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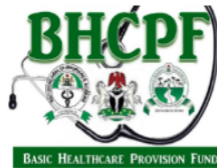
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Prof. Obieli Nnodu



The Judiciary Should Be An Institution Where People Can Comfortably Run To
Yusuf Dantalle - Chairman, IPAC



2024 Gender & Inclusion Summit: Access To WASH More Than Just A Basic Right



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Rape of Female Soldier Prompts Women Affairs Minister to Discuss With Army Chief



The Journey That Helped Save Nigeria's Art for the Nation

Reduction of Disease In Africa Is Attainable – African Institute of Public Health Professionals (AIPHP)

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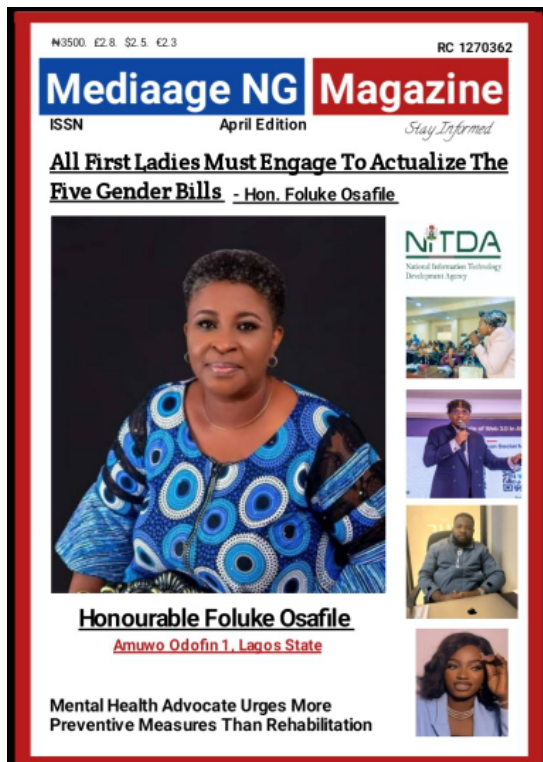
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Publisher's Note

Management of SCD is focused on preventing and treating pain episodes and other complications. Prevention strategies include lifestyle behaviors as well as medical screening and interventions to prevent SCD complications. A common hereditary disease, it can be prevented by preparing young persons ahead of the conception of an affected foetus. The disease is an autosomal-recessive genetically transmitted haemoglobinopathy that is responsible for considerable morbidity and mortality.

Normal red blood cells are round flexible disks. They slide through the blood vessels, carrying oxygen to the organs and tissues. Sickled cells are stiff and sticky and get stuck in the blood vessels, instead of flowing throughout the body. Complications of sickle cell anemia can be life-threatening. In the past, babies born with this condition rarely lived to be adults. Now, thanks to early detection and new treatments, more persons live longer.

On to our next major story that dwells on the independence of the Nigerian judiciary. There has been an increasing reliance on the court to decide on cases where major issues of public interest have arisen which has brought the judiciary into the limelight. What then are the attributes of an independent judiciary?

The independence of the judiciary is guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic

of Nigeria, as altered. Section 17 (2)(e) of the Constitution provides that the independence, impartiality and integrity of courts of law and the easy accessibility to the courts of law shall be secured and maintained. The independence of the judiciary ensures that the judicial officials are free from any outside pressure or influence in the exercise of their judicial functions. However, is that the reality of today? Answers to this are provided by two of our key features in the Magazine. Have a pleasant reading.

Olaedo Nelson.



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Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) Mortality Is Preventable Through Evidence-Based Interventions and Other Measures - Professor Obiageli Nnodu



SCD (SCD) is the inheritance of at least one abnormal gene for sickle haemoglobin from each parent. Major sickle genotypes include sickle cell anaemia which is homozygous sickle haemoglobin ie HbSS and the most common form. Other types include heterozygous forms with HbS and another abnormal haemoglobin

such Haemoglobin C (HbSC) or Hb Hereditary persistence of foetal globin (HbS/HbHPFH). These usually clinical less severe phenotypes.

Can this disease be avoided?

According to Professor Obiageli Nnodu, Director, Centre of Excellence for SCD, Research and Training, University of Abuja, SCD could be prevented if carriers of the sickle haemoglobin refrain from marrying each other. The awareness prior to when an individual gets married is important to the prevention of SCD. The severity of SCD can be reduced through the application of evidence-based interventions.

In this interview Professor Nnodu had with Mediaage, she shed more light on major things the society needs to know of SCD.

Excerpts:

Can you introduce yourself to our readers?

My name is Professor Obiageli Nnodu. I'm a Consultant Haematologist and Professor of Haematology and Blood Transfusion. I'm the Director of the Centre for Excellence in SCD Research and Training at the University of Abuja. I'm also the Chairperson of the Sickle Cell Support Society of Nigeria, which is an NGO representing the interests of patients, parents, professionals, and other NGOs involved with SCD in Nigeria and the diaspora. The Sickle Cell Support Society was established in 2010, incorporated in 2014, and has representatives in the six geopolitical zones of the country.

Thank you for that brief introduction.

Is it true that individual management of SCD is not affordable for majority of Nigerians who live with the condition?

This statement is not accurate at all because the most important aspect of managing SCD is early

diagnosis, which is very affordable through cost-effective methods. Early diagnosis, followed by education of parents or caregivers on simple evidence-based interventions, can actually impact the clinical course of the disease. It ensures that the baby or child grows into adulthood.

Such simple interventions include parental education about SCD, ensuring that the baby receives oral penicillin, folic acid, and the full complement of immunizations under the National Program for Immunization. The baby also starts taking hydroxyurea from nine months, which is a disease-modifying drug. The baby is screened and enters comprehensive care involving various healthcare workers such as pediatricians and adult hematologists, nephrologists, orthopaedic and plastic surgeons, cardiologists as the baby grows and transitions.

These professionals will monitor the different target organ complications that could arise in the course of the illness. We refer to this as comprehensive care. Fundamental to this approach is education for the parents to understand how to maintain good health and prevent complications. This health education is very important, teaching parents how to provide optimum nutrition and hydration for the baby, how to avoid and treat infections properly, and how to recognize acute complications. Parents are taught to seek care immediately for harmful complications such as acute malaria, acute chest syndrome, and splenic sequestration. We teach mothers how to palpate the spleen on the left side of the abdomen, check if it is enlarged, and report immediately.

These are some of the measures that, when implemented as part of regular health maintenance, help children thrive. Particularly important is avoiding frequent mosquito bites to prevent malaria. You will find that babies receiving this care do well. However, the most crucial factor is hydration because dehydration can easily trigger a crisis. Other preventive

measures include ensuring that the doors and windows of the house have nets, making sure they sleep under treated nets, and taking prophylaxis for malaria. These are some of the common practices they can adopt.

Because sickle cell patients have a high risk of stroke, we ensure they undergo screening. There is a test called Transcranial Doppler Ultrasound Scan that we introduce to children from age two up to age sixteen, and we conduct an annual check to assess their risk of stroke. If they are at high risk, we provide interventions through blood transfusions to reduce the level of hemoglobin S and through hydroxyurea treatment, which also modifies the disease by increasing the level of fetal hemoglobin.

As the child grows older, we begin to screen for chronic organ complications and damage, monitoring the heart and kidneys, for example. Sometimes, they may develop leg ulcers, and these are some of the conditions we watch for and provide care for during their visits.

Thank you for that very impressive response. The government in one of its press briefings last June said there is hope in the fight against SCD. Do you have an idea of the measures it is trying to put in place through the Ministry of Health?

In reality, the government has accomplished a considerable amount in terms of policies and establishing guidelines for management. When the government establishes these policies, it is the responsibility of stakeholders to ensure they are executed. Fundamental to this is the government's non-communicable disease policy, which has actually established multi-stakeholder engagement for the control of non-communicable diseases. The government aims for individuals to be identified early in life with SCDs through newborn screening, and this newborn screening would be conducted at the primary healthcare level.

The government also intends for individuals to receive care for SCD at the same primary healthcare level. This aligns with patients' preferences, as evidenced by our screening program present in 25 Primary Health Centres in the Federal Capital Territory. When we identify babies with SCD, we recommend they come to the Teaching Hospital to be enrolled in comprehensive care. Some mothers express a preference to receive that care closer to where they live, at the Primary Health Care center.

The government has a policy of universal screening, potentially utilizing point-of-care technology. Point-of-care technologies are low-cost test kits that can detect SCD without requiring significant infrastructure investment. Right there in the Primary Health Center, a newborn can be tested to determine if it has SCD. The government has a policy that newborn screening would be based on such low-cost methods. Of course, the government also has larger reference laboratories where confirmatory testing can be conducted.

We have both policy and strategic implementation plans that support research and multi-stakeholder involvement. For instance, the Education Ministry and Health Ministry are providing information about SCD, with all these stakeholders working together to ensure that the management and control of SCD is applied in the policy. This is very important.

In August, there was going to be a launch of some policy documents that would be released regarding non-communicable diseases, as well as the strategic implementation plans. This would allow all stakeholders to see what needs to be done and begin to work with them, defending the motive to ensure they spread the information.

These are some of the actions the government has taken. The government is also enabling health awareness and public sensitization, educating people in different geo-political zones,

starting with the South West where the prevalence of SCD is highest. They are beginning there to teach healthcare workers how to use point-of-care technologies to detect individuals with SCD, not only babies but individuals of all ages. These are some of the initiatives the government has undertaken, and I am confident that you, as members of the press, have the rest of the information.

During that press briefing, the Minister, represented by Dr. Chukuma Anyike said Nigeria stands out as the most sickle cell endemic country in Africa and globally, ahead of countries like India and the Democratic Republic of Congo. As an expert in this field, have you come up with solutions that can take the country off that position?

This is not a single-person endeavor. We have collaborated with the government over many years to develop policies focused on early detection and screening. However, the most crucial aspect, which we are not emphasizing sufficiently, is the risk factor for having SCD, which lies with those who are carriers. Recently, I heard someone referring to individuals with SCD as carriers. This is incorrect; the carriers are those who have the sickle cell trait. That is, they have one abnormal hemoglobin and one normal hemoglobin, specifically AS or AC. Individuals with AS or AC are the primary drivers of the disease if they marry each other because, in each pregnancy, there is a 1 in 4 chance (per pregnancy) of having a child with SCD.

This probability remains constant regardless of the outcome of past pregnancies. Consequently, in some families, you may find three or four children with SCD. The fundamental solution, if we want to reduce the prevalence of the disease, is education.

Firstly, many people do not know their status before getting married, or they may know their status but not understand the implications of having SCD. They may not comprehend the

types of problems and complications associated with the disease, such as repeated illnesses, the impact on the family budget, the catastrophic health expenditures they may face, and the various complications that can arise. Imagine a child who is growing well, then suddenly starts experiencing repeated strokes that can be so severe that they set the child back in terms of cognitive development. These children can grow into adulthood unable to care for themselves because SCD has damaged their brain. The consequences can be that severe. Alternatively, a child who is doing well may suddenly develop kidney problems or other chronic complications such as hip pain, immobility, or debilitating leg ulcers.

The frequent hospital visits, the emotional burden, physical limitations, and the overall impact on family life can be highly disruptive. Consider the current high cost of living, coupled with the unpredictability of pain crises and hospital admissions. When people are told that this disease is 100 percent preventable, they often do not fully grasp the implications. They may choose to act based on emotions rather than informed decision-making. What we need to do is educate people on how to avoid SCD in the first place. This is what we call primary prevention.

Failing that, and if people proceed to have children, the next step is to identify affected babies early. This has been one of our focus areas. In the past, we relied on expensive equipment, high levels of skill, and supply chains for consumables from abroad for newborn screening programs. However, these approaches have not been successful due to logistical challenges.

One of our recent achievements has been the application of point-of-care technology for newborn screening. While we did not develop this technology, when it became available, we evaluated its accuracy and sensitivity in detecting sickle cell carriers even in young

infants. We were among the first globally to apply this technology to newborn screening.

We have provided the government with the opportunity to implement this point-of-care technology, and they have incorporated it into policy to identify affected individuals early. I believe that SCD prevalence is largely driven by ignorance, as people often do not fully understand its severity or how to maintain health with the condition. This is what we mean by comprehensive care. When we identify babies early and enroll them into care programs, they can do well.

They can grow optimally and thrive if evidence-based interventions are applied, including good nutrition, infection prevention, disease-modifying treatments, optimal hydration, and prompt management of acute complications through referral to higher centers. Many of these strategies can be taught to mothers. We have books and educational materials available. If you speak with sickle cell patients in their fifties, they often acknowledge that they came to understand their condition over time, learning what to avoid and how to take care of their bodies. This is the kind of understanding we need to promote.

It is essential that the public has access to this health information and education. Additionally, the schools where we train our healthcare workers should have a curriculum for the management of SCD, which is already in place, outlining best practices for care.

Moving beyond management, we also have curative treatments for SCD through bone marrow transplantation from a donor who does not have the sickle cell gene. With a perfectly matched transplant, the recipient can be cured, although genetically they still carry the sickle cell trait. However, their body no longer manifests the disease. We also have gene therapy as a curative option.

We need to prepare our Centers of Excellence and Teaching Hospitals to offer these curative treatments, as currently, many of our citizens are going abroad to access them. The first step is to establish enabling policies and legislation. Secondly, we need policies for screening and educating those who have the sickle cell trait. Our current policy mandates genotype testing at various stages of life: for kindergarten, primary school (during common entrance exams), secondary school (during JAMB), during National Youth Service Corps, and before marriage.

Each of these screenings should be followed by adequate education. You can see a comprehensive approach forming. Some countries have successfully implemented legislation to reduce the prevalence of SCD through education and genetic counseling. Genetic counseling services targeting those with the sickle cell trait are particularly important. We need to train more genetic counselors; currently, we have fewer than 500 in a country of over 240 million people.

We should discuss this issue at the population level to ensure the message reaches everyone. Our program encompasses primary prevention, early detection, application of evidence-based interventions, genetic counseling, education of healthcare workers, the use of standard guidelines for SCD management, and the incorporation of sickle cell education into healthcare curricula.

We also offer training to journalists, educating them about SCD so they can comfortably run programs on the topic. These efforts form a complete package, addressing the issue from all angles. Through this comprehensive approach, we can begin to control the prevalence of SCD.

Another crucial component of our program is research, particularly implementation research. We focus on two types: identifying what has worked and helped, and determining how to

scale it up. For instance, we are conducting implementation science research in newborn screening. We have examined conventional diagnostic methods, which are expensive. The basic test found everywhere, hemoglobin electrophoresis, cannot detect SCD in infants under six months old.

We need tests that can detect the disease early. The expensive equipment we mentioned earlier is not sustainable here; the government purchased six units but has been unable to maintain them due to the high costs. Through research, we have found more cost-effective diagnostic methods using point-of-care technology, and we have demonstrated their effectiveness. We are now exploring how to scale up these methods to enable more widespread early testing.

These are some of the areas of research we are pursuing. We also need to investigate the genetic factors associated with disease manifestation in individuals, as we observe that even within the same family, the disease can present differently. Sometimes we can identify genes that modify the expression of hemoglobin or the disease itself. These genetic studies can lead to the discovery of new treatments for SCD.

The foundation for all of these efforts is education. Our educational program targets various groups, including policymakers. Sometimes, those of us at the forefront have information that is not widely available, and policymakers need access to this information to make informed decisions.

We also target the general public to increase awareness about SCD and reduce stigmatization of those affected. It is important to understand that SCD is a genetic condition, not an infectious disease, and it is not the fault of the individual. Patients with SCD need our help, understanding, and compassion. We need to ensure that they have conducive conditions in schools, are not bullied, and have the right infrastructure and

support systems to thrive.

We need to educate healthcare professionals to support sickle cell patients using standardized approaches. We have developed multi-level standard of care guidelines for our healthcare system, covering tertiary hospitals, district hospitals, primary healthcare centers, and home care. These guidelines serve as training tools at different levels of healthcare and for parents, helping them understand how to care for affected children.

If truly implemented, these measures can help reduce the burden and prevalence of SCD in our country.

Regarding your question about government support, I have been involved in multidisciplinary research with colleagues within Nigeria and across Africa, supported by direct and indirect crowd funding.

The last question, being a health practitioner that has interacted with foreign counterparts, can you draw comparisons between Nigeria and other countries concerning the fight against SCD?

We are all collaborating because we have established several consortia. The most significant of these is the Sickle Pan African Consortium, (SPARCO) which has two coordinating centers, one located in South Africa and the other in Tanzania. SPARCO has sites in six African countries: Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. Together, we are developing guidelines and conducting implementation research. We are also engaging in joint advocacy efforts. Additionally, we have initiated new collaborations with partners in the United Kingdom, Zambia and Ghana for patient centred management of sickle cell disease. Another project is the Sickle Cell Genomics Network of Africa led by Professor Solomon Ofori- Acquah from Ghana. We have completed data collection

for that project and are currently analyzing the genomic data. Thus, we are involved in numerous collaborative efforts. Our work extends beyond mere collaboration. In Nigeria, for instance, we have established a network that the Sickle Pan African Research Consortium Nigeria Network with centres in the six geopolitical zone.

Do you have any message for the government

I am the Special Adviser to the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare on SCD. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to provide advice intended for the Minister through this medium. I deliver my recommendations directly to the Minister.

Thank you.

You are welcome!

The Judiciary Should Be A Certified Institution Where People Can Comfortably Run To - Yusuf Dantalle



Judicial independence is the non-interference of the executive, legislature in judicial affairs. Judges

and other judicial officers are expected not to be subjected to inappropriate influence from the other arms of government or private interests. As one of the arms of the law, the judiciary plays a cardinal role in the principle of separation of powers. Without independence, the judiciary cannot offer the checks and balances it is expected of and necessary to prevent any arm of government from exerting much power. At the First Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) Roundtable, in Abuja, an event that evaluated the role of the judiciary in Nigeria's democracy, where the Chairman of the council, Alhaji Yusuf Dantalle said the third arm of government is a stabilizing force and the last hope of all aggrieved persons against opponents' inclination, penchant and propensity for injustice. The court he said expects its ministers to be upright, with men and women of integrity dispensing justice fairly. After the event, we sought more of views as to the state of the independence of the judiciary in Nigeria. Excerpts:

Can we meet you sir?

My name is Yusuf Dantalle, the National Chairman of the Inter Party Advisory Council (IPAC). I am a Sociology graduate from University. I'm also a farmer and an entrepreneur in oil palm and water processing business. I'm also involved in other small businesses like petroleum marketing.

What brought you into where you are today?

It's about determination. You are taking me back into history. I was born in a Nigeria where we use one naira to buy 5 or 6 tins of peakmilk. I can remember my first motorcycle was bought for #180 and 50 kobo was used to fuel it. We rode for about 101km.

I remembered my father bought 911 truck for #11,000; they said it was costly when it came to #11,200. The school fees paid for me was #25 for the whole year. And as we grew, Nigeria

became something different. I don't think our children will enjoy the system I did. I feel we should do something to make the system work so we can have a better tomorrow and be remembered for what we did for humanity.

At the IPAC Roundtable event held in August, in Abuja, you said the Judiciary is the bulwark of Nigeria's democracy. For the sake of our readers, can you elaborate more on that?

Before the advent of codified laws, we had religion that served as a bridle between man and his conducts with other men. We have the ten commandments in the Bible that tell us what to do and what we ought not to. Going against what we ought not to do comes with a punishment. But, after that, we have what is called laws that are codified. We have men who are supposed to serve in the place of God, like judges in the judiciary system that represents God on earth. That is why we have only judiciary that whatever that's said there, like "my Lord", there's no argument. If you do that, it's not right. Because, in the context of the court, you're not supposed to talk while the judge is talking. If it's meant to be so, it's expected that such persons should be people of impeccable character that should be seen as superhumans, even to resist all forms of temptations, human and otherwise and to do what is right between man and God.

Conflict is a natural part of divine existence and politics in particular, is about interests. It is people wanting to take control of machineries or covenants, and that has to do with the allocation of resources. So, in such situation, you don't expect crisis to be absent. But, there should be a bridle between men who struggle to get one thing. Today, you have people in parties for the position of leadership; from presidency to counselor. In the course of that, there are procedures some will want to conform, to follow the rules; some will not conform, they will violate the rules to innovate their own ways to see that people follow theirs. In such situation, you need to have checks with the conducts of men.

There are crisis that would be precipitated from such processes. We have judicial arm of government to see what the constitution has to see that people operate within the confines of the constitutional procedures. That is why we have the judiciary, but when we have the judiciary meddling into something that's unusual that will affect the integrity of that institution, it calls for questions; it calls for attention; it calls for sober reflection.

There are calls for court orders in the similar issues of our coordinate jurisdiction giving two separate orders from the same issue. For me, it's not supposed to be so. We need to do what is right and that's why we have to call the judiciary. The institution of the judiciary should know whatever happens, they're next to God. The court will do what is right. So, they're expected not to be above God. They are expected not to be influenced by material and human influence or other influences.

The judiciary is supposed to be a certified institution that at least, when you feel denied of your right, you can comfortably run to the judiciary and say this is what happened; and any judgement that will come from there should reflect justice. Today, in some cases, we have judgement passed but, if you look deeply, it does not reflect true justice. We don't have any other home apart from Nigeria. I love this country so much and if I die, I want to come back as a Nigerian. So, we need to do everything possible to see that we have a Nigeria that's great; and one day our children would ask us, daddy, when these things were happening, what did you do? We need to justify our existence between God and man.

What do you think should be done to ensure that the judiciary is independent?

Not just the judiciary alone, but the members of the judiciary and Nigerians. We are in a situation where politics has been so monetized. We are in a country where remuneration in one of the

political offices is so outrageous. You saw what has been happening recently. It's about the argument of the take home pay at the legislature and other arms of the government. It is embarrassing! Somebody comes out and say it is one million, someone else will say I don't take one million, I take 21 million every month. It is a country where we find it difficult to pay 70 thousand naira for workers. There's a gap between the people, power and the people that are expected to administer the facts from the reality. We have a situation where farmers cannot go easily to the bank to seek for agric loan, but banks would go after people who occupy public office to give them loan that they did not request for. It's an abomination! How do you expect such society to grow?

Everybody runs into politics because they feel the best place to be now is there. The legitimate businesses people are supposed to do today; the people said that the wherewithal, the enabling environment for sustainable legitimate businesses is no longer there. So, why don't we go for where we can drag national cake. Just to write something and you will get it and you will even be protected. You have a society where the law enforcement agencies protect you.

We need to look back and reclaim this country. Whether you are 100 years if possible, if you don't leave the office, the office will leave you. There are people who were there yesterday, today, if you look at their conditions, it's pitiable. To people who benefited from the porosity of the system; today, they're at the mercy of that same system they created. Why can't we use these as lessons to sanitize the system?

Basic human need is one. The same thing you need to survive is the same thing the man in Abia, the man in Katsina need to survive. You need food, you need clothing, you need shelter, you need medical attention and education. Any other thing outside that is nothing. I am a student of sociology, I said it earlier. Robert Martin's, social story of anomy: He tried to

classify how people react to social situations in five ways:

The first is conformity, the second is Innovation, the third is Retreatism, the fourth is Socialism, and the fifth is rebellion.

There are values in the society and there are what to do to achieve these values. People conform, they go to school to do all the legitimate things asked to do. Some people accept the values, but they feel that the system has denied them the means to the values. What they do is to innovate their own ways of achieving the values. And that innovation could come in the form of robbery, in the form of kidnapping, in the form of banditry, in the form of yahoo yahoo (cybercrimes). So, these are symptoms of the problems. They are only indicating that these things are wrong in socio economic and political arrangements; inequality in the distribution of our wealth.

And then, you have this group that retreat into drugs. You can see the prevalence of drug addiction in the society.

Religion has created two world: The world that is profane and another that is ordinary. There is a world that's sacred that lets me do whatever I can so that when I die, there will be a better paradise or better place. But, the last group said no, the system is not working. Let's rebel against the system. Then you begin to see those breaking the pipes, the Boko Haram, Biafran agitators, Oduduwa and the rest of them. If you assumed the position of authority, what do you use that power for? That power can help in transforming the lives of the people.

We need to look at God. We swear with Bible, we swear with Qu'ran during swearing in, but we do something different.

Look at what local governments are doing the State Independent Electoral Commission. The position of outrageous nomination forms for

those who are to run for local government chairmanship. You're shutting doors to the same people you showed to the president. What are we doing to ourselves?

We must ensure that we have a sound foundation for the betterment of democracy. We need to look into ourselves. We must urge them to begin to sensitize one another to boost the spirit of the economy. There's no place like Nigeria in the world. This country is so great. God has given us everything. For me, Nigeria is the greatest country in the world. No natural disasters! Nothing! Whatever you plant on this soil will grow. The climate is not disastrous. Why are we destroying what God has created? It's difficult but, we need to do something. The solution to Nigeria's problems is in Nigeria. So, we can.

As the current chairman of IPAC, what are the roles to play to sensitize the Nigerian Youths being the conglomerate of political parties?

Like the name implies, Inter Party Advisory Council, our role is purely advisory. We don't have power to administer projects. We give advice to political parties (intra and inter) and government agencies to see what they can do. It's left for the people to accept or or reject our advice.

But, as much as possible, we will continue as we are doing. We are advising Nigerians through your own medium. We write letters as you can see. We are doing what we can. You know that the local government financial autonomy; I had from the second of my administration, we are at the forefront of the advocacy for local government autonomy and we will continue to do it. We are still advocating for the scrabbling of the local government and state independent electoral commission because, it's di-functional; it is evil! It does not represent qualitative democracy.

Today, people are clamouring for the

establishment of another commission for the local government, duplicating functions and wasting of public funds. What! The state/ local government election, they do not have all the equipments: no BVC, no Voters Registers, even Ballot Box. Nothing!

The only thing you do is to appoint people you want. What you see happening today; you see the influx of people into Abuja, influx of people into state capitals. In some cases, the security of lives and properties is virtually absent in some of the local governments.

I followed my father to the farm but, I can't take my children to the same farm my father took me to. Why? Because I am afraid of kidnappers. These are most of things we see in Abuja and people are scared. Most of the local government chairmen and even some governors are not comfortable in their states because they are scared. The wealth of the villagers is in the farm. I am appealing to the authorities to please help Nigerians. Some of them, the school fees that was used to getting them to where they are; Nigerians gave them security, Nigerians gave them sound mind, Nigerians gave them food. They should transmit the same thing they enjoyed to them; this generation and the next one. Posterity will never forgive us if we do not do what is right!

The countries which they're running to, they believe in themselves. If they had destroyed their societies you won't go there. We are wasting our own to develop other countries. What is lacking in Nigeria? Nigerians are the best wherever they go all over the world. In the entertainment industry it's them. Go to other African countries, it's the news of our voice here that they hear. In sports we are exceptional; in science Nigerians are exceptional; we have the best. Nigerians are outstanding wherever they go. God has given us everything; why are we not utilising them?

The judiciary should help, we believe so much to deliver judgement with justice. No home is

better than yours. Whatever you are enjoying today is temporal. And for those of us in positions storing wealth for their great grand children; you sent your children to school as human not as livestock. So, they should be able to develop themselves to replicate what they went to learn in school. They are trained to be reproductive and better.

The graduates we are producing today, are they close to what we enjoyed in the past? The answer is no! Because, we have destroyed it. We thought it is better to steal for them. I am still appealing to Nigerians; to all of us even you in the media, to do what is right because of our youths.

Somebody recently came online and talked about how he was offered bribe to damage Dangote's efforts in the same society. Are we supposed to talk about Dangote refinery getting good oil or not? Dangote created a revolutionary act because of what he has done and by extension, it is to reduce crime; to put food on the table of a common man through the creation or generation of employment - direct or indirect.

I shes watching Dangote one day; he tried explaining to justify his efforts that are subjected by others. They are trying to ridicule his efforts. One man from no where will come and say some rubbish because, he's opportuned to be in public office. I don't look at Dangote as an individual, but for what he has done; even if he's the worst person on earth, he's a revolutionary.

Why should Innoson suffere to sell his own vehicles to Nigeria? But, thanks to President Ahmed Bola Tinubu when he invited Innoson executives to see how the government can partner with him. We have people like this, we have everything! We should make the farmers feel secured. Most of the boys on the farms killing and slaughtering people, they are our people, they are Nigerians. They take drugs; they kill maybe, because they don't have hope in the

system again, and because of that, it becomes easy to recruit them into banditry and terrorism. We can appeal and get them reintegrated into the society, whoever that is involved. Nigeria is too great to be messed.

You made mention of advisory role, and inter party. What is your word or notion concerning the wranglings in the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP)?

What is happening in the PDP is not different from what is happening in other political parties. The institutions are weak. In the past, political parties decide transparently who becomes council ward. But, today, the reverse is the case. An individual decide the fate of a political party because, the political party has been weakened through withdrawal of funds. A political party is not an individual's property but, for the public.

That the entry and exit of political party should be free, made easy to make people have choices of where to belong. Today, the national leadership of political parties are struggling for resources to drive the parties. And do you know what that means?

Where does PDP gets their funds? Where does APC get their funds? Whoever provides the funds determine what happens in the party. So, it's difficult at that point for the party to take the bold step of punishing erring members of the party.

The same person you want to punish is the person responsible for the survival of the part. How can you punish such person? Can your son punish you, because you paid his school fees? Until we look back and chose to restore grants to political parties and for them to be monitored by INEC for the parties to be strengthened to take decisions.

Look at what Joe Biden did. He said, I love my job; I want to remain, but the love for my country is more. So, for the interest of my country, I quit.

Can we do that here? They believe that the system would guarantee its existence. But here, we do not believe that the system will guarantee our existence but, we have to fight, using every human arsenal at our disposal to do what we can. We need to sit down together; Nigerians would have to come back to do what is right. It's difficult but we can do it.

To avoid this conflict of court orders, what do we do?

First, the willingness to do what is right. Whatever can I do for Nigeria? Whatever I do, there's judgement of God. If today you are the judge of man, you still have another Judge which is God. In Nigeria we are either Muslims or Christians, and the scriptures tell us there's another Judge. So, we should think about that.

Secondly, the system should be less financially or materially lucrative, in the political class: both in the judiciary, executive and the legislature. The system should be sanitized to attract quality service. Today, some governors are running to impose those that will do their biddings, not those that will do the biddings of the people.

The members of the judiciary, they're Nigerians. We need to fix our laws and how they can be reviewed to accommodate sanctity of the system at all levels; not only in the judiciary. Thank you.

**2024 Gender & Inclusion Summit:
Access To WASH More Than Just
A Basic Right**



Nigeria is currently battling significant health and economic challenges due to many factors – one of which is the persistent problem of open defecation, with an estimated \$1.5 billion lost annually to related health issues and reduced productivity.

This figure includes the cost of medical treatment, loss of productivity, and premature deaths linked to diseases like diarrhoea, cholera, and malnutrition, which are exacerbated by poor sanitation and water contamination. It has a telling impact on the populace, especially women.

For women and girls, access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is more than just a basic human right – it's a daily struggle. The burden of water collection often falls disproportionately on their shoulders, forcing many to travel long distances, exposing them to danger, and limiting their opportunities for education, work and leisure.

At a break out session of the day one of the Gender and Inclusion Summit, organised by the Policy Innovation Centre, the National Economic Summit Group, in Abuja recently, had panelists discussed "The Power of Clean: Gender Equity in WASH for Sustainable Poverty Solutions.

According to one of the panelists, Dr. Boluwaji

Onabolu said Water Supply and Sanitation (WASH) is a human right and a bedrock to accessing every other rights. She said this means for every SDG to be achieved, "you must have adequate WASH, including right to education, health, energy and others.

She stated that inadequate access to WASH has its negative effects on women and as they are known as primary care givers, it leads to health issues. Dr. Onabolu said poor sanitation affects the cognitive development of the brain and can affect the quality of labour force in Nigeria.

In her words, "UNICEF in a multiple indicator cluster survey (2021), looked at children between 2-5, found out that more than half of them did not meet four of the five domains of cognitive development.

"So, what environmental epidemiologists are saying as far back as 2003 is that, African countries, including Nigeria has it that 48 million Nigerians are defecating in the open, 47 percent of resident Nigerians don't have access to basic education.

"On the impact of the woman herself, is the fact that her biological needs for example, cannot be met. The rural Water Sanitation framework which guides the implementation in Nigeria says that a household is entitled to water, thirty metres from home in rural areas is the minimum or sixty metres for semi rural areas.

Country Director, Self Help Africa, Joy Adelere, while revealing that there is limited awareness of WASH, said the lack of rural education and awareness is one of the barriers to achieving gender equality.

The second she said is cultural norms which have put many women at a disadvantage.

"When we talk about gender, we are actually looking at men and women but, looking at how this affects women, you will see that they are more impacted when it comes to some cultural

norms. Things around menstruation, women being confined to household chores, some have no access to water and you see a woman going to the river, miles away – it increases the burden of work on her and leads to lack of economic opportunities”, she revealed.

“Not all of our norms are bad, some are fantastic, while others are very negative and have impacted both men and women negatively,

She also posited that low representation in decision making has limited the impacts women would have had in the society. Her organisation, Self Help Africa, she pointed as the first to achieve “Open Defecation Free” has made efforts to address this.

Other barriers Adelere listed include infrastructure and design, economic barriers that impact the production time of a woman.

John Makina, the Country Director, Nigeria, OXFAM International, relating gender equity to multidimensional poverty and how WASH play a role, said sanitation and hygiene is central, highlighting that both men and women are required to use WASH facilities and practices. He however said the female gender are more affected than the males.

“Think about how much time it will take a woman or a girl to and from a water source. These are some of the things that we need to be thinking about. In other traditional setup, a girl is asked to go to a water source to draw 2 or 3 pales of water for the household before going to school, Mr. Makina said.

Ugoh Elizabeth, Director, Water Quality Control and Sanitation, Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, said the Ministry is in the process of updating policies concerning water supply and sanitation to be comprehensive and inclusive

In her words, “previously, there use to be gaps when you talk about gender, vulnerables, safely

managed facilities, and safely managed water. Currently, the Ministry has a committee that has been established, a forty member committee involving development partners and the private sector, to have contributions from various sectors and develop policies and address lots of the gaps existing”.

Mrs. Ugoh added that the Ministry runs campaign to address open defecation and said there must be a behavioural change, advocacy and awareness creation. “With this campaign, when it gets more to the grassroots through the traditional, religious and community leaders, we will be able to push this campaign to the understanding of Nigerians”, she stated.

Dennis Aizobu, the Managing Director, SFH Access concluded by saying that a total should be employed to address these issues. This must involve the government, development and implementing partners, and non governmental organisations.

The experienced social marketer said the government must first take the driving seat and bring in the private sector.

Expected Economic Growth Hinges On Improved Security –



NESG

The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) has called for an improvement in the current state of the country’s security sector to aid the economic growth it desires.

In a statement ahead of the 30th Nigeria Economic Summit (#NES30), the group said the current economic situation is threatening both domestic and foreign investments.

“Security underpins economic stability, enabling businesses to operate without fear of disruption and attracting foreign investments. Addressing the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, is essential for creating a stable environment for both citizens and enterprises, NESG said in the statement.

“Subsequently, enhanced security promotes an environment where businesses can thrive, education can flourish, and healthcare can improve, leading to a higher quality of life for all citizens and without these in place, economic progress may not yield the desired results.

“The summit will serve as a platform for meaningful deliberations, emphasising Nigeria’s role in driving the continent’s transformation through institutions, investment, integration, industry growth and innovation just as security, being a critical component of this transformation, will be a key focus area”, the group added.

International Water Conference: Health Professionals Canvas For Improved Water Production



Water is essential and plays a significant role in human life, health and economy of a nation. Quality water benefits the environment, public health, and the protection of its resources for future generations.

Water quality is a complex issue, impacted by pollution, weather, human activities, amongst other factors.

Also, drinking water is essential to human survival. In fact, studies have revealed that humans can live up to 21 days with no food, but up to two months just by drinking water. This backs the assertion that the production of quality water must be prioritised.

One of the sources of water production in Nigerian communities is drilling of boreholes, seen as a cost effective way for household consumption and commercial purposes.

However, are these boreholes hygienic for human consumption? What are the processes or regulatory measures employed by the society, stakeholders in ensuring that the kind of water produced by these boreholes and other sources are good enough for the human body.

At the day two of the International Water Conference, organised by Rite Place Health Initiative, held in Abuja on Thursday, health practitioners and professionals brought their expertise to the fore at various presentations and debates on ways of producing and consuming quality water.

It is not just enough to have water

Nkabono Nglass, a pharmacist, entrepreneur and teacher, said to ensure quality water management, advocacy, communication and sensitisation must be the primary focus.

He said this is what is needed to constantly engage those who stand to benefit from quality water production as the first stakeholders.

“In our communities, we have different sources of water but, how are we managing them before talking about the quality. There has to be that constant communication between those who know the impacts and others using it.

“The social mobilisation and sensitisation should be an opportunity for education. It is not just enough to have water but, important to understand the need for quality water. The

message should spread beyond this conference and across the society.

“Once we do this, a huge chunk of the problem would have been solved”, Mr. Nglass said.

Air Vice Marshall Abdullahi Kassimu (Rtd) said a regulatory agency should be installed for proper monitoring of borehole drilling and added that it’s not advisable to have them in close proximity.

He also said the military does civil relations and is already in partnership with communities in carrying out water projects. However, he noted that this is not a core function of the military but, a move engineered to “win the hearts of local residents”.

“Looking at the communities and based on geotechnical studies of the area, it will be nice to have households partner together to use same borehole and get these houses link together for usage (one entry but, multiple usage).

“In a way of policy formulation, the government has to get details of an area and come to a decision based on the geotechnical data of that area and develop a systematic way of working”, he said.

When interviewed, Forster Uwaejiofor, Commissioner, Anambra State Ministry of Agriculture said water program for the state is on going and very elaborate. Compared to previous governments in the state, he said what is done by the present administration in regards to water related development, has not been touched for several years.

Irrigation makes it more easier

Kingsley Idoko, from Lorna Group said through irrigation, there could be an all round season farming.

He added that if the government can provide irrigation for farm settlements, it makes it easier for all year round farming.

“Food insecurity is not a joke, it’s a serious problem. In the north, people can’t go to farm because of banditry, boko haram, herdsmen and other menace. But, in my own place (Kogi State), we don’t really have problems with the herdsmen in our farming activities. We’ve been friends and partners with them for ages.

“Although, we are in discussions with the Kogi State government, through the Ministry of Agriculture but, if they can create irrigation for us, it makes it more easier”, Mr. Idoko said.

Twenty-three Year Old Student Kills Female, Demands For Ransome



A 23 year old student of Olabisi Onabanjo University, OOU, has admitted murdering a female and demanding for ransome from mother of the deceased.

Ayomide Adeleye, a 300-level Philosophy student tried cutting his fingers with a sharp object that would make him bleed to death but, had to be stopped by vigilant security agents around.

According to the Nigerian Vanguard, the lanky black complexioned young man had not been at home for over six months, and the victim, Christiana Idowu, 18, contacted him severally in school to help fix her phone. He had been the one repairing it previously.

Mr. Adeleye is the first son of three siblings, one of whom is late. He said his father is a boat driver. He also said he attends Redeemed Christian Church of God, where he's same member with the late Christiana.

"I had known her for three years before the incident. She had been contacting me and I told her I would be at home at the end of the session. When I came back to Lagos, she called and came to our house around 5pm on the day of the incident and asked me to repair her phone.

"She was an Industrial Training, IT, student in Yaba College of Technology. She came with a bike. She had her bag and other things she used in school. So, when she arrived, I collected the phone from her, looked at it, and discovered that the phone only had battery problem and the screen was faulty. I just needed to put gum on the screen and change the battery. But, she was not ready to change the battery, she just wanted to continue using the phone like that.

"I killed her because, I had financial problems. I thought of the problems and decided to strangle her, while she was busy going through my phone. Then, I called her mother, claiming she was kidnapped and should pay ransom.

"I didn't really pounce on her. She was preoccupied with my own phone. Then, it was drizzling, and a little noisy. I just grabbed her and applied pressure. It made her struggle and she didn't really shout because, I already suppressed her. I squeezed her throat and it made her give up.

He placed her body on a seat and took pictures of her to send to her mother.

"I didn't send it immediately, I just left her at the shop like that. That was around 5:30 pm on Monday night. I left her on the seat and went to plan how to dispose of the body. By 11 p.m. that same night, I started to dig her grave in a small farm behind our compound. Luckily, rain fell that day, so the ground was a little soft.

"I dug using shovel. I was not able to dig deep that night. So, I postponed the digging. The body was still in the shop.

"By 4 am the following day, I got up to continue digging. I did not close my eyes till day break. I was just filled with thoughts about what I did.

"I took the body to the shallow grave only to notice that it could not be covered well. I thought of what to do next but, I was really tired of digging. I had blisters on my hand and the shovel I used had already broken.

"I thought of chopping off her head to make it easy to bury but, I didn't have the courage to do that. I just had to continue digging, even if the shovel broke, I continued to dig until the shallow grave could contain her. Then, I buried her. Everything happened before 5 a.m. I left the scene to contact her mother and demanded ransom."

On how he got the mother's number, he said it was on the daughter's phone.

"Luckily, she did not have PIN number or pass code. I recognized her mother's face on her profile picture. I then called and the first thing I said to her was, "Hello, madam. we have your daughter." The next thing she said was "who be this?." Maybe she thought it wasn't for real.

"Then I sent a text message telling her same thing. I sent it with the picture where she was sitting on a chair. She asked me, "What do you want?" I told her, "madam, how much do you have?" I wrote everything in Pidgin. She said, "I don't have any money. I am a single mother".

I said, "Madam, just bring anything" but, she said she didn't have. I told her to "bring three million to release your daughter".

"I know she does not have three million naira. Even if she did not have that amount, I was ready to collect any amount because, I desperately needed money no matter the amount.

"After going back and forth with her, she said she was able to get N350, 000.00 and I gave her a sporty bet account to pay the money in order to avoid being traced. That was three days after I buried her daughter. She sent the money there, but, I was unable to withdraw at first because, Sporty bet had this rule that once you deposit, you have to play at least a game before you can withdraw. I tried to withdraw but they locked the fund.

"Then, they asked me to present my NIN for verification. I sent it to them. They didn't release it until three days later".

Again, he asked the late girl's mother for another sum. She said the money in her account wasn't up to N10, 000.00. He asked her to hurry up and put it together to send. "She sent it to her daughter's account making the whole money N360, 000.00 paid as ransom.

"After that, I stopped all communication with the mother. But, before they sent the money, they were telling me that they wanted to actually see a video or voice confirmation of the girl but the girl was no more. It was only that picture I took that I was able to send.

"So, I just kept on pushing them. I used the money to take care of my personal and family financial problems."

His arrest

"It was not the police, I was picked up by soldiers. They told me it was through my Sporty bet account because, I uploaded my NIN so it

was traced.

"If I had not uploaded my NIN, it would just be an empty account. But the moment I uploaded my NIN, all my personal details, my location, my address, my name, everything, was already on the sporty bet. The girl's phone was also with me, they could have traced the location of the phone, that was how they got my location.

"Before I was arrested, Christiana was somebody that I had known for over three years, and we were close friends. I regret killing her because, my mum and hers were friends."

Have you ever had any mental issues that landed you in the hospital?

"I wouldn't say that it landed me in the hospital, but I am always alone. I don't like associating with anybody".

What was the last word she said before you took her life?

"She was focusing on the TikTok video. She did not say anything. In fact, when that incident happened, my cell phone dropped from her hand".

Now, what do you want to be done to you?

"I don't deserve any mercy for what I have done. At the same time, I ask God to forgive me. What I did was totally wrong and I regret it. I feel remorseful for what I have done. If there's any way I could be given a second chance, I want to be given one but, I deserve death, honestly.

I have been planning to kill myself. While I was in the guard room, I tried to look for any sharp object to cut myself so that I would bleed to death".

Health Stakeholders Deliberate On Access To Safe Drinking Water



Non Government Organisation, Rite Place Health has called for collaboration in providing access to portable water in Nigerian communities.

Executive Director, Pharm. Chukwumezie Okechukwu Okolo said some areas in the country don't have access to water, stating that access to water without quality produces waterborne diseases like cholera and typhoid.

"So, it is important for us to have access to water and ensure that it is of high quality. That is the reason stakeholders are gathered to come up with strategies to eradicate water borne diseases within our space, beginning with Nigeria", he said at the 2024 Water Conference held on Wednesday, in Abuja, the Nigerian capital.

With the event drawing participants from African countries like Malawi and Uganda, Pharm. Okolo said the essence of the conference is to bring quality to the table, bordering on discussions on access to portable water. "We want people to understand that without quality, access to portable water will be difficult", he stated.

"It is not just the responsibility of the government. There need to be community participation. This is more like a BPP call so that individuals and communities can join hands with the government to be the vanguard of quality water and contribute in ensuring drinkable quality water.

"The challenge of portable water is everywhere, including capital cities. If we can't find quality water in our cities, what will now be the fate of those in rural areas? We are not looking for

where the issues are, they are all over the place already.

"People just go behind their houses and package water, label it and sell in the name of business. They sneak these unhygienic products and adulterate the market, causing trust issues because, buyers will find it hard to identify which one to trust or not. We all need to join efforts, collaborate and watch out for these activities" he said.

Rukayya Wamakko, the Executive Secretary, FCT Primary Health Care Board said regulatory agencies must come up with strategies in ensuring that water production is of the highest standards. She said that activities like regular checkups, monitoring and evaluation, unannounced visits to water production factories must should be intensified and get the true picture of the realities on ground.

"It is one thing to regulate and another to maintain. We lack maintenance culture in Nigeria. If the right maintenance is put into practice, there will be improvement", she said.

"The system is very corrupt and has seen bribery playing sway to get fake accreditation. The authorities are not even aware of this. Some of the machines used for production may either be outdated or obsolete but, they don't care, hence they've gotten accreditation. Beyond accreditation, there must be close monitoring and evaluation", Mrs.Wamakko added.

She advised that when issues of waterborne diseases are discussed, the infectious or communicable or non-communicable aspects of it should be looked at.

She identified heavy chemicals found in either rain or dug water must be regulated for human consumption, and if not regulated, it causes harm to the body circulatory system.

"It causes narrowing and thickening of the blood vessels and affects the blood circulation. Once

the pipe of the blood vessels is being narrowed, there will be difficulty for the heart to beat and pump.

“Diabetic persons are prone to all these because of the three radicals that are there in the body, they will remain in circulation, in addition to the chemicals that are already been taken from the water to the body. It worsens the situation of the diabetic patients.

“So, non communicable diseases can be caused by water that is not purified, taken into the body.

“It’s intentional that our health care system be arranged like the tiers of government that we have, where we have primary healthcare at the local government and ward level, the secondary facility at the state level and the tertiary at the federal level – from the grassroots to the upper level.

“We are doing a lot to ensure that community residents from the village to ward level, local government level, state and federal levels get a better understanding of clean water.

“At the same time, we need to assist the poor at the rural areas to use the surrounding water they have and meet their needs. We have the resources in this country, as long as the will is there. I believe it’s doable.

“We need to have private public partnership to invest in safe portable water in our environment. Like I said, advocacy, communication, and social mobilisation are important to make the community participate and understand that their lives are in their hands”, Mrs. Wamakko concluded.

Dr. Ayodele Bankole James, Registrar/CEO, African Institute of Public Health Professionals said lack of portable water is a problem in the country, one of the aims of converging for the conference.

“You can’t talk about public health without

community engagement and advocacy to achieve our aim, especially when it has to do with World Health Organisation (WHO), Sustainable Development Goals (3), talking about accessing health care services for everyone, irrespective of age”, he posited.

“You discover that most of the water gotten from boreholes are not safe for drinking or consumption. Most of the persons that these boreholes are dug for, are not aware they are not suitable for drinking”.

He called for a regulatory agency saddled with the responsibility of certifying water from boreholes to be safe for drinking. Doing so he said will aid in achieving the aim of having portable water.

“A situation when the borehole is drilled, with an agency passing it fit, it (the agency) can be going from home to home, ensuring that the water coming out are safe”, he said.

Professor Odili said the relationship between water and cardiovascular diseases is mainly through heavy metals, not really infective agents. He encouraged participants at the conference to note that heavy metals, especially accumulation of LED in water is a risk factor for hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases.

Revealing that water might look clean and not infected, yet, lack quality, he enumerated that addressing the challenge should stem from a holistic approach – drilling stage of the boreholes, to producing bottled and sachet water, “Quality measures are not usually obeyed”, he stated.

“We should up our game. A lot still needs to be done. We need to find out what’s happening. We need to know the quality of the water available and the regulatory agency – NAFDAC and the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation and ensure that standards are met in water production.

“For those of us in research institutions, we should provide studies into what affect us daily. People in Chemistry, Biochemistry, Public Health should look at the quality of water around us. After research, parts of it should be disseminated amongst peers and invite the regulatory agencies”, he concluded.

Stakeholders Brainstorm On Growth Of Nigeria’s Agricultural Sector



Experts in the agricultural sector on Tuesday gave diverging views of growing the industry in Nigeria and internationally.

Speaking at the 6th edition of the Nigerian International Agriculture Expo, held in Abuja, Executive Director of Agriquest Africa Network, Amb. Abiodun Olaniyi said efforts to transform Nigeria’s agricultural landscape and recognising the huge role it plays in agric-economic growth, paves the way for food security and poverty reduction, ensuring that the agricultural potentials are harnessed.

“We are committed to exploring these potentials to the benefits of Nigerians”, Olaniyi stated.

The expo which brought together local and international experts, innovators and stakeholders to showcase the latest technology products, services in agriculture, provided the platform for knowledge sharing, networking and collaboration, essential for driving progress in the sector.

The President of the Coalition of Northern States Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agric, represented by Dr. Mrs. Bisi Adeniyi said with focus on innovation, sustainability and collaboration, the Expo is built to exchange ideas and showcase cutting edge technology and explore opportunities for growth and development.

She said the Nigerian economy, as it relates to agriculture is of utmost importance that brings a quickening effect on the living standards of Nigerians and achieving food security.

Nigeria with a population of 180-200 million has an estimated 70 percent of its people engaged in farming activities of different kinds, based on the 2022 report of the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

This figure places agriculture in a very strategic position that can largely influence the generality of the Nigerian economy in the areas of food production, employment opportunities, as well as serving as source of basic raw materials for manufacturing industries.

Dr. Mrs Bisi said despite the immense benefits, the agricultural sector still faces mirage of challenges and hurdles that have brought the country to its present time, such as poor infrastructure , inadequate and outdated technology and skills which in turn avails quality, quantity and efficiency.

She also commended the efforts put in place by the President Bola Tinubu led administration towards agriculture and food security and added that renaming the former ministry as Ministry of Agric and Food Security speaks volumes of the administration’s desire to make Nigeria to be food secured within a short time.

She pointed out that appointing young persons to drive the quest for the attainment of food security is a step in the right direction. She praised the collaboration amongst the Ministries

of Water Resources, Defence, Environment, Aviation, Transportation, Power, Finance, Trade and Investment, as well as the Central Bank of Nigeria, with the Ministry of Agric and Food Security to fast track the realisation of food security.

Onyaole Patience, the Executive Director, Niger Foods spoke on government policies which she described as catalysts for agricultural growth. She said putting the right policies in place by the government produces results, thereby, providing the enabling environment for Nigerians to thrive.

“The benefits of government policies bringing in driving the agricultural sector cannot be underestimated, she enumerated.

She praised the efforts of the Niger State government in initiating agricultural practices that will improve the well-being of residents.

“Agriculture development is hinged on government policies that enable the environment to thrive and that has been an era when we had a lot of challenges in Nigeria because, the relevant polices that will support the investment in agriculture, help us to grow and bring the sector to be at par with rest of the world is not there.

“The government of Niger State has created an enabling environment and put polices in place that will allow the sector to thrive. The governor has gone out of his way to ensure that the enabling environment is in place to aid us get the land that we need.

“He has polices that make every local government bring into the pool ten thousand hectares of land. This can easily produce 250,000 hectares across the state to encourage investors.

“He’s building mind blowing infrastructure like roads. So far, he has brought in over four hundred tractors and we are still building on that daily. We’ve been able to provide solar panels to

small scale farmers.

“There’s an SAPZ (Special Agro Processing Zone) at the Minna airport, positioned to export. We are also building the Minna Airport City to produce thousands of green houses to produce exports which will be shipped straight from the airport. So, it’s important for government policies to support agriculture. Once that is done, everything thrives.

“Also, inputs are very important. We make sure that we work with the farmers association, SUBEB (State Universal Basic Education Board). The farmers get inputs from us at subsidised rates. We have a model where we bring out all the inputs, you come into the program and we are able to work with you and at the end of the day, we harvest. We do a buy back and you get your profit in inputs or cash and we take ours. These subsidies are to ensure that farmers can thrive” Onyaole concluded.

Nigeria’s Ruling Party Wins First Test Despite Harsh Economic Reality



Nigeria’s ruling party, the All Progressive Congress (APC), has won its first big electoral test since Bola Tinubu became president last year, despite the dire state of the country’s economy.

In the southern Edo state, which had previously been in the hands of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Senator Monday Okpebholo defeated the PDP’s Asue Ighodalo.

He gained 291,667 votes against 247,274 for Ighodalo.

However, the PDP has complained of fraud and vowed to challenge the result in court.

“The way these elections are going, they are probably going to be the worst elections in the history of this country,” said PDP candidate Ighodalo.

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa), which monitored the election, accused both the PDP and APC of vote-buying and also said election official had been intimidated in some areas.

Although the PDP had previously been in power in Edo, the state has been in the hands of the APC for many years so its victory isn't necessarily a huge surprise.

But given Nigeria's economic situation, some analysts had thought the APC could lose.

The country is experiencing its worst economic crisis in a generation with annual inflation at 34% – the highest in almost three decades.

Food prices have risen even faster – for example, in the commercial hub, Lagos, yams, a staple food, cost almost four times more than they did a year ago.

Last month, massive protests were held across the country over the economic situation.

Political analyst Muzammil Yakasai told the BBC that election violence had prevented some people from voting.

“I don't think the election in itself is a reflection of how people in Edo state and Nigeria see the APC at the moment.”

Another test awaits the APC in another governorship election in the south-western Ondo state in November.

Who is Monday Okpebholo?

Before his latest victory, he represented Edo Central as a senator at the National Assembly in an election he won last year.

Born in 1970, Okpebholo, has a degree in Business Administration from the University of Abuja and a masters in policy and leadership studies from the same institution.

Married with two children, the 54-year-old was charged earlier this year over allegations that he had falsified the date on his birth certificate.

He has not commented on the matter which is still in court. However, now that he's a governor, he has immunity from prosecution.

Director, BHCPF Advocates For A Coordinated Health Care System



The Director, Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF) has said Nigeria cannot afford to continue to have “a fragmented health care system” where states and local governments, including the federal government take different directions in health care delivery in the country.

“It has to be coordinated with an approach and understanding”, Dr Mukhtar Muhammed said while speaking recently in a programme, Morning Brief, on Nigeria's Channels Tv.

He said there must be a very good

understanding between the federal and state governments on how primary healthcare services should be operated.

The National Health Act provides that there should be a national body that comprises the federal and state governments to operate the health system in the country.

“We have agreed with the states that the primary health care services will be provided and everyone will have their responsibilities, including the federal, state and local governments, with the current autonomy.

“So, far, under the leadership of the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare (Prof Muhammad Ali Pate), we have managed to build on that strategy. He is in constant communication with the governors and the association of local governments to ensure that the understanding and strategy is sustained because, that is the only way we can succeed in delivering an effective Primary Health Care in the country.

“Over the years, stakeholders have realised the huge burden on the health sector, as seen in cases of maternal and under five mortality. These are the most important variables of measurement. The health sector has pushed towards having a dedicated fund that will serve as special intervention to improve the delivery of primary health care”, Dr. Mukhtar said.

He further revealed that the federal government provided one percent from the Consolidated Revenue Fund for this purpose to ensure that primary health care centres are enabled to provide health care services and to ensure that the vulnerable population are enrolled into health insurance plans “with very minimal or out of pocket expenses”.

The fund which is also meant to be administered through four gateways which are agencies of the government that statutorily provides certain

functions like the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), which is a regulatory agency providing oversight of the National Primary Health Care System in the country, working very closely with the state governments who have established their states agencies, the National Health Insurance Agency (NHIA), which has the statutory function of ensuring that all Nigerians are under a health insurance scheme, having access to health care services at a very minimal rate, Emergency Medical Treatment Committee, providing medical emergencies and Nigerian Centre for Disease Control which has the statutory function for epidemic preparedness and response to react to epidemics, also has provisions for donors and the private sector to provide theirs within the framework.

Dr. Mukhtar further added that in terms of proportion of the fund, what the BHCPF under the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, does, is to distribute these funds. 45 percent he said goes to the NPHCDA, 48.75 percent goes to the NHIA, 1.25 percent goes to the NCDC, while 5 percent of the fund goes to the Emergency Medical Treatment.

These responses are coordinated under the Ministerial Oversight Committee chaired by the Minister and other stakeholders.

The Health Act was passed in 2014, while the funds became available in 2019. Over the years, the funds have increase over the years and the agencies first have access to primary healthcare facilities, onboard and get accredited with NHIA. The vulnerables also have access to these facilities.

According to Dr. Mukhtar, the number of facilities have steadily increased and the laudable idea of having one PHC per ward has been achieved.

“We currently have about 8,300 primary healthcare facilities, which means almost every

ward is fully covered. Funds are provided to improve the infrastructure, ensuring that they have water and electricity. Funds are also made available to the facilities to make decisions, in terms of buying drugs needed and other necessities”, he enumerated.

Nigeria’s Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, in collaboration with State Ministries of Health, Development, partners and stakeholders, launched a robust Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) to accelerate the transformation of Nigeria’s health sector.

According to a statement signed by Dr. Muntaqa Umar-Sadiq, the National Coordinator of the SWAp Coordination Office, ahead of its media engagement, this management approach is set to transform the healthcare landscape across the country, ensuring that all Nigerians have access to quality healthcare services, regardless of their location or economic status.

The Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) is a coordinated management effort designed to overcome decades-long fragmentation and inefficiencies that have plagued the country’s health sector.

The statement said despite substantial investments, the sector has struggled with inadequate financing, limited human resources, poor data collection, insufficient infrastructure, and fragmented governance. These challenges have resulted in suboptimal health outcomes, with Nigeria bearing one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, among other poor health indices.

It said some of the key issues the Nigerian health system has prioritised, include inadequate and inequitable financing, stating that currently, only 3% of Nigeria’s GDP is allocated to healthcare, with just 40-60% of the federal budget for health being utilized effectively.

“SWAp aims to increase transparency and efficiency in the allocation and utilization of funds, ensuring that resources are directed towards priority areas and used to achieve measurable outcomes”, the statement read.

Other key issues prioritised by the country’s health system includes human resources for health and health data and infrastructure.

The statement said SWAp will focus on improving the distribution and availability of skilled healthcare workers across the country, especially in underserved areas and added that the reliability and use of health data in Nigeria have been severely compromised, with reports showing discrepancies, such as a 159.7% DPT3 immunization rate reported by Nigeria versus 55% from WHO surveys. “Additionally, only 0.5 hospital beds are available per 1,000 people, compared to the WHO guideline of 4 per 1,000”, it said.

“SWAp will prioritize strengthening data collection, the overall health infrastructure and its maintenance, among others, to support informed decision-making and improve quality service delivery”, it stated

It also said that by 2027, through a better coordinated health sector which harnesses the frontline efforts of local governments, the governance and execution strengths of states, and policy stewardship of the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Nigeria hopes to create a unified, transparent, and accountable health sector that operates as a coordinated unit across all levels; alongside our development partners.

Through this Sector Wide Approach, it is hoped that as a collective, there will be increased local production capacity, increased local production capacity, improved response to health threats, more applied data in decision making, and expansion in access to healthcare.

Concerning media engagement, the statement further reassured SWAp's Coordination Office commitment to transparency and open communication with the public, and to strengthen this point, the office has launched a dedicated media relations portal (swap.gov.ng/media) to provide timely updates, access to information, and opportunities for media professionals to engage with the initiative, and drive accountability.

"We believe that a coordinated and transparent approach is key to achieving our health sector goals. Through SWAp, we are not only addressing current challenges but also laying the foundation of accountability for this reforms approach", the statement concluded.

During the media briefing on Wednesday in Abuja, the Director of the Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF) and Secretary of the Ministerial Oversight Committee (MOC), Dr. Mukhtar Mohammed said 12.9 bn Naira is yet to be disbursed for 2024. Already, the Nigerian government has disbursed 130.8 bn Naira for health care delivery through the BHCPF since it became operational in 2019.

The Fund which is disbursed through four gateways, was established by the National Health Act, purposed to ensure that basic health care services are accessible to every Nigerian, including the most vulnerable. The gateways include the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), Nigeria Centre For Disease Control (NCDC), National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA) and the National Emergency Treatment Committee (NEMTC).

According to Mukhtar Mohammed, the disbursed fund constitutes a percent of the Federal Government Consolidated Revenue Fund and donor contributions to strengthen the Nigerian health care delivery.

He said funds are needed to support

development of resilience, through infrastructure, human resource essential services available at primary healthcare centres, including completed referral mechanisms.

Dr. Ashiri Adamu Abubakar of the Nigerian Health Sector Renewal Investment Initiative (NHSRII) said SWAp has made strategic plans to improve healthcare outcomes in the country and added that it's a management approach aimed at building a more cohesive, effective and sustainable health sector, adding that all stakeholders must consider the sector as a whole to endorse strategies, measure progress and agree on revisions.

He said lack of effective governance is a major challenge and added that improvement in oversight mechanisms, enforcing the National Health Act, accountability, engaging stakeholders, and fostering effective partnerships are vital in delivering healthcare services.

Dr. Saidu Ahmed, the Secretary, National Emergency Medical Treatment Committee (NEMTC) said five percent of the Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF) is administered through NEMTC, with oversight from the National Emergency Medical Treatment Committee, NEMTC which acts as a board.

'I Thought I Would Die With My Six Children' – Dam Collapse Survivor



Fatima Yakubu cannot believe that she and her six children are still alive after a dam collapsed

following torrential rains in north-eastern Nigeria.

The family, who live south of the city of Maiduguri near the Alau Dam, were asleep when their house began filling with water in the early hours of Tuesday.

"I woke up at 1am when I felt water on my legs," the 26-year-old told the BBC.

"It was rising very fast, and I was so scared. I thought I was going to die with my children."

She cried out in panic for help: "Some men heard me screaming and came to rescue us. I am grateful to God."

Along with her children she has found refuge at Bakassi Camp, one of four centres set up for the hundreds of thousands of people who have been flooded out of their homes this week.

Until last year, the camp was occupied by those who had fled notorious Boko Haram Islamist militants, whose 15-year insurgency has caused havoc in a region where poverty is endemic.

Though diminished, the jihadists are still active and despite the closure of displacement camps, Maiduguri remains densely populated with many people still preferring its relative security to rural areas of Borno state.

The heavier than usual rains began towards the end of August – and it is still humid and pouring with rain as people try to deal with the aftermath of the dam's collapse.

Locals living around the Alau Dam, which is about 20km (12 miles) south of the city on the Ngadda river, became worried about the structure as the waters in the reservoir steadily rose last week – and they alerted officials.

A delegation did go out to inspect the dam, but said there was nothing to worry about.

However around four days later it started to fracture, and the dam gave way. Within three

hours water was pouring into Maiduguri as people slept – with some estimates suggesting nearly half of the city was covered.

The authorities are still scrambling to rescue people, and sometimes bodies, trapped in buildings.

Many public structures are affected, including hospitals and the prison.

The crisis has been compounded by the escape of some wild animals from the state zoo – and an estimated 40% of its animals have perished.

The Borno state government has ordered schools that only recently reopened after a long holiday, to close for two weeks.

Hundreds of residents can be seen walking through the knee-high floodwater along the popular Lagos Bridge, while most vehicles are unable to plough through the high volume of water.

Mothers clutch their children tightly as they wade through the streets, trying not to get swept away.

Some young people have been taking advantage by going swimming in areas where the water is at least 4ft (1.2m) deep.

The waters have begun to recede in some areas, though five communities are still inundated.

This is Borno state's most devastating flood disaster in three decades, according to the UN and local media.

There are worries about an outbreak of waterborne diseases as most of the city's network of sewers has collapsed, contaminating water sources.

"The governor has announced the constitution of a special health team that will analyse the situation," Borno state spokesperson Abdurrahman Ahmed Bundi told the BBC.

“International partners, like the WHO [World Health Organization], have promised to support the government.”

Aid agencies say at least 37 people have died – but the authorities say it is too early to confirm this estimate.

“We can’t ascertain the figure yet. For the number of houses affected, we have to wait until the water level recedes,” Sirajo Garba, from the National Emergency Management Agency (Nema) in Maiduguri, told the BBC.

The state governor, Babagana Zulum, has said that the floods may have affected up to a million people.

Hunger is now a major issue for those who have lost their belongings, homes and businesses.

At Bakassi Camp on Wednesday evening, a car pulled up at the gate and the driver began giving out loaves of bread to the crowds gathered.

But dozens of people then swooped on his vehicle and snatched everything through the wound-down windows.

“We don’t have enough food and essential supplies at the camp. People are always rushing for food,” said Ms Yakubu, who is shouldering the responsibility for looking after her children as her husband is staying with his second wife.

“My kids shared just one plate of meal today. They are still hungry while I haven’t eaten,” she said.

The family all share a mat placed on the ground in the open air – no other shelter is yet available. Fighting off mosquitos, she uses her hijab to cover her one-month-old baby.

Like many families, they are yet to be assigned sleeping areas as more tents are still being put up.

“My son and I have only taken kunu [a local drink

made from sorghum or maize] today,” 23-year-old Aisha Muhammad told the BBC in tears.

Like many other women in the camp – finding something to eat is her main concern.

NEMA said it would start distributing food soon – in addition to what the state government is doing.

The state spokesman explained that Governor Zulum visited the camp on Wednesday.

“He distributed 10,000 naira [\$6; £5] to the head of each household as an immediate relief package while the government prepares something that’s more sustainable,” Mr Bundi said.

The four camps are currently housing around 6,000 people, according to NEMA.

But, there are thousands of others in desperate need of help – sleeping on the roads, under bridges, inside trucks and under vehicles.

Some have made makeshift tents with whatever is to hand, but they do a poor job of shielding them from the continuous rain.

As the emergency services deal with the deluged city, it is unclear when the damaged Alau Dam will be fixed.

“The reconstruction of the dam is a huge project that Borno state government alone cannot take care of. It is owned by the federal government,” Mr Bundi said.

The BBC.

7th BHCPF MOC: Nigeria’s Health Minister Approves 12.9 Bn For Improved Health Care Services



Nigeria's Coordinating Health and Social Welfare Minister, Prof. Muhammad Ali Pate, through the Ministerial Oversight Committee for the Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF), has approved the disbursement of an additional 12.9 bn to state governments for utilisation in health care services for the third quarter of 2024.

This is in consonance with the BHCPF Guidelines, 2020 for improved transparency, accountability, and sustainability in the country's healthcare system.

Under his leadership as the Chairman of the Ministerial Oversight Committee, Prof. Pate said the funds will be maximally integrated into the sector-wide program, as outlined in the BHCPF 2020 guidelines.

"Once fully implemented, it will ensure better allocation of resources to enhance Nigeria's health outcomes by saving lives and promoting overall health", Prof. Pate said on Thursday in Abuja, the Nigerian capital, during the 7th BHCP Ministerial Oversight Committee Meeting.

While revealing that the reform of BHCPF is not just a formality, but a comprehensive financial restructuring that exceeds government's current funding levels, aimed at revitalizing primary healthcare services, he said these outcomes encompass improved antenatal care coverage, enhanced skilled-birth attendance, reduced stunting and wasting, lower adolescent birth rates, fewer zero-dose children, higher rates of children aged 0-12 months fully immunized, and expanded health insurance coverage.

Calling for urgent comprehensive reforms of the BHCPF, he said it should align with the country's Health Sector Renewal Initiative that was approved by the 64th NCH. It should also be in consonance with President Bola Tinubu's endorsement of a Sector-Wide Approach.

Dr. Muyi Aina, Executive Director/Chief Executive of the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA) updated the press on proceedings at the MOC meeting, highlighting the various presentations from the gateways, including the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), the National Primary Healthcare Development Agency (NPHCDA), the NCDC, and the Emergency Transport Services (ETS), as well as the Ministerial Oversight Committee Secretariat and the Sector-Wide Approach office.

"A number of activities took place beyond the proceedings, memos were submitted to the MOC and were approved. The first memo was a joint one that presented reforms from the NCDC gateway, as well as the EMC's, Dr. Aina said.

"You may recollect that both the NHIA gateway and the NPHCA gateway had previously presented reforms that we are proposing will go into the next phase of the Basic Health Care Provision Fund Programme 2.0.

"Those reforms are beginning to be implemented and will be reflected in the revised guidelines which will be available in about a month. Both the NCDC and AMD really presented their reforms which again included the programmatic themes.

"For NCDC, it is how they are focusing and the way it will be ran at the state and national levels to ensure that the resources are utilised appropriately. It is similar for the EMT as well. We also learnt how to collaborate with other gateways and get value on how to utilise these resources. The second memo was really for the disbursement", he stated.

The Director General/Chief Executive of The National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), Dr. Kelechi Ohiri said the MOC meeting focused on promoting transparency and accountability for the utilization of funds.

Dr. Ohiri disclosed that funds for the last Quarter were reviewed with the media and civil society for accountability sake. While stating that about 2.7 million Nigerians are currently enrolled in insurance programs, he said the approved 12.9 bn funds will motivate state governments to do more, efforts -wise to support disadvantaged residents in the state.

Nigeria Moves To Address Mental Health Needs of Citizens



Daju Kachollom, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

The government of Nigeria has announced steps to address the mental health needs of all Nigerians and ensuring that not only focus would be laid on treatment but, preventative measures.

The Nigerian Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare said suicide prevention advocacy should be seen as a collective responsibility. "Together, we must be committed to creating a society that values mental health, promotes well-being, and provides care for all", Prof. Muhammad Ali Pate said on Thursday at the commemoration of 2024 World Suicide

Prevention Day.

Represented by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Daju Kachollom S.mni, the Minister said available data on suicide rate in Nigeria is estimated at 12.9 per 100,000. He said in changing the narrative, there must be shift from focusing solely on the tragedy of suicide to the hope of prevention.

Nigeria had earlier launched a National Suicide Strategic Framework 2023-2030, which clearly seek to identify the risk and protective measures for suicide prevention in the country.

He said the Health and Social Welfare Ministry is working closely with the Office of the Attorney General of the Federation and partners, to address section of the law that criminalized attempted suicide and improve the mental well-being of Nigerians. He assured that Nigeria would soon be among the comity of nations to discriminalized attempted suicide.

Suicide rates are mostly identified with young persons aged between 15 and 29 years in Nigeria. It is the fourth leading cause of death amongst others in the country.

The theme of this year's event, "Changing the Narrative on Suicide", is aimed at raising awareness on the importance of reducing stigma and encouraging open conversations to prevent the menace.

Daju Kachollom in her own remarks said the Ministry will continue to collaborate with stakeholders to ensure the full implementation of the National Suicide Prevention Strategic Framework which provides a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention in the country.

Amongst attendees at the function include representatives of ministries, departments and agencies, as well as development partners, such as the World Health Organization, and Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI).

Big' Nigerian Actor Shoots New Film at Scrapyard



A movie star who described himself as “one of the great actors in Nigeria” said shooting scenes for his latest film in Suffolk and Essex was a “beautiful experience”.

Jide Awobona, who has nearly one million followers on Instagram, spent 21 days in the UK filming for his forthcoming, but currently untitled, gangster comedy flick.

During that time, the actor and his production team captured footage at Assington Autos scrapyard, in Suffolk, and on the Essex coastline in Leigh-on-Sea.

The movie, which followed Awobona’s character to Great Britain as he tried to undo his father’s mistakes back home, was a “serious story with comedy infusions”.

“A lot of audiences are really going to enjoy it – it’s a cross-culture film with two countries coming together”, the star added.

Although, he had little time to explore in between shoots, Awobona has been left with a lasting impression of the scrapyard in which he shot some “banter” scenes.

He said: “The production crew did a good, getting us the right locations that the script described – and the scrapyard scene couldn’t

have been shot anywhere else.

“The scrapyard was actually a very beautiful place and I couldn’t have imagined a place like that in the United Kingdom – it was a lot of fun for me.

“Everyone who works there were so welcoming and warm and it was a beautiful experience and I really want to go back there again – I can’t forget that scrapyard.”

Awobona, who is perhaps best known for his role in the Nigerian sitcom *Jenifa’s Diary*, was also complementary about the time he spent in Leigh-on-Sea.

“When I heard the name I wanted to see what this place looked like and it was exactly how I thought and it was the first time I saw the sea very close to me,” he said.

“It was a very calm and beautiful place and a really good place to film. The UK keeps getting better and I just love its discipline and decency. I love everything about it.”

Some of the biggest Nollywood films to ever hit the silver-screen include the likes of *A Tribe Called Judah* and *Battle on Buka Street*.

Awobona is now hoping his 949,000 Instagram followers can help his new movie achieve similar success by flocking to cinemas when it comes out.

“I have been in the game for a while and I’m not a fan of blowing my own trumpet but I am not small - I am a big actor here in Nigeria,” he said.

“I have a lot of fans who love my craft. I am trying to be humble but I am one of the great actors in Nigeria”.

Dozens of Islamic Worshipers Killed In Kaduna State



Tens of Islamic worshippers were killed in a crash in northern Nigeria's Kaduna state.

On Monday morning, 16th of September, 2024, a Kaduna State Emergency Management Agency official put the death toll at 36.

The victims were travelling to celebrate Eid-el-Maulud – Prophet Muhammad's birthday – in the northern town of Saminaka.

Their bus collided with an oncoming truck near the town of Lere, an organiser of the Eid celebration said.

Fatal road collisions are very common in Nigeria. Both drivers and passengers have been known to flout safety measures, which are loosely enforced by the authorities.

However, event organiser Ahmad Dayyabu told the BBC up to 40 people had died and 31 more were being treated in hospital.

"They took off from the town of Kwandare on their way to here, Saminaka. On reaching the town of Lere, their vehicle was run over by a trailer truck," he said.

"From our investigation, there were 71 people in that ill-fated vehicle."

The bus is said to have been overloaded.

More than 1,470 people died in road collisions across Nigeria in the first quarter of 2024, official statistics show.

That is around 16 people per day on average.

The government declared Monday a public holiday in order to mark this year's Eid-el-Maulud.

Hope Raisers Global Foundation



Hope Raisers Global Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating positive change in the World. The mission of the foundation is to provide hope, support, and resources to those in need, empowering them to overcome obstacles as a means to achieve their full potential with the foundation's DEED acronym (Discover, Educate, Empower, Deploy).

Over the past years, Hope Raisers Global Foundation has worked tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of individuals, internally displaced persons, vulnerable persons in communities around the Nigeria. Through various programs and initiatives, it has been able to provide assistance in areas like education, healthcare, and disaster relief.

One of its most successful initiatives is a scholarship program that has helped a hand full of students access education and break the cycle of poverty. "We have also partnered with local organizations to support skill acquisition initiatives, providing much-needed technical support to underserved populations", a statement read from a source in the

organisation.

In times of crisis, Hope Raisers Global Foundation has been quick to respond to emergency aid to communities affected by natural disasters and conflicts. Its disaster relief efforts have helped countless individuals rebuild their lives and communities in the aftermath of tragedy.

"Through our dedication and hard work, Hope Raisers Global Foundation has positively impacted the lives of thousands of individuals in Nigeria", the organizations said.

"We are committed to continuing our efforts to inspire hope, create change, and make the world a better place for all.

"Our empowerment programs in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps focus on providing education, skills training, and psychological support to those affected by conflict and displacement.

"These programs aim to rebuild resilience, restore hope, and empower individuals to rebuild their lives. One of our success story is centered on the deployment of one family in the Durumi IDP Camp back to Borno State in 2022", it stated.

Through its Summer Splash Program, children living in IDP camps are provided with a safe and stimulating environment where they can learn and grow. The program includes a range of activities such as arts and drama and topics ranging from Mental Health Wellbeing, National Values, Peer Pressure, Technology, Leadership and a number of other value oriented topics as well as life skills training and education sessions.

By engaging in these activities, children are able to develop key life skills such as teamwork, leadership, communication, and problem-solving. They also learn important values such as respect, empathy, and resilience, which are essential for building a strong and positive character.

Overall, the organisation's empowerment and Summer Splash Program have been instrumental in fostering a sense of community, belonging, and purpose among children living in IDP camps.

They have helped to strengthen their character and value system, equipping them with the tools they need to overcome the challenges they face and build a better future for themselves and their communities.

"We are open to collaborations, donations and all kinds of support that would drive our work to a height that will further transform the lives of our people", it concluded.

URL: [Https://www.hrgfoundation.com](https://www.hrgfoundation.com)

Email: info@hrgfoundation.com

ACReSAL Project: Restoring the Hadeja-Nguru Wetlands



Yobe State, mapped in northeastern Nigeria is mainly agricultural driven, carved from the western half of Borno State, was created on the 27 August, 1991. The State borders the Republic of Niger to the north and the Nigerian states of Borno to the east, Gombe to the southwest, Bauchi to the west, and Jigawa to the northwest.

The state's terrain consists of plains drained by the seasonal Komadugu Yobe River and its tributaries in the north, and by the Gongola River in the south. Its vegetation is predominantly of the Sudan savanna type, with scattered acacia trees. There is also an area of Sahel savanna, consisting of sandy soils and thorn scrub, located in the far north.

Nguru, town is in the northwest part of the state, near the Hadejia River. It is a seasonal tributary of the Komadugu Yobe River which flows into Lake Chad. The Nguru wetlands is known for worsening situations of droughts and desertification that has directly or indirectly impacted all aspects of human life and the environment including the ecological, health, geo-chemical, hydrological, and socio-economic facets, according to Olagunju I.E, 2015.

The Nguru wetlands located at Latitude 12°39.31"N, Longitude 10°35.108"E, is a segment of the Hadejia-Nguru wetlands (HNWs), geographically located in an area on the southern edge of the Sahel Savanna in the northeastern region of Nigeria, comprising permanent lakes and seasonally flooded pools, connected by a network of channels.

Nguru wetlands have its upper catchment in Jigawa State and among the anthropogenic factors the region has suffered include poor land management, inadequate farming techniques and over-cultivation, overgrazing and the removal of natural vegetation; misuse of water resources; and poor environmental and ecosystem management.

Droughts-affected areas in Nigeria are predominantly known for low and high rainfall variability, high evaporation and potential evapotranspiration rate. Also, they are known for persistent negative rainfall anomalies, occasional torrential rains resulting in floods, rapidly high erosive runoff, especially on steep terrains sparse vegetation cover and too little moisture for rainfed cultivation throughout the

year.

Similarly, desertification-affected areas are characterized by a reduction in the fraction of the soil covered by the vegetation. In particular, under desertification, the fraction of bare soil increases and vegetation may be reduced to isolated patches or clumps. Other aspects of the features of desertification- affected areas of the country include a rise in the reflective capacity (albedo) of the surface for solar radiation, a considerable and permanent loss of perennial plants, especially woody shrubs and trees, considerable soil erosion and impoverishment by wind, gully and sheet erosion of soils by occasional heavy rainfalls, and overgrazing and inadequate forage in relation to vegetative resources.

These prevailing climatic and anthropogenic conditions continually put excessive pressure on the livelihood and living conditions of community residents in these these areas. For last 11 years these activities were worsening, leading to migration of several communities.

The proposed Agro Climatic Resilience In Semi Arid Landscape (ACReSAL) project intervention is targeted at arresting desertification and improving the sustainable productivity of land in the targeted areas of degraded and desert landscapes.

Challenges engulfed by the Hadejia-Nguru threatened the survival of the once-rich ecosystem and the locals therein. These challenges include:

Typha Grass, which is an alien grass that invaded the wetlands since the late 1970s, and claimed considerably hectares sites of fishing areas, agricultural fields, grazing areas, ponds, canals, and channels, redirecting water flow, causing flooding, sedimentation, siltation, and pollution in the downstream. This is one of the causes of reduction in rice and wheat production.



Equally, the Maikintari flood along the Hadejia-Nguru road is caused by Typha grass. One could not see any water/wetland at a glance from or by the roadside. The area has been a breeding ground for mosquitoes, as it was not completely deoxygenated by aquatic plants. A reason for this is, typha grass is a habitat for laying and hatching of mosquito eggs because it provides shelters against high isolation and wind. It was a nuisance affecting the social and economic well-being of the people under the Nguru Watershed area.

Upstream river channels diversion which has dried up the Nguru wetlands resulting from low water, leading to habitat and ecosystem loss. The construction of Tiga and Challawa Dams in Kano State, the Hadejia Irrigation project in Jigawa State, and the proposed Kafin Zaki Dam in Bauchi State have directly impacted the Nguru wetland for decades, contributing negatively to the shrinkage and desiccation of the wetland.

iii. Massive deforestation and consequences of climate change: Massive deforestation around the wetlands as a result of excessive felling of the trees for fuel, overgrazing, drought, and poor management of upstream water development schemes have been identified as major threats to the continued existence of Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands.

The Agro Climatic Resilience In Semi Arid Landscape (ACReSAL) brought in excavators and dredged 400 hectares of land. In the last

eleven years, Nguru town ran void of water. But, in the last few weeks, there is water in place and the typha grass cleared, thanks to the much-publicized efforts devoted by the government and other related stakeholders such as the Hadejia- Nguru Wetlands Conservation Project (HNWCP). Other works are ongoing.

The Way Forward.

For effective management of these challenges, calls for a holistic sincere efforts by stakeholders, while making use of relevant expertise and professionals to tackle these challenges. It is therefore, recommended that:

- (i) The menace caused by typha grass proliferation necessitates the adoption and application of appropriate techniques for each section of the wetland to minimize incurring further damages to the wetland units. In addition, it is important that findings be done to ascertain the extent to which other biodiversity units like reptiles, amphibians, and insects within the Hadajia- Nguru wetland are impacted.
- (ii) The government in Nigeria and other stakeholders should collaborate to establish processing, conversion and fodder production plants for the translation of the weed to positive utility such as; fuel pellets, building materials, fodder for animals, furniture, roof thatching etc. The processing plants are required to be sited within reach of the impacted communities, to curb unemployment induced by Typha grass proliferation.
- (iii) Consistent financial means need to be sought through NEPAD, NEEDS, SEEDS, NGO's or by any other means necessary to fund research activities and adopt control technologies for the Typha grass management with the involvement of the immediate communities affected.
- (iv) Raw Material Research and Development Council (RMRDC) Abuja, is currently developing

a technology to briquette the Typha grass of the Hadejia-Nguru wetlands. Under this project, the Typha grass in Hadejia-Nguru will be briquette into fuel pellets for local utilization and for export using technology from neighbouring Mali. Stakeholders need to follow up this agency to see to it, that the project translates to reality.

(v) Biological control: Equilibrium point can be attained by identifying and introducing the natural prey of typha grass to maintain its population at a stage of negligible harm.

Typha grass decreases incomes, hence, increases poverty level of communities around the wetlands and has also led to conflicts among farmers. The invasive plant has colonized many large farms and grazing lands and river channel thereby making life miserable for the inhabitants through interference with their utilization of water and land resources. This led to migration of the inhabitants from one area to another causing conflict over resource use, and increased poverty.

Transportation, hunting and tourists guiding were successful economic activities engaged by local communities along the Nguru wetlands.

Intervention.

The Nguru dredging intervention to restore the lost hope of economic growth and livelihood was proposed by ACREsAL in 2022 after due consultations from the Stakeholders to find a means of livelihood to the inhabitants of the area as many people are migrating to neighbouring Jigawa State.

Majority of the stakeholders advised the procurement of dredging machine to clear the blockages caused by Typha which is becoming unmanageable.

Yobe Acreasal successfully procured an amphibious excavator at the cost of \$1,200,000 which was officially launched on the 30 th of May 2024 and sofar, the machine have cleared

about 28km (385Ha) path of the blocked path that leads to Nguru town and its environs.

The intervention works will include dredging, erosion, and flood control, restoration of the degraded area, clearing of blocked channels, Typha weeds control, massive siltation including engineering and bioremediation interventions so as to conserve the water resources for sustainable ecosystems, and economic development of the wetlands

Yobe ACREsAL has planned to restore about 5000ha covering eight Local Government Areas of Nguru, Karasuwa, Bade, Jakusko, Yusufari, Yunusari and Geidam to empty in to the Lake Chad via Borno State.

Plateau Commissions Pharma-Garde Warehouse In Boost To Health-care Delivery



Plateau State Government in collaboration with the National Emergency Medical Services and Ambulance System (NEMSAS) on Tuesday, flagged-off a pilot scheme for the State Emergency Medical Services and Ambulance System (PLASEMSAS).

It also, officially commissioned the State Drug and Medical Commodities Management Agency Pharma-Grade Ware house, in the state capital, Jos.

According to statement released by Nigeria's

Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, this is a significant step towards advancing health supply-chain system and delivering high-quality emergency medical services towards achieving Universal Health Care in Nigeria.

Coordinating Minister, Professor Muhammad Ali Pate, represented by the Permanent Secretary, Daju Kachollom mni, said the flag off is a milestone achieved in the collective efforts to transform healthcare delivery in the country.

"This initiative reflects the strong commitment of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR's administration and the vision outlined in the Nigerian Health Sector Renewal Investment Initiative, aimed at strengthening the healthcare system and enhancing population health indicators by addressing critical gaps in healthcare delivery through substantial investments in improving healthcare access and quality for the most vulnerable populations", the statement quoted the Minister.

Narrating the support for the implementation of this initiative, the Minister, said the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare donated an ambulance equipped with Basic Life Support equipment to the State, with the intention of encouraging the provision of additional ambulances and resources to ensure comprehensive coverage of Emergency Medical Services in Plateau State.

"Under the Plateau State Emergency Medical Services and Ambulance System, ambulances will be deployed to respond swiftly to various emergencies, including medical crises, trauma incidents, or accidents, providing transportation to accredited healthcare facilities.

"Healthcare providers offering services through this system will be duly compensated from the allocated funds under the 5% Basic Health Care Provision Fund designated for Emergency

Medical Treatment.

"This integrated approach aims to deliver timely emergency responses, ensure high-quality pre-hospital care, reduce mortality rates, and fortify the overall healthcare system", Prof. Pate added.

He enumerated that the role of the newly upgraded Central Medical Store in establishing an integrated and efficient health supply chain for the distribution of essential medicines and public health commodities is pivotal.

While revealing that Plateau State is the first to witness the commissioning of its upgraded warehouse, he acknowledged the contributions of the Global Fund, the National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, Land Designs Limited and other of key stakeholders in accomplishing the upgraded warehouse.

"The objective of this collaboration was to establish a government-led supply chain characterized by effectiveness, efficiency, financial self-sustainability, and the provision of quality healthcare services in alignment with the principles of Universal Health Coverage.

"The State's commitment to annual budgetary allocations for warehouse maintenance and capacity building for warehouse personnel, as well as, the mobilization and maintenance of ambulances and training of health personnel, will be essential for ensuring the long-term viability of the healthcare system", the Minister said.

Plateau State Governor, Barr. Caleb Manasseh Mutfwang said his administration is dedicated to enhance quality healthcare and commended the Coordinating Minister for the visionary initiatives, highlighting the significance of the Pharma-Grade Warehouse and the Plateau State Emergency Medical Services and Ambulance System.

He said the project will be central in establishing

a sustainable healthcare infrastructure to ensure the availability of essential medicines and vaccines across all 17 Local Government Areas.

“The state-of-the-art Pharma-Grade Warehouse, equipped with advanced technology and designed to global standards, features a cold room maintaining temperatures below -80°C, a modern forklift for efficient inventory management, pallets for streamlined supply movement, a mini-quality control laboratory, and a drug information center, the Governor said.

“This facility is poised to enhance the effective management and distribution of pharmaceutical supplies, addressing supply chain challenges and facilitating timely healthcare delivery throughout Plateau State”.

Governor Mutfwang, expressed enthusiasm for the warehouse’s potential to support local pharmaceutical production, commending the unveiling of five locally manufactured products and pledging full support for the agency’s collaboration with NAFDAC to ensure sustainability.

“As a beacon of hope and progress, the warehouse symbolizes the collective commitment to affordable healthcare and serves as a testament to the transformative impact achievable through unity, shared vision, and diligent effort in building a healthier future for all Plateau citizens”, he stated.

Additionally, the launch of the Plateau State Emergency Medical Services and Ambulance System signifies a crucial milestone in the journey towards accessible and high-quality healthcare for all residents. This initiative underscores the commitment to saving lives, reducing mortality rates, and providing essential support within the healthcare system.

PLASEMSAS aims to establish an integrated emergency medical service and ambulance system that delivers prompt, efficient, and

accessible care free of charge within the initial 48 hours of an emergency, eliminating financial barriers in critical situations and ensuring timely care for all individuals.

The Journey That Helped Save Nigeria's Art for the Nation



The Nigerian National Museum in Lagos sits in the city like a respected but unloved relative - it somehow exudes importance but remains largely unvisited.

This is perhaps because the concept of a museum is based on a colonial idea – stuffing cabinets full of exoticised objects removed from the context that gave them any meaning.

Olugbile Holloway, who was appointed earlier this year to head the commission that runs the National Museum, is keen to change this - he wants to take the artefacts on the road and get them seen back where they once belonged.

“How organically African [is this concept of a museum] or has this ideology kind of been superimposed on us?” he asked me.

“Maybe the conventional model of a nice building with artefacts and lights and write-ups, maybe that isn’t what’s going to work in this part of the world?”

Established in 1957 – three years before independence - the museum houses objects from across the country, including Ife bronze and terracotta heads, Benin brass plaques and

ivories, and Ibibio masks and costumes.

But there is also an irony – Mr Holloway's job would not exist if the antiquities department, set up by the colonial government, had not got people to go around the country to collect the pieces that ended up in the museum.

Some may have otherwise been stolen by Western visitors with less scruples to be sold on the lucrative European and American artefacts market. While others could have been destroyed by zealous Nigerian Christians convinced that they were the devil's work.

In 1967, an unlikely American duo of Charlie Cushman, a hitchhiker, and Herbert "Skip" Cole, a postgraduate student, were sent around the country by the antiquities department, to gather up some of the heritage.

"It was an incredible opportunity to spend - what was it, two weeks? - to venture into small enclaves and villages in south-eastern Nigeria," Mr Cushman, now 90, told me.

At that time, significant cultural artefacts were kept in traditional shrines, palaces and sometimes caves. They were often central to the area's traditional religions.

Household heads and shrine priests were responsible for maintaining and protecting these items.

"What I found particularly interesting is that many people in the villages seemed very willing to part with masks and objects that had been in their families for a long time," 89-year-old Mr Cole told me.

"I was able to buy masks for two or three dollars. They would be worth hundreds in Europe at the time.

"Its monetary value wasn't important in Igbo villages.

"They used the objects for ceremonies, for

entertainment, for commemorating ancestors and nature spirits... which is probably why they were able to sell things inexpensively when they decided that they were no longer useful to them".

Mr Cushman kept detailed journals of his experiences as they travelled together in a VW minibus and on foot to retrieve these artworks, including ceremonies they observed and people they met – and those handwritten notebooks have survived more than 50 years.

I was especially fascinated by their efforts to persuade Christian converts not to destroy artefacts, which they considered pagan and evil.

The diaries describe meeting a Mr Akazi, a school headmaster and "self-appointed crusader of God" who had burnt some ancestral figures.

"They are evil and remain as crutches to the people. Only with their destruction can we rid the people of these monstrous influences," Mr Akazi is quoted as saying.

Mr Cole tried his best to explain.

"We are here to try and preserve these art objects for future generations. Rather than destroy them, could we not have them sent to the Lagos Museum where they will accomplish both of our purposes? For you, they will no longer be here to serve as obstructions to Christianity, and for us, they will be preserved."

It seems that the headmaster was persuaded to hand them over, but did not see their cultural value.

"You see for me there are too many emotional ties connected with these hideous manifestations of Satan. Perhaps for you, these things are art, but they can never be so for me," Mr Akazi said.

Reading those excerpts reminded me of the times I have accompanied compatriots, who were visiting me in London, to the British

Museum to see some of the Nigerian artwork on display, mostly looted from our country.

Some of my guests, who were committed Christians, refused to take photographs of themselves standing with any of the objects, concerned that they might be fraternising with demonic items. We laughed about it, but they were serious.



Mr Cushman and Mr Cole's mission originated from an assignment by Kenneth C Murray, a British colonial art teacher, who was a key figure in Nigeria's museum history.

Murray was invited to Nigeria at the request of Aina Onabolu, a European-trained Yoruba fine artist who convinced the colonial government to bring qualified art teachers from the UK to Nigerian secondary schools and teacher training institutions.

Murray believed that contemporary art education should be grounded in traditional art, but there were no collections in Nigeria available for study.

He was also concerned about the unregulated export of Nigerian items.

To address these issues, Murray and his colleagues pressured the colonial government to legislate against the exportation of artefacts and to establish museums.

This resulted in the inauguration of the Nigerian Antiquities Service in 1943, with Murray as its first director. He established Nigeria's first museums in Esie in 1945, Jos in 1952 and Ife in 1955.

Mr Cole was studying African art at New York's Columbia University and conducting fieldwork in Nigeria when Murray assigned him to collect artwork from south-eastern Nigeria for the newer museum in Lagos.

Other scholars and Nigerian employees of the museums were tasked with doing this elsewhere in the country.

"I collected more than 400 artworks for the museum," Mr Cole said. "Murray came to my flat in Enugu and carted things off both to the museum in Lagos, and also to the museum in Oron."

Mr Cushman studied at Yale and Stanford Universities. He turned down the opportunity to work with investment company Merrill Lynch in New York, eventually deciding to travel the world. He ended up in Nigeria where he met Mr Cole, an old school friend, and was persuaded to join him on his mission.

The journals that Mr Cushman kept are all that survive from the trip.

Unfortunately, "Skip" lost all his own records when he was forced to flee south-east Nigeria during the civil war, which started in July 1967 when the region's leaders seceded from Nigeria and formed the nation of Biafra.

He was sad to learn later that some of the artwork he had collected for the museum in the southern town of Oron had been destroyed.

"The Nigerian army took over the museum because it was the only building around with air-conditioning so they would use artefacts as firewood to cook their food," he said.

But much of what the two men, and others, collected survived and is now the responsibility of Mr Holloway as the head of the Nigerian Commission for Museums and Monuments.

He hopes to develop a new concept of a

museum that is more appealing to, and representative of, Nigerians and Africans.

"We have about 50-something museums across the country and the vast majority are not viable, because people are not interested in going into a building that has no life.

"To the white man or to the West, what they would call an artefact to us is a sacred object... I feel that the richness in those objects would be to display them as they would originally have been used".

The BBC.

Flooding: Women Affairs Minister Sympathizes With Borno State



Barr. Uju Kennedy Ohaneye.

Nigeria's Women Affairs Ministry sympathized with the people of Borno State, especially women and children who were severely affected by flooding.

The Ministry led by its Minister, Barr Uju Kennedy Ohanenye said it is deeply saddened by the loss of lives, displacement of families, and destruction of homes and livelihoods.

According to a statement issued on the 14th of September, 2024, by the Media Aide to the Minister, Musa Abdulrahman, it said the Ministry is in solidarity with the affected communities. The Ministry expressed its readiness to provide support and assistance to women and children in the state.

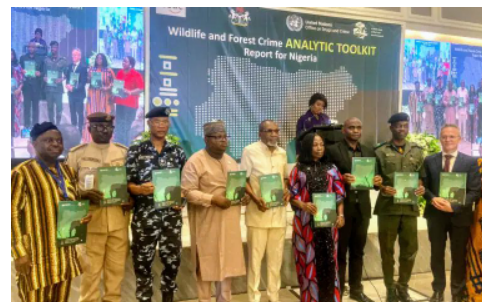
The Ministry also said it will work closely with relevant government agencies and humanitarian organizations to ensure that the most vulnerable in the state receive timely and appropriate aid.

It urged citizens of th state to heed to warnings issued by the Nigerian Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA and take precautions to avoid further loss of lives and properties.

"By staying informed about weather conditions and following safety guidelines, we can minimize the impact of future floods", the statement said..

"The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs remains steadfast in its commitment to the welfare and well-being of all Nigerians, and will continue to work tirelessly to address the challenges faced by our citizens", it added.

Nigeria Launches Enforcement Team To Combat Trafficking



The Nigerian government and other stakeholders have made efforts to combat trafficking by establishing a Wildlife Enforcement Task Force, WLETF, within the West Africa sub-region.

The Taskforce team is also charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the recommendations of the International Consortium for Combating Wildlife Crime, ICCWC, toolkit assessment report are translated into concrete actions.

Minister of Environment, Balarabe Abass Lawal said the launch of the ICCWC Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit Assessment Report is a comprehensive and timely document that will provide a clear-eyed view of challenges, as well as opportunities to strengthen the efforts to combat wildlife crime.

Represented by the Director, Planning, Research & Statistics, Stanley Jonah, the Minister said the Ministry will be exploring new technologies and innovative approaches to monitor and protect wildlife which will include the use of drones and satellite imagery.

"I commend the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) for their commitment and dedication to assisting Nigeria in this critical fight. This report represents not just an assessment but a roadmap for action-one that calls for greater collaboration, innovation, and determination, the Minister said at the event organised by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, in Abuja, on Friday 20th September, 2024.

"We recognize that much more needs to be done. Wildlife crime is a complex, transnational issue that requires a multi-faceted and collaborative approach.

"The recommendations in the ICCWC Toolkit Assessment Report provide us with a valuable guide as we work to improve our efforts. We are committed to implementing these recommendations in partnership with our international and domestic stakeholders.

"In this regard, I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Environment, in collaboration with the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESRA), Federal Ministry of Justice (FMoJ), the Nigeria Customs Service, (NCS), the Nigeria Police Force, and INTERPOL has established a dedicated Wildlife Enforcement Task Force (WLETF) first the West Africa sub-region", the Minister stated.

He also said it is imperative to understand the crucial role communities play in conserving wildlife, and forest resources, "empowering local communities to protect and sustainably manage our natural resources.

Reduction of Disease In Africa Is Attainable – African Institute of Public Health Professionals



The Registrar, CEO African Institute of Public Health Professionals (AIPHP) has said that the vision of reducing diseases in Africa is attainable and entwined in the sustainable development goals, ensuring a healthy life and providing well being for all.

Dr. Ayodele Bankole James also revealed that a healthier and resilient community cannot be achieved in the African continent without capacity building, an objective that makes for its commitment to "achieving our goals for the betterment of Africa, and human race".

He stated these at the institute's colloquium and investiture program, held in Abuja on Tuesday. The event also marked the induction of new fellows and organised to mark the 58th birthday anniversary of the Registrar.

Dr Bankole also enumerated that the institute has collaborated with frontline international agencies, among which is World Health Organisation (WHO).

He said AIPHP's drive to address issues of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) proves the

commitment of Africans in attaining the universal health coverage objectives in Africa by the year 2030.

"This institute is focused on investing in health outcomes, particularly public health professionals in Africa", Dr. Bankole stated.

He applauded participants at the event for showing resilience and doggedness exhibited by attending the Colloquium, in spite the economic downturn currently experienced globally. "This is a real commitment to professionalism, as health professionals on one side, and indeed, humanity on the other side", he added.

Guest Speaker at the investiture, while making a paper presentation, said universal health coverage is a fundamental principle aimed at ensuring access to health care for all individuals without financial hardship.

Rukayya Wamakko is also the Acting Executive Secretary, FCT Primary Health Care Board added that the UHC encompasses all component of the health system, from health promotion to disease prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. "It is also critical in achieving sustainable development goals in Africa", she said.

The Sokoto State born master trainer on family planning, posited that advocacy, communication and social mobilisation remain key to improve primary healthcare delivery to communities.

Dr Aminu Zaro Sani said there are pockets of persons that don't allow their wards at the community level to get access to vaccination. According to him, this could be caused by lack of awareness.

He also added that advocacy, sensitisation of communities must be made to ensure that they understand that the essence of giving out immunisation/vaccination is to build the health immunity. "The more a child is vaccinated, the more immune the child will be to diseases", he

said.

The African Institute of Public Health Professionals' is a continental assembly of public health professionals, first registered in Ghana and also its presence in Uganda, Rwanda, Egypt, Ethiopia and Liberia.

The Institute is focused on training and is involved in training of African health professionals. One of such trainings was held with the World Health Organisation, funded by its African head office in Brazzaville, Dr Congo. It drew facilitators from different parts of the African continent.

UNGA 2024: Women Affairs Minister Advocates Change To Ensure Gender Equality



Nigeria's Women Affairs Minister, Uju Kennedy-Ohaneye has called for an urgent change in global action to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment, in line with contemporary realities.

Speaking of Nigeria's commitment to the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, Kennedy-Ohaneye expressed optimism that by championing this change in global action plan, Nigeria would have inspired collective action and collaboration among nations, thus ensuring tangible progress in the gender affairs.

The Nigerian Minister revealed these at the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA:2024) in New York, US, and made through a statement issued by the Head,

Information and Public Relations, Mrs. Grace Njoku, on Wednesday 25th September, 2024.

According to the statement, this marks a significant step in Nigeria's commitment to advancing women's rights and promoting a more inclusive global community.

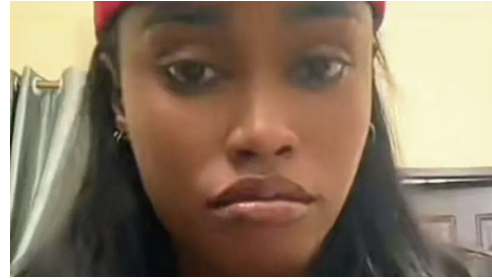
"Without a change in the action plan to reflect current realities affecting women, especially across the African Continent, there can be no meaningful impact in their lives", the statement read, quoting the Minister.

"We need to start achieving something. How can we do this? By changing the action plan so that the former narrative used in improving the lives of women globally in the past can now reflect the current realities with a focus on who we are and what we can benefit from, particularly in areas like empowerment and skill acquisition for women to boost their economic status and relevance in the society, she said.

The Minister acknowledged the support of the international community in improving the lives of the feminine gender, especially through advocacies and deployment of other mechanisms. However, she observed that for the average hardworking and resilient Nigerian woman, what is needed is a boost that can come in the form of empowerment through funds to upscale small scale ventures, and in the provision of equipment for skill acquisition, among others.

Key areas of focus in the change of narratives, she advocated, include promoting equal opportunities and rights for women and girls, enhancing women's participation in politics, economy, and society as well as fostering a culture of inclusivity and representation.

Rape of Female Soldier Prompts Women Affairs Minister to Discuss With Army Chief



The rape of a female Nigerian soldier has prompted the Minister of Women Affairs to have discussions with Nigeria's Army Chief.

The female soldier was sacked by the Nigerian military after she accused some senior officers of rape and sexual harassment. She released a video condemning her treatment.

Her allegations caused widespread outrage in the country.

Ex-private Ruth Ogunleye made the allegations via her TikTok account in January, saying she had suffered immensely as a result of her ordeal at the hands of a general and two colonels.

She was dismissed by the army after an investigation. The army said the soldier had been discharged on medical grounds, as she suffers from a condition that makes her vulnerable, without giving further details.

Ms Ogunleye has now released a second video on TikTok, in which she calls for the investigation to be made public and describes how she was raped and given an injection by those she accused.

"Firstly I want to thank [army spokesman] General Onyema Nwachukwu for posting me on all social media platforms, newspapers, it shows how powerful I am", the BBC quotes her.

"January 9th 2024, I came on social media to complain of how I was harassed, of how I was raped and how I was injected and put inside a casket.

"How I had a gun pointed at me, was handcuffed and kept inside an office for some days.

"I want to beg the Nigerian army to post the outcome of the investigation on all social media platforms, so that the world would know what transpired," she noted.

The outcome of the investigation was revealed by Gen Nwachukwu on Tuesday evening.

"Upon receipt of her complaint, the Nigerian Army referred the matter to the Military Police for a thorough investigation. The investigation concluded that Colonel I.B Abdulkareem did not commit the alleged offences," he said.

He said Ms Ogunleye had been discharged after refusing to get medical treatment from either the National Hospital in the capital, Abuja, or the Nigerian Army.

He went on to accuse her of propagating "false narratives against Colonel Abdulkareem and other senior officers [and] using online platforms to engage in cyberbullying and defamation".

However, women's rights activists have called for an independent investigation.

"The army is known for not wanting to wash its dirty linen in public," Hadiza Ado, founder of Women and Children Initiative, said while speaking with the BBC.

"If the army investigation are saying she had a medical condition which affects her, then for how long was she in the service with that condition, why coming out to say it now that she was dismissed?" she asked.

Nigerian Prison Officials Suspended Over Celebrity Bribery Claims



Brobrisky.

Two Nigerian prison officials have been suspended over bribery allegations regarding controversial transgender celebrity Brobrisky.

It follows claims by social media influencer Martins Otse, widely known as VeryDarkMan, that some anti-corruption officials were bribed to drop money laundering charges against Brobrisky. She has dismissed the bribery claim.

Brobrisky, whose real name is Idris Okuneye, was released from prison last month after serving a six-month sentence for abusing naira, the local currency. But a court dismissed money laundering charges.

Nigeria was last year ranked 145 out of 180 countries in the Transparency International's perceptions of corruption index, with bribery named more prevalent in government offices.

The Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have ordered investigations into a viral video, which Brobrisky has called "false", allegedly linking her to the bribery allegation.

In the leaked video, someone who is purported to be Brobrisky is heard alleging that she paid \$9,000 (£7,000) to EFCC officials to have the money laundering charges dropped.

It was also alleged that she paid some millions of naira to secure a private apartment near the prison where she allegedly served her jail term.

Brobrisky, who has nearly five million followers

on Instagram, denied the allegations in an Instagram post.

"I didn't pay any EFCC money, which is a very big lie. I served my term in full, and I came out. Discard any false information."

In a statement on Thursday, the Civil Defence, Correctional, Fire, and Immigration Services Board, said it suspended two prison officers linked to the bribery allegations, which have sparked widespread condemnation in the country.

Two other senior prison officials were also suspended over separate accusations.

"The suspension of these officers is to allow for further investigation on the various allegations while assuring that the outcome would be made public when concluded," the statement added.

Taking A Leap Of Faith Pays - Ruger



If Ruger has learnt one thing this year, it's that taking a leap of faith pays off. Parting ways with his old record label to form his own was an eye-opening experience for the 24-year-old Nigerian singer.

"I understand the business more now," he says, admitting "it's more stressful" but that the newfound freedom has also granted Ruger a deeper sense of control. "I feel more enlightened and more at peace," he tells me.

As we speak, the star is preparing for his first headline show in London.

He is bubbly, engaging and relaxed as he explains the role Britain's capital city plays in shaping Afrobeats music on the global stage.

"If your song is big here, it is big around the world," he says. Ruger's sound sets him apart due to his distinctive use of Jamaican Patois and his refusal to repeat melodies, giving each song a fresh energy.

"That's why you know a Ruger song when you hear a Ruger song," he explains. "My delivery is different, my lyricism is different."

In the current landscape of African music he has mastered the art of fusion.

Born and raised in Nigeria's hectic metropolis Lagos, Ruger's music pays homage to his African roots and global influences. The Jamaican artists he grew up listening to - Chronixx, Kranium, Popcaan, Gyptian, and Buju Banton - were a key influence on his unique blend of dancehall and Afrobeats.

Asiwaju remains his most significant hit to date. The infectious song peaked at number two on the UK Afrobeats chart and boasts over 127 million streams on Spotify, along with 113 million YouTube views.

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Ruger says the shift from recording "normal Afrobeats" was organic rather than strategic, and happened two years ago while working on his track Warning in the studio with Nigerian producer KukBeatz.

"I told him: 'I think I'm going to stick with this sound. There is nobody actually killing

this sound the way I just did it now. I think I want to make more songs like this. Using Patois and blending it with Afrobeats."

With 2.5 million Instagram followers, over four million monthly Spotify listeners, and multiple chart-topping hits under his belt, Ruger's rise in the music industry since starting out just five years ago is undeniable.

Reflecting on his influence, Ruger says emerging artists are taking note of the unique energy he brings to the scene.

"I feel like everybody that is coming up, is also looking like the way I'm doing it and they're learning from me," he says.

"I'm creating another path... I am also doing my own thing." Known for his bright pink hair and pirate-esque eye patch, Ruger emphasises that individuality is crucial for success.

He urges new artists to identify something that is distinctive about their music and "hold on to it" if they want to elevate their brand.

Another lesson he has learnt is about conflict. A highly-publicised online beef with fellow Nigerian singer BNXN (formerly Buju) kept both singers in the headlines in recent years.

The spat was fuelled by fans comparing the two artists and came to a head when the pair competed for a prize at the Headies, a Nigerian music award show, in 2022, which was ultimately won by BXBN.

But the former rivals eventually called a truce and collaborated on the joint album "RnB", released earlier this year. "We grow,

you understand," Ruger tells me. "We grow and we elevate together. That's the most important thing."

Looking back now, it seems clear to him that the pair were destined to make great music together, regardless of that early rivalry.

More collaborations are on Ruger's mind now. On his wishlist are global superstars Doja Cat, Future and - above all - Adele.

"Just her soft voice and mine doing something amazing. I trust it to be mad!"

So what does Ruger make of the trend of singers from outside the continent tapping into the "African sound"?

As the Afrobeats genre expands globally, even earning its own category at the Grammys and MTV VMAs, it's the lack of substance behind certain songs that worries Ruger.

"Some people just get into the studio and just do some things, and because there's money to push, they push it - and the world is forced to like it. "That's where I feel like the dilution comes from."

Despite the pressures of an evolving industry, Ruger remains committed to staying true to his craft. "Times change," he says. "I feel like you can either change with the time or do whatever you like."

For now, though, the boundary-breaking artist is focused on the present and giving the best to his fans. "I feel blessed... This is my first headline show in London, it's long overdue."

The BBC.

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