias Kazuba Mwale of Zambia on his election as Secretary-General of the ATU for the 2027 to 2031 term, expressing confidence that his leadership would deepen regional cooperation and accelerate telecommunications development across Africa.

Dr. Maida equally commended the outgoing Secretary-General, Mr. John Omo, for his eight years of dedicated service and leadership, describing his contribution as instrumental to the growth of the Union.

The successful conclusion of ATU CPL 2026 reinforces the NCC's expanding role beyond domestic telecommunications regulation into regional digital diplomacy and international policy engagement.

As Africa prepares to participate in global telecommunications discussions later this year, the Commission's leadership in convening the conference has strengthened regional consensus on issues that will shape the continent's digital future.

NEPC Targets Retirees As Nigeria's Next Generation Of Non-Oil Export Entrepreneurs

By Anita Dennis

For many Nigerian public servants, retirement has traditionally marked the end of a career and the beginning of financial uncertainty. Years of public service often give way to reduced income, limited business experience and the difficult transition from salaried employment to self-reliance.

Mrs. Nonye Ayeni, DG/CEO of NEPC (3rd right), and other participants, at SOAR initiative.

The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) wants to redefine that experience.

Rather than viewing retirement as the end of economic productivity, the Council is positioning it as the beginning of entrepreneurial opportunity, particularly within Nigeria's expanding non-oil export sector.

That ambition is driving the launch of the Sustainable Opportunities for Active Retirement (SOAR) programme, an initiative designed to prepare public servants approaching retirement to build sustainable businesses across the country's non-oil export value chain.

The first phase of the programme will train 100 public servants who are within three years of retirement, equipping them with practical knowledge needed to participate in agriculture, value addition, aggregation, logistics and export marketing.

The initiative reflects a broader shift in Nigeria's economic thinking.

As government intensifies efforts to diversify the economy beyond crude oil, expanding exports increasingly depends not only on supporting established businesses but also on attracting new entrepreneurs with professional experience, organisational skills and long-term investment potential.

Retiring civil servants represent an underutilised resource in that strategy.

Launching the programme in Abuja, Executive Director of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council, Mrs Nnoye Ayeni, said SOAR aligns with the Federal Government's Renewed Hope Agenda by helping public servants transition into productive enterprises after leaving active service.

The programme also seeks to change long-held perceptions surrounding retirement within the public service

According to her, the programme was developed in response to the reality that many workers enter retirement without adequate preparation for life beyond government employment.

Rather than focusing solely on financial planning, SOAR introduces participants to commercial opportunities across the export ecosystem where they can continue generating income while contributing to national economic growth.

"We are opening their minds to the enormous opportunities in non-oil exports. We will groom them from farm to market so they can find their place as farmers, service providers, aggregators or exporters. Retirement is not the end of life," Ayeni said.

Her remarks reflect a growing recognition that economic diversification requires broadening participation beyond traditional exporters.

The export value chain now extends well beyond shipping products overseas. It encompasses production, processing, storage, logistics, quality assurance, packaging and marketing, creating opportunities for entrepreneurs with varied professional backgrounds.

The programme also seeks to change long-held perceptions surrounding retirement within the public service.

Representing the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs Didi Walson-Jack, the Permanent Secretary, Common Services Office, Mr Kalba Usman, described SOAR as a strategic intervention capable of transforming retirement from a period associated with hardship into one defined by opportunity and fulfilment.

He argued that with proper preparation, retiring workers can build successful businesses, improve their quality of life and continue contributing to national development through entrepreneurship.

The wider economic implications are equally significant.

Declaring the programme open, Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, Mr Chris Isokpokwu, said economically active retirees can stimulate enterprise development, generate employment, strengthen local communities and expand Nigeria's non-oil export capacity.

His observation reinforces the increasingly accepted view that entrepreneurship is not confined to young innovators or technology start-ups.

Experienced professionals entering retirement often possess management expertise, institutional knowledge and extensive networks that can become valuable business assets when properly supported.

Recognising that business success requires sustained guidance, Director of the State Office Coordinating Department, Mr Arnold Jackson, assured participants that the Council's engagement would continue beyond classroom training through mentorship and advisory support.

Ultimately, the SOAR programme represents more than a retirement initiative.

It reflects an effort to convert decades of public sector experience into productive enterprise while strengthening Nigeria's non-oil economy. If successful, it could redefine retirement from the end of employment into the beginning of a new phase of wealth creation, entrepreneurship and export-driven growth.

Nigeria Deepens Indigenous Defence Manufacturing To Reduce Foreign Military Dependence

By Jennete Ugo Anya

For decades, Nigeria's military modernisation has depended heavily on imported weapons, ammunition and specialised equipment. While foreign procurement has enabled the Armed Forces to respond to immediate security challenges, it has also exposed the country to supply chain disruptions, foreign exchange pressures and long delivery timelines that can affect operational readiness.

Increasingly, however, Nigeria is seeking to redefine that model by expanding domestic defence manufacturing and positioning indigenous production as a strategic pillar of national security.

That objective received renewed emphasis during a visit by the Chief of Defence Staff, General Olufemi Oluyede, to the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) Ordnance Factory in Kaduna, where he reaffirmed the Armed Forces' commitment to strengthening local production of military equipment.

The visit went beyond a routine inspection of military facilities. It underscored a broader shift in defence policy, one that increasingly views domestic manufacturing not only as an industrial ambition but as an essential component of national resilience.

During the visit, General Oluyede inspected production and research facilities and received detailed briefings on DICON's manufacturing capacity, ongoing projects and future expansion plans.

His assessment reflects growing confidence that Nigeria's defence industry can play a larger role in supporting military operations at a time when security challenges continue to evolve across multiple theatres.

The Chief of Defence Staff commended the management and staff of DICON for their efforts to advance indigenous defence technology, describing local innovation as critical to the country's long-term security objectives.

"Nigeria will continue to strengthen local production of military equipment to boost the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces and reduce dependence on foreign defence hardware," Oluyede said.

His remarks capture a strategic calculation that extends beyond defence procurement.

Modern military capability increasingly depends not only on acquiring equipment but also on maintaining, repairing and replenishing it quickly during periods of operational demand. Countries that rely almost entirely on imports often face delays arising from international procurement processes, export controls or geopolitical considerations.

Building domestic manufacturing capacity therefore strengthens military preparedness by improving supply reliability and reducing vulnerability to external disruptions.

General Oluyede also identified important economic benefits associated with expanding local defence production.

"Increased local production would enhance operational readiness, conserve foreign exchange and guarantee sustainable logistics support for the Armed Forces," he stated.

The foreign exchange dimension has become increasingly significant.

Military hardware constitutes one of the most capital-intensive components of government expenditure. Greater domestic production offers the potential to reduce import dependence, retain more value within the national economy and stimulate industrial capabilities that extend beyond the defence sector.

General Olufemi Oluyede, Chief of Defence Staff

Many technologies developed for military applications eventually find civilian uses in manufacturing, engineering, communications and advanced research.

Nigeria's defence industry can play a larger role in supporting military operations at a time when security challenges continue to evolve across multiple theatres

For Nigeria, strengthening DICON could therefore generate broader industrial spillovers while supporting national technological development.

The renewed emphasis on indigenous manufacturing also aligns with wider government efforts to increase local content across strategic sectors of the economy.

Just as domestic refining, pharmaceutical production and agricultural processing have become national priorities, defence manufacturing is increasingly viewed as part of a broader agenda to build productive capacity and reduce reliance on external suppliers.

Achieving that ambition, however, requires sustained investment in research, engineering expertise, quality assurance and partnerships between government, academia and the private sector.

Recognising those requirements, the Chief of Defence Staff reaffirmed Defence Headquarters' commitment to supporting DICON's ongoing transformation.

"Defence Headquarters remains committed to supporting DICON's transformation into a modern defence manufacturing institution capable of meeting the equipment needs of the military and other security agencies," Oluyede said.

His commitment highlights an important reality.

Successful defence industrialisation depends not merely on expanding factory output but on creating an ecosystem that encourages continuous innovation, technology transfer and skilled workforce development.

General Oluyede therefore stressed that indigenous research and innovation must remain central to Nigeria's long-term defence strategy.

"Promoting innovation and indigenous research remains key to achieving Nigeria's defence industrialisation objectives," he said.

That objective reflects a broader understanding of national security in the twenty-first century.

Shettima Urges Regional Dev't Commissions To Deliver Visible Economic Impact

Vice President Kashim Shettima (9th left), with the management and board members of SWDC at the Presidential Villa in Abuja.

By Majeed Salaam

Nigeria's regional development commissions were established to do more than administer public funds. They were created to address long-standing development gaps, unlock regional economic strengths and ensure that growth is driven by the unique comparative advantages of each geopolitical zone.

Their ultimate value, however, will not be measured by the number of meetings held or policies drafted. It will be judged by whether they improve infrastructure, expand economic opportunities and raise living standards.

That was the central message from Vice President Kashim Shettima as he recently received the Chairman, management and board members of the South West Development Commission (SWDC) at the Presidential Villa in Abuja.

His remarks provide an indication of how the Federal Government expects the newly established regional development commissions to operate under the Renewed Hope Agenda.

Rather than functioning as conventional government agencies, the commissions are expected to become development institutions capable of mobilising partnerships, attracting investment and accelerating economic transformation within their respective regions.

Addressing the delegation, Shettima urged the South West Development Commission to work closely with state governments, traditional institutions, the private sector and development partners in delivering sustainable development.

The emphasis on collaboration reflects an increasingly accepted principle in development planning.

Complex economic challenges rarely fall within the capacity of any single institution. Infrastructure, education, industrial development and investment promotion require coordination across different levels of government as well as active participation by businesses and local communities.

The Vice President also reminded the commission that public expectations would be shaped by tangible outcomes rather than institutional structures.

He stressed that its success would ultimately be determined by visible projects and measurable improvements in the lives of the people.

That observation reflects a wider shift in public sector governance.

Increasingly, government institutions are expected to demonstrate impact through service delivery rather than administrative processes. Development commissions, in particular, face growing pressure to produce projects that generate employment, improve infrastructure and stimulate regional economic activity.

Shettima further called for transparency, innovation and the implementation of projects capable of attracting private investment.

His remarks underscore the changing role of public institutions in economic development.

With fiscal resources under increasing pressure, governments are relying more heavily on private capital to finance infrastructure and productive investments. Regional commissions are therefore expected not merely to spend public funds but to create conditions that encourage businesses and investors to participate in regional development.

That approach aligns with broader efforts to diversify Nigeria's economy by leveraging regional strengths.

Each geopolitical zone possesses distinct economic advantages ranging from agriculture and manufacturing to solid minerals, tourism and maritime commerce. The commissions are intended to identify those opportunities and coordinate investments that maximise local potential while contributing to national growth.

Earlier, Chairman of the SWDC, Senator Olubunmi Adetunmbi, commended the Tinubu administration for establishing the regional development commissions and implementing broader economic reforms.

He also acknowledged Vice President Shettima's leadership of the National Economic Council, describing it as an important platform for coordinating development priorities between the Federal Government and the states.

Outlining the commission's priorities, Adetunmbi said that it intends to invest in infrastructure, human capital development and other strategic projects capable of supporting long-term growth across the South West.

Those priorities mirror the broader objectives behind the establishment of regional commissions.

Infrastructure provides the physical foundation for economic expansion, while investments in education, skills and human capital strengthen productivity and improve competitiveness over time.

Ultimately, the success of Nigeria's regional development commissions will depend less on their statutory mandates than on their ability to convert regional potential into measurable economic progress.

For the SWDC, the task ahead is therefore not simply to implement projects, but to demonstrate that regional institutions can become effective vehicles for inclusive growth, private investment and sustainable development.

Quotes of the Week

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, DG of WTO

It's all about leadership. We need leaders who have the interests of the country and the continent at heart—not themselves. Leaders who ask the right questions, focus on implementation, create jobs for young people and remove the obstacles preventing economic growth.

Mr. Abubakar Kyari, Minister of Agriculture & Food Security

85 percent of the food we consume comes from smallholder farmers, yet their living conditions have remained virtually unchanged. That shows there is a structural imbalance in the agricultural economy.

Sen. John Enoh, Minister of State for Industry

The more a country adds value to its products, the more respect it earns globally. The Dangote Refinery stands today as one of the strongest demonstrations of that principle.

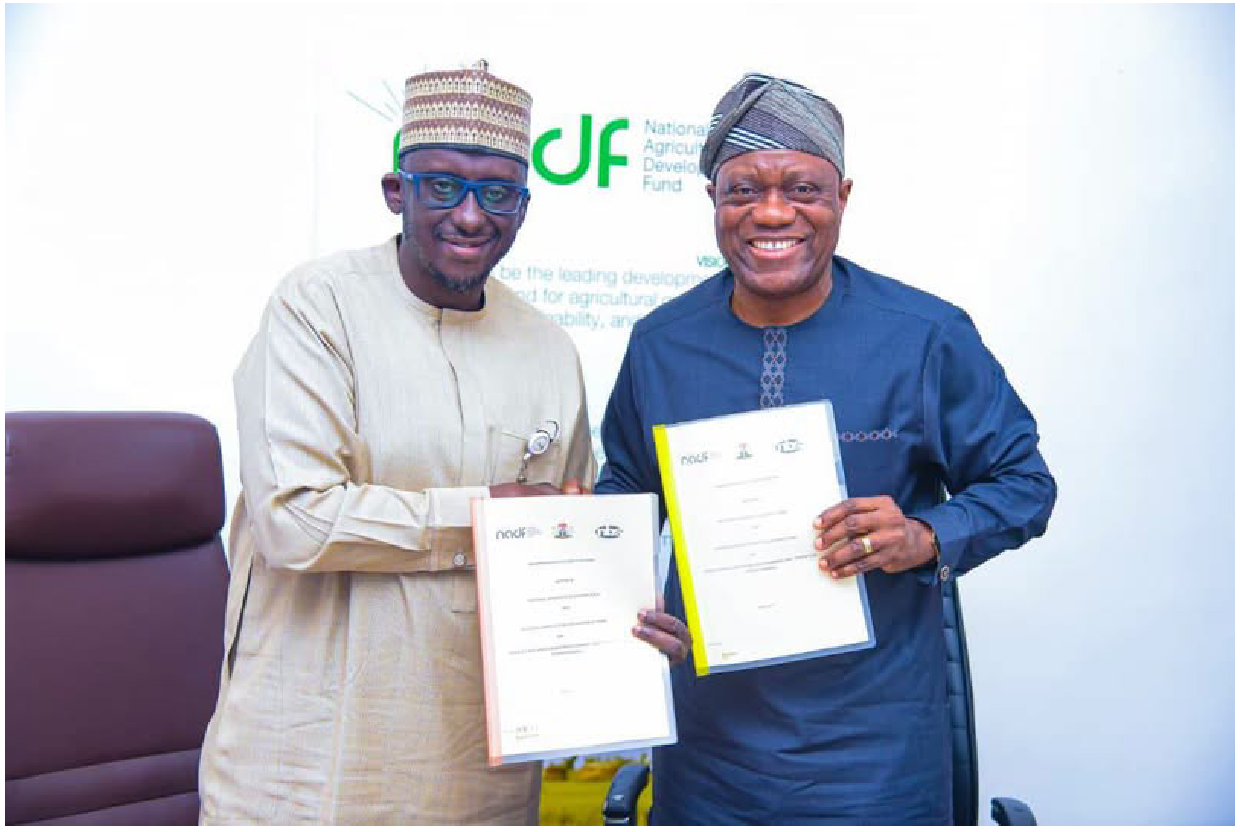
NADF, NBS Partner To Strengthen Agricultural Data For Food Security

By Ahmed Ahmed

Nigeria's food security debate is often dominated by familiar challenges, insecurity, climate change, rising production costs and inadequate financing. Yet beneath these structural constraints lies another problem that receives far less attention but influences almost every agricultural decision: the quality of data.

Without reliable information on production, yields, farm locations, financing gaps and market performance, governments struggle to design effective policies, financial institutions hesitate to invest, and development interventions often miss their intended targets.

Recognising that challenge, the National Agricultural Development Fund (NADF) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) have entered into a strategic partnership aimed at strengthening agricultural data as a foundation for evidence-based policymaking, investment and national food security.



Executive Secretary of NADF, Mr Mohammed Ibrahim (left), with Prince Adeyemi Adeniran, Statistician-General of the Federation, during the signing of the MoU.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed in Abuja, establishes a framework for collaboration on agricultural data generation, validation, sharing, analysis and impact assessment across the country.

Although administrative in appearance, the agreement reflects a broader shift in Nigeria's agricultural strategy. Increasingly, policymakers are recognising that food security depends not only on expanding production but also on improving the quality of information that guides public and private sector decisions.

Reliable data has become an essential economic asset.

It helps governments identify production gaps, allocate resources more efficiently, evaluate intervention programmes and respond more quickly to emerging risks. For investors and financial institutions, dependable statistics reduce uncertainty and improve confidence in agricultural financing.

Executive Secretary of the NADF, Mr Mohammed Ibrahim, described credible data as the foundation upon which sustainable agricultural development must be built.

According to him, the partnership will strengthen informed investments while improving interventions across Nigeria's agricultural value chains.

His remarks reflect the expanding role of the Fund since its establishment in 2022.

Initially created to support agricultural financing, the organisation has increasingly broadened its activities to include research, donor coordination and collaboration with state governments. Each of those responsibilities depends heavily on access to accurate and timely information.

As agricultural financing becomes more sophisticated, lenders require better evidence to assess risks, identify viable projects and measure programme outcomes. Development partners similarly expect stronger monitoring systems before committing long-term funding.

The agreement therefore seeks to strengthen not only statistics but also confidence in Nigeria's agricultural institutions.

For the NBS, the partnership represents an opportunity to improve coordination between official data producers and sector-specific institutions.

Statistician-General of the Federation, Prince Adeyemi Adeniran, said the agreement would establish a common framework for agricultural data exchange, validation and harmonisation.

Agricultural information is often generated by multiple institutions using different methodologies, making comparisons difficult and occasionally producing conflicting figures

Such coordination addresses a long-standing weakness within Nigeria's statistical system.

Agricultural information is often generated by multiple institutions using different methodologies, making comparisons difficult and occasionally producing conflicting figures. Harmonising data collection and validation can improve consistency, strengthen policy planning and enhance investor confidence.

Adeniran also stressed that both organisations would maintain high standards of data governance and confidentiality while improving monitoring and evaluation of agricultural programmes.

That commitment is increasingly important as governments rely more heavily on digital technologies, geospatial information and electronic databases to support planning and service delivery.

Beyond statistics, the partnership highlights a changing understanding of food security itself.

Traditionally, food security has been viewed largely through the lens of increasing agricultural production. Today, it increasingly encompasses the ability to anticipate risks, monitor supply chains, evaluate interventions and make timely policy adjustments based on credible evidence.

In that context, information becomes almost as valuable as infrastructure.

Good data allows governments to identify where fertiliser support is most needed, measure the effectiveness of irrigation investments, track crop performance, evaluate climate risks and allocate scarce resources more efficiently.

For farmers, stronger data systems can eventually translate into better access to finance, more targeted government support and improved market opportunities. For policymakers, they reduce the likelihood of costly policy mistakes. For investors, they provide greater certainty in an industry often perceived as high risk.

The partnership between the NADF and the NBS therefore represents more than an institutional agreement.

It signals a growing recognition that achieving national food security requires more than producing more food. It requires producing better information.

In agriculture, the quality of decisions often depends on the quality of data behind them. As Nigeria seeks to build a more resilient and productive food system, reliable statistics may prove to be one of its most valuable harvests.

The agreement therefore seeks to strengthen not only statistics but also confidence in Nigeria's agricultural institutions

Why Nigeria's Electricity Reform May Ultimately Be Won Through Consumer Protection

Mr Tunji Bello, Executive Vice Chairman of the FCCPC

By Annita Dennis

Nigeria's electricity reform is often discussed in terms of generation capacity, transmission infrastructure, tariffs and investment. Yet beneath those familiar debates lies a less visible issue that may ultimately determine whether the sector succeeds: consumer confidence.

As the Electricity Act 2023 reshapes the country's power market by allowing states to establish independent electricity regulatory commissions, Nigeria is gradually moving from a single national regulatory framework to multiple state and regional electricity markets. While the decentralisation promises greater efficiency and responsiveness, it also introduces a new policy challenge, ensuring that electricity consumers receive equal protection regardless of where they live.

That concern framed discussions at a stakeholders' engagement in Abuja, where the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), the Nigerian Electricity Management Services Agency (NEMSA) and state electricity regulators examined how to prevent regulatory fragmentation from weakening consumer rights.

Executive Vice Chairman of the FCCPC, Mr Tunji Bello, argued that electricity consumers should not experience different standards of protection simply because regulatory authority has become more decentralised.

His position reflects a growing recognition that Nigeria's electricity reform cannot rely solely on expanding infrastructure or attracting investment. It must also build public trust through consistent enforcement of consumer rights.

"Consumers do not experience electricity in silos, so consumer protection cannot come in silos either," Bello observed, stressing that collaboration among regulators should become a permanent feature of the electricity market rather than an occasional response to emerging problems.

The Electricity Act 2023 has fundamentally altered regulatory responsibilities by empowering states to oversee their own electricity markets. That shift potentially creates opportunities for innovation and faster decision-making, but it also raises the possibility of uneven regulatory standards across the country.

Without coordination, consumers in one state could enjoy stronger protections than those in another, while investors may encounter conflicting compliance requirements that increase regulatory uncertainty.

For both consumers and businesses, consistency matters almost as much as regulation itself.

Bello pointed to the joint intervention involving the FCCPC, NERC and NEMSA that halted the deployment of obsolete Unistar prepaid meters as an example of how coordinated regulation can deliver tangible consumer benefits.

The action prevented the installation of meters considered inadequate until appropriate consumer safeguards were established, reducing the risks of inaccurate metering, excessive estimated billing and unjustified electricity disconnections.

The episode illustrates an important reality within Nigeria's electricity market. Consumer protection is not merely about resolving complaints after problems occur. It is equally about preventing harmful practices before they affect millions of customers.

Officials at the meeting also argued that stronger regulatory coordination serves broader economic objectives beyond protecting consumers.

Head of Consumer Protection at NERC, Mr Anthony Etienne, noted that harmonised regulatory standards would provide greater certainty for investors while ensuring that electricity users receive consistent treatment across emerging state electricity markets.

As more states assume greater responsibility for electricity regulation, investors increasingly require predictable rules that are applied consistently across jurisdictions. Divergent regulatory standards could discourage investment at a time when Nigeria requires substantial private capital to expand generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure.

The Executive Commissioner for Electricity Regulation in Anambra State, Mr Nnaemeka Ewelukwa, said decentralisation has brought electricity governance closer to consumers, making regulators more accessible and responsive to local needs.

That proximity offers one of the strongest arguments for state-based regulation. Local regulators are often better positioned to understand regional challenges, respond more quickly to complaints and tailor regulatory interventions to local market conditions.

Yet decentralisation achieves its full potential only when local flexibility operates within nationally accepted consumer protection principles.

Participants therefore agreed that stronger information sharing, joint investigations, coordinated enforcement and harmonised regulatory standards should become central features of Nigeria's evolving electricity market.

Their consensus highlights a broader lesson for the country's ongoing power sector reforms.

Reliable electricity depends not only on power plants, transmission lines and distribution networks. It also depends on institutions capable of enforcing fair rules, protecting consumers and creating confidence that the market operates transparently.

As Nigeria's electricity sector becomes increasingly decentralised, the success of reform may ultimately be measured not simply by how much power is generated, but by whether every consumer, regardless of location, enjoys the same confidence that the system is fair, accountable and worthy of public trust.

Reforms Nuggets

Nigeria, Saudi Arabia To Host Diaspora Invest't, Tourism Summit

- The Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), in partnership with Al Yaro International Company Limited, will host the second Nigeria-Saudi Diaspora Investment and Tourism Exhibition Summit on August 4 and 5, 2026, at the Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Centre in Abuja.

- Speaking on behalf of NiDCOM Chairman/CEO, Dr. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, the Commission's Secretary, Dr. Sule Bassi, said the summit aims to deepen trade, investment and tourism cooperation between Nigeria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

- Themed 'The Misconceptions, Challenges, and Opportunities in Investing in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria,' the event is expected to attract more than 100 exhibitors and over 5,000 participants across the two-day exhibition.

- Bassi recalled that the inaugural edition, held in Abuja in 2019, attracted over 30 Saudi companies and corporate organisations, laying the foundation for stronger bilateral investment ties.

- Participants will explore opportunities across about 20 sectors, including agriculture, energy, ICT, tourism, manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, real estate, and Hajj and Umrah services.

- The summit will feature business-to-business (B2B) matchmaking sessions to connect Nigerian and Saudi investors and foster strategic commercial partnerships.

- NiDCOM described the initiative as one of its flagship diaspora programmes designed to strengthen collaboration between Nigerians living in Saudi Arabia and stakeholders in both countries.

- Organisers disclosed plans to institutionalise the exhibition as a biennial event, rotating between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia to sustain bilateral economic engagement.

- Head of Technology Transfer, Innovation and Investment at NiDCOM, Dr. Abdulrahman Terab, said the summit would help transform long-standing diplomatic and cultural relations into sustainable economic partnerships through investment facilitation, technology transfer and diaspora engagement.

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Nigeria's Greatest Resource Is Not Oil, But The Young People We Continue To Underestimate

REFORM TALKS *with* Enam Obiosio

Whenever conversations about Nigeria's future begin, I notice that we instinctively turn to oil prices, exchange rates, inflation, public debt, electricity supply or infrastructure. Important as these are, I believe we often overlook the one factor that will ultimately determine whether every economic reform succeeds or fails. That factor is our people, especially our young people.

No country develops by accident. Nations rise because they invest deliberately in human beings. Roads, bridges, airports and power stations certainly matter, but they are only as productive as the people who use them. Without educated, healthy and skilled citizens, physical infrastructure becomes little more than expensive concrete.

That is why I believe discussions about population should never be reduced to counting how many people live within our borders. Population is not merely about numbers. It is about potential. It is about planning. Above all, it is about whether government understands the people it governs well enough to prepare for their future.

The National Population Commission deserves credit for reminding the country of this reality during the 2026 World Population Day activities. Its appeal for stronger media engagement on population issues may appear routine, but I think it raises one of Nigeria's most neglected national conversations.

Reliable population data are not academic statistics gathered to satisfy researchers. They determine where schools should be built, how many teachers should be recruited, where hospitals should be located, how many vaccines should be procured, and where roads, water systems and electricity projects are most urgently needed.

Whenever data are weak, planning becomes weak. Whenever planning becomes weak, public resources become less effective. Whenever resources are poorly targeted, citizens naturally lose confidence in government. For me, therefore, the debate about population is inseparable from the debate about governance.

Nigeria is one of the youngest countries in the world. According to the National Youth Policy, citizens between the ages of 15 and 29 account for roughly one-third of our population. Many commentators present this as a demographic burden. I disagree.

I see it first as an extraordinary economic opportunity. Every developed economy has, at one point, benefited from what economists describe as the demographic dividend, when a large working-age population produces more than it consumes, expands productivity and drives sustained growth. But demographic dividends do not arrive automatically. Young people do not become productive merely because they are young. Potential alone has never built a prosperous nation. Human capital does.

That is why I agree with the National Population Commission that investment in education, healthcare, skills acquisition, decent employment, gender equality and meaningful youth participation should occupy the centre of national development planning rather than its margins.

Too often, I hear discussions about youth that focus almost entirely on unemployment. Certainly unemployment remains one of Nigeria's biggest challenges. But I think underemployment deserves equal attention.

A graduate selling products online because formal employment is unavailable may technically be employed, yet the economy is failing to utilise years of acquired knowledge and training. Likewise, a skilled technician without access to finance cannot contribute fully to national productivity. Neither can an entrepreneur operating without electricity, digital infrastructure or affordable credit.

Youth development therefore extends far beyond job creation. It requires creating an ecosystem where talent can flourish. Unfortunately, that ecosystem remains incomplete.

Too many young Nigerians still struggle to access

> **Nigeria is one of the youngest countries in the world**

quality education. Healthcare remains uneven. Infrastructure gaps continue to widen opportunities for some communities while narrowing them for others. Insecurity disrupts learning, investment and productive enterprise across many parts of the country.

These challenges do not exist independently. They reinforce one another. Poor education reduces employability. Weak healthcare lowers productivity. Insecurity discourages investment. Limited investment creates fewer jobs. The cycle repeats itself.

Breaking that cycle demands evidence rather than assumptions. That is another reason I believe accurate population data deserve greater public attention. Governments cannot solve problems they do not properly understand. Without dependable demographic information, policymakers are left planning in the dark.

The result is predictable. Schools become overcrowded because enrolment projections were inaccurate. Healthcare facilities become overwhelmed because population growth outpaced planning. Urban centres expand without corresponding infrastructure because migration patterns were poorly understood. Good governance begins with good information.

This is where I believe the media also carries an important responsibility. For too long, population stories have largely appeared only during census debates or World Population Day commemorations. That should change.

Journalists should consistently explain why birth registration matters. They should examine whether population statistics influence budget allocations. They should investigate whether education, healthcare and employment policies actually reflect demographic realities. In my view, journalism should not merely report population figures. It should interpret what those figures mean for ordinary citizens.

The National Population Commission's call for sustained media enlightenment therefore deserves serious consideration. An informed public is more likely to support evidence-based policymaking than one driven by speculation or misinformation.

I also think discussions about youth must become less paternalistic. Young Nigerians should not simply be viewed as beneficiaries of government programmes. They should increasingly become participants in shaping public policy. A society cannot claim to be preparing its future while excluding those who will live in it the longest.

I recognise that government has introduced programmes aimed at expanding opportunities under the Renewed Hope Agenda. Those efforts are welcome. But every administration should also understand that young people evaluate policies less by official announcements than by practical outcomes.

Can they find quality education? Can they obtain meaningful employment? Can they build businesses? Can they raise families with dignity? Can they believe tomorrow will be better than today? Those questions ultimately determine public confidence.

As I reflect on Nigeria's future, I become increasingly convinced that our greatest development challenge is not the size of our population. It is whether we possess the courage and discipline to invest consistently in that population.

Countries that transformed themselves economically did not wait until they became wealthy before investing in people. They became wealthy because they invested in people.

Nigeria possesses one of the youngest populations on earth. That fact alone will neither guarantee prosperity nor condemn us to failure. It simply presents a choice. We can continue treating our youthful population as a statistic discussed during international observances, or we can finally recognise it as the country's greatest strategic asset.

If I were asked where Nigeria's future truly lies, I would not point first to oil wells, mineral deposits or government budgets. I would point to classrooms filled with curious children, hospitals that keep mothers and infants alive, vocational centres where skills become livelihoods, entrepreneurs transforming ideas into businesses, and reliable data guiding wise public decisions.

That is where national wealth begins. Everything else follows.

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