IMO ECONOMY DIGEST
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Imo Economy:
The Hidden Potentials



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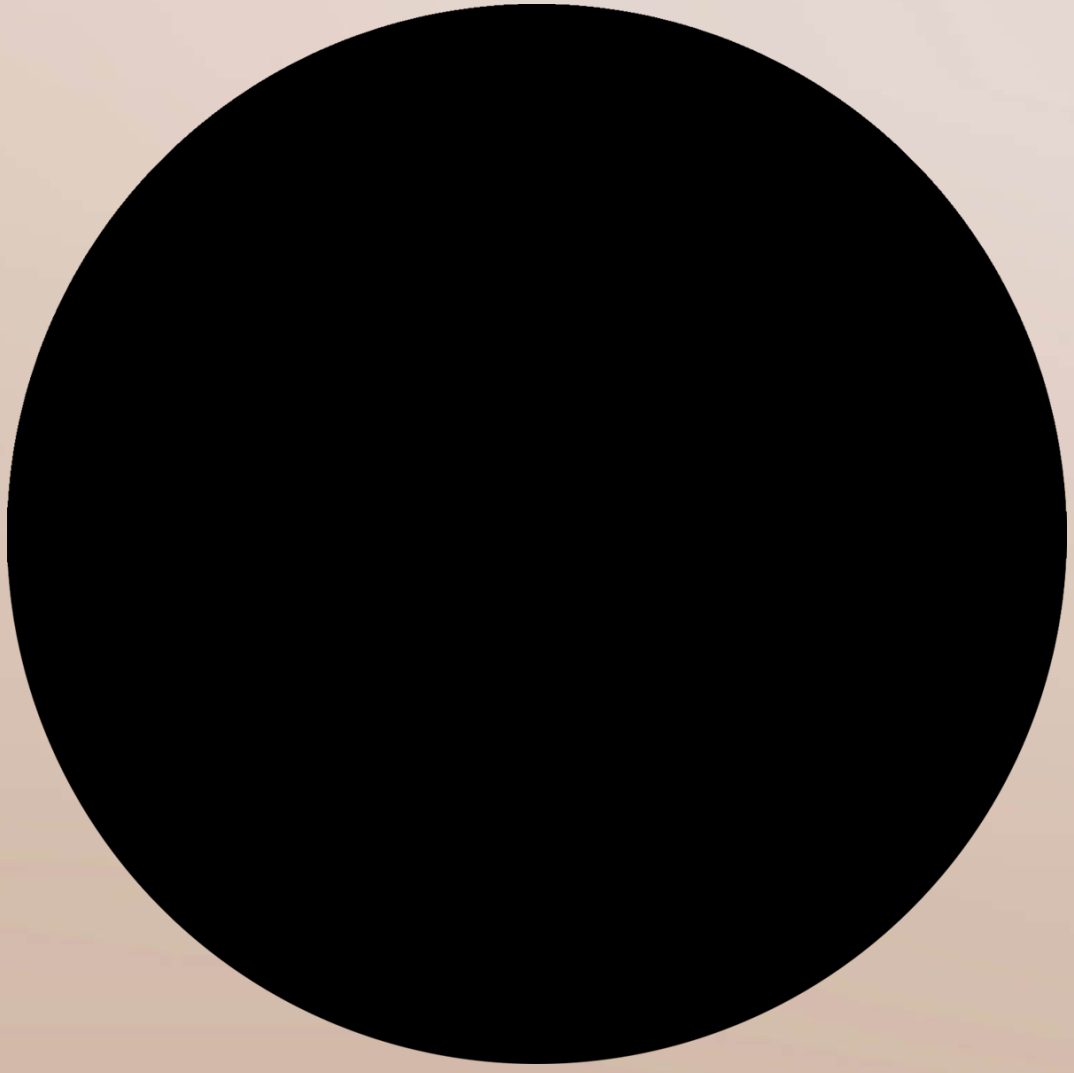





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Editorial Team

Professor Kenneth Amaeshi
Editor-in-Chief

Ikechukwu Odigbo
Chinelo Otiji
Adaeze Ashaheme
Research Analysts

Jovita Agwu
Prince Eze Ugochukwu
Business Development Correspondents

Editorial Advisors
Honorable Declan Emelumba
Honorable Dr Doris Anite Uzoka
Professor Bennet Chima Nwanguma
Sir MacDonald Ebere, PhD
Dr. Bola Adigun

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All correspondence to:
The Editor-in-Chief
Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government,
Governor's Office, Owerri.



Governor's Message

A common assumption for some people who are not very conversant with Imo State, is that Imo is a civil service State. This implies that the civil service is the mainstay of the state's economy. Whilst the civil service tag signals the endowment of an extraordinary human capital, with requisite skills for deployment in manufacturing, and economic development, what distant observers often do not know is that Imo State has in its bowels, quantum of crude oil and gas deposits and boasts of huge minerals and agricultural produce, as well as other investment opportunities, which are all critical for the development of the State.

The Digest highlights other opportunities from tourism, modular refineries, to agribusiness and renewable energy. In short, the Digest is a one stop information hub that will offer readers what they need.

In the bid to further harness these opportunities for the sustainable development of Imo State and at the same time showcase them to the world, my administration at inception decided to reengineer the economy of the state through the faithful implementation of our Prosperity Agenda encapsulated in the 3Rs of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Recovery.

In the last two years, a lot has been done to fortify the economy and make it self-reliant, and we are making good progress in this direction. However, since many local and global economic actors may not actually be aware of the investment potentials of Imo State and what volume of work we have done and are doing to make the State their preferred investment location, I tasked my economic team to design and implement a communication strategy for the many investment opportunities in the State. This positive challenge has given rise to the ***Imo Economy Digest*** - a quarterly publication, which will not only elucidate our efforts to build a strong economy but also expose investors to the hitherto hidden investment potentials in the State.

I therefore see this maiden edition of the ***Imo Economy Digest*** as a bold statement, captured in lucid and graphic details, on what Imo State can indeed offer the world. Ever conscious of the fact that no economic development can thrive without basic infrastructure like roads and power, we have, in the last two years, wrought a massive infrastructure revolution that has made Imo State an attractive investment destination.

The Digest highlights other opportunities from tourism, modular refineries, to agribusiness and renewable energy. In short, the Digest is a one stop information hub that will offer readers what they need.

I sincerely commend the ***Imo Economy Digest*** editorial team led by Professor Kenneth Amaeshi, the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government and Chair in Sustainable Finance and Governance at the European University Institute for this maiden edition of the Digest. I, therefore, highly recommend it to the public, especially potential investors and our development partners, and look forward to a very constructive engagement with the Digest.

Sen Hope Uzodimma
Governor, Imo State

Imo Economy: **The Best Kept Secret**

We have the pleasure to present to you the maiden edition of the ***Imo Economy Digest,*** a quarterly publication from the office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government. The theme of this edition is 'Economic Opportunities in Imo State'. The aim of this edition is to beam the searchlight inwards and showcase some of the abundant economic opportunities in Imo State for everyone to see. Some of these opportunities are apparent, some are not. The idea is to stimulate new business start-ups, consolidate existing ones, attract indigenous and foreign investors, create jobs, grow wealth and improve on the general economic wellbeing of the Imo people. Essentially, we want to unleash an economic revolution in Imo State. The Digest is designed to cater for both people living in Imo State and those outside.

What do we mean by economic opportunities? There are two ways to explain this. First, within Imo State, some of the regular economic activities that our people engage in are still largely under-developed. Either for lack of information or skill or both and some businesses remain under-developed. In other words, the full potential of these businesses are far from realized. Therefore, the Digest calls to attention, the fact that a lot of economic benefits can still be maximized from these businesses if our people get improved access to information, skills, finance et cetera and are genuinely willing to invest more time and energy into them. There is still a lot of spaces upwards.

Take for instance ICT, tourism and entertainment. Although currently not the mainstay of the Imo economy, tourism and entertainment are cash cows waiting to be milked, particularly because of the huge number of value-chains and the spiraling economic benefits that come with them. Therefore, when we say, for instance, that there is abundant economic opportunity in ICT, tourism and entertainment, we are arguing that there is a good chance for advancement, expansion and consolidation of those sectors. Both global and local trends suggest that these sectors have huge potentials that are beckoning on everybody to invest and reap abundant rewards. The time is now.

Secondly, there are untapped resources that can be economically beneficial to those who explore them, or better put those who first explore them. For instance, in Imo State today, almost all businesses and homes have a standby generator for electricity. This is a pointer to a huge economic opportunity. But while handicrafts, trading of various types and the regular businesses of the people proliferate, not many persons might consider making a business out of supplying non-oil-dependent and cleaner sources of electric energy to people in exchange for money. Therefore, the Digest seeks to awaken the attention of entrepreneurs among us to these gaping opportunities and therefore invite them to take the necessary steps to create more wealth in their communities and by extension, the larger state...

Whether understood in the first or the second vein, that is, as expansion of already existing efforts or commencement of fresh initiatives, all economic activities tend to have a knock-on multiplier effect that benefits everybody through value-chain expansion for service providers, job creation for the youths, availability of disposable income, increase in consumption, improvement in tax revenues for government, growth in economic output and improvement in the general wellbeing of the people. With the proliferation of new economic activity stimulated by these businesses – large or small, old or new – a society stands a better chance of being positively impacted.

Therefore, we believe that Imo State holds great potential to become an acclaimed economic powerhouse in the south-eastern region and wish to see more of these activities spring forth in response to this growing and concerted awareness of these opportunities. This represents a great opportunity ignite economic revolution in the State. The Digest is designed to point out the economic opportunities, openings and possibilities around us, inviting us to take advantage of them. It is our firm conviction that those who seriously engage with the content and suggestions of this publication will find in them great economic opportunities capable of transforming their fortunes in a significant way. There are twelve rich articles in this edition covering the very diverse sectors of the economy including energy, agriculture, ICT, finance, hospitality, entertainment and tourism.

Once again, welcome and happy reading.

Editorial Team
(Imo Economy Digest)



Conversation with
THE DEPUTY GOVERNOR OF IMO STATE, PROFESSOR PLACID NJOKU

"Imo State is blessed with many opportunities and abundant resources with untapped potentials that her citizens can leverage on."

- Prof. Placid Njoku, the Deputy Governor, Imo State

QUESTION: *Your Excellency, you chaired the interface with the host communities for the Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zone which Imo State is one of the seven beneficiaries. Can you explain what the project is all about, and how it will impact the host communities and Imo State in general?*

ANSWER: ***The Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zone [SAPZ], project is a special project of the African Development Bank (AfDB) that aims to expand agricultural processing in Nigeria into exportation. The essence is to enhance the agricultural value chain from raw (primary products), into finished products. Here, when we produce yams we sell them as tubers, we produce tomatoes we sell them as fruits - the project is therefore to encourage processing of agricultural products. For this project, the AfDB has made funds available to support seven pilot states in Nigeria and fortunately, Imo state is one of them.***

In Imo, we have taken this project very seriously and sourced appropriate locations for it – and the project is primarily to increase the production and processing of livestock. The livestock that are of importance to us in Imo state are poultry, pigs, sheep, and goats. We are also considering milk production through the importation of exotic breeds of cattle with very high milk yielding capacity. For example, our local cattle produce between one and two litres of milk a day compared to exotic breeds which can produce up to 30 litres of milk daily. We are therefore going to use foreign breeds as a way to boost commercial milk production. You cannot really engage in commercial milk production with the local poor yielding breeds.

One of the things you cannot do with the exotic or foreign breed is to raise them on free range grazing, that is to roam around and source food by themself. But the story went around that we are trying to bring RUGA (Ru-

ral Grazing Area) to Imo State. The exotic breeds are not animals that can trek long distances from one place to another. They are animals that you keep penned in barns where they are fed and managed so that the feed can transform essentially into milk.

That indeed was a local misunderstanding about the project, but I must inform you that the Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones Program (SAPZ) is one of the best projects that the AfDB has brought to Nigeria, and Imo state is very keen on engaging in the project to make the best of it. Part of the anticipated benefits is modern agricultural production and processing systems. The value chain will not only promote local employment and improved consumption but also exportation of finished products across Nigeria and to the international market. Fortunately, Imo State has an international cargo airport – SAPZ project may be the impetus that will drive exportation from our airport. So, it is a project with great potential. It will increase the quality of food that we produce and consume here, it will also enhance processing which in turn will stimulate exportation of our food. Siting the project in Imo state situates Imo as a hub for the Southeast, which invariably makes it a Centre. It is anticipated that contiguous states will buy into the project and bring their own produce for processing. It is therefore a very important project to us and one that we will certainly like to take full advantage of.

QUESTIONS: *Last year, you supervised the distribution of farm inputs to Imo farmers for increased food production. Are we to expect the same this year and what category of farmers are beneficiaries? Are we reaching out to actual farmers?*





They are animals that you keep penned in barns where they are fed and managed so that the feed can transform essentially into milk.

ANSWERS: *Basically, as a government, we have a responsibility to ensure that our farmers are very active - and last year, quite a number of inputs were given to farmers. For example, fertilizers were distributed to farmers and His Excellency, the Governor was very generous and ensured that fertilizers that were distributed across the state last year were given free of charge to the farmers.*

"What is required is for us to look inwards to identify our major local resources of comparative advantage and develop them to boost the economy of the state"

- Prof. Placid Njoku, Deputy Governor, Imo State.



This had a significant impact on food production even though there were quite a number of challenges due to insecurity and so on. Thankfully, people who got the fertilizer were able to make maximum yield and harvest from their crops. We appreciate the fact that His Excellency has worked very hard to contain the issues of herdsmen killings or destroying crops of our farmers. This was brought to a zero point so a lot of our farmers were able to go into the field last year. As resources are provided, we will also repeat the same thing this year.

Agriculture has to be seen as a commercial business. People in agriculture do not necessarily expect handouts. They expect the best inputs and they are prepared to pay for the best inputs; they are also prepared to make efforts to ensure that their inputs are properly nurtured so that they can get the highest production. They however need two more critical things – extension workers and off-takers. Extension workers are people who bring the latest technologies to farmers and educate farmers on proper crop planting and management methods, how to take advantage of the rainy season to plant in good time as well as when and how to harvest. Then the second thing they need is off-takers - those who can buy up their products. It is known today that farmers prefer to sell their agricultural products themselves other than take it through agents or a board. They prefer to go to the open market and sell their products so that they can get the maximum returns from it. What a government like ours can concentrate on is providing storage facilities for such products, so that they can sell their products when the price is sufficiently high in the market.

QUESTION: *Prior to the commissioning of the Acharaubo Farm Estate at Emekuku, you made repeated visits. You talked about bringing back dead and decayed systems in the agricultural sector. What do we expect going forward even as the Songhai farms at Nekede is still not functioning optimally?*

ANSWER: *Acharaubo is a great example of what can be done by a serious government. Regrettably, the preceding governments in Imo State did not care much about agriculture. Acharaubo, Avutu Poultry, and Songhai used to be very major projects that produced a lot of food which the state consumed. But unfortunately, some of the previous governments abandoned these projects and so those places turned into forests. When we visited some of them initially, we just saw tracks where there used to be tarred roads leading to farm units. The same as Avutu Poultry Farm. When we assumed office, we saw an opportunity to take advantage of the Federal Government National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA). We brought NALDA in, and worked with them to re-design the project at Acharaubo, where trained farm hands raised chickens, pigs, and goats. What used to be a forest before is now revived and now you can see a lot of agricultural activities going on there. However, it is an ongoing project, and we will keep improving as we progress. I am quite happy that Mr. President, ably represented by His Excellency, the Governor of Imo state commissioned that project.*

Speaking about Songhai farms in Nekede, this is one of many efforts the government made in the past to bring sustainable agriculture to Imo state. Unfortunately, ensuing administrations did not handle that project well and it just decayed and degenerated. Nobody did anything. What we are

doing right now is that we are reconsidering the entire area of Songhai.

Songhai farms was initiated by an Imo son, Rev. Fr. Engr. Godfrey Nzamoju in Benin Republic who tried to replicate it all over Nigeria and the Songhai farms in Imo was one of such efforts. Unfortunately, all that money was wasted. When we came to take inventory, there was hardly any equipment; all we saw were empty and dilapidated blocks of buildings. There was essentially nothing going on there. Like we have done in Acharaubo, we will reactivate and redesign the place for optimal production, identify the specific products we want to produce there, and get it going like Acharaubo.

QUESTION: *You headed the Committee to fast-track activities of the Rural Access Mobility Projects (RAMP) What is the outcome so far?*

ANSWER: *RAMP is the Rural Access Mobility Project. It is a World Bank project that Imo State is benefitting from. We have had a number of administrations since its inception. It started with the Ohakim administration, which was followed by Okorocha and Ihedioha administrations. On assumption of office, I was given the responsibility to go round and confirm the status of work done on all the roads. There are about 88 roads in this project with a total length of over 380 kilometers. On inspection, we found that not more than 2% of real work had been done on these projects over several years - and quite a bit of money had already been spent on the projects. We then defined the specific status of each of the roads and His Excellency, the Governor invited the contractors who were on the roads and asked them to go back to site. They were very hesitant because they complained about inflation and the attendant cost of materials. His Excellency reiterated that the project, although initially funded by the World Bank, will be refunded by the Imo State government eventually and so insisted that they must return to site. Eventually, they returned and in the last couple of months, construction work has been ongoing at many of these sites. The state government is very keen on completing those roads because if we can complete them, added to the several roads that are under construction, you will see a major road transformation in the state. We believe that opening up rural access roads will bring good economy to the rural areas and to the whole state. This is why we are putting serious effort on road construction.*

QUESTION: *We now have a new University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences in Umuagwo. We hope that our graduates will not be mere paper tigers but adequately trained and nationally competitive. How can the university be an engine room for real growth in the agricultural sector?*

ANSWER: *I think one of the most exciting and in fact important things His Excellency, the Governor has done in Imo State is actually to bring that university to life. It is an institution that has great transformative capacity. What that university is*

> *Acharaubo, Avutu Poultry, and Songhai used to be very major projects that produced a lot of food which the state consumed.*





For the Environmental component of the University, it will look at the different components of the environment of Imo State, and conduct appropriate research, for example on gas flaring, its effects on the trees, farmlands, rivers, and on the quality of air that we breathe...

going to do is to concentrate on specific sectors of the economy and ensure that Imo state can get maximum benefits from those sectors.

The University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences is a specialized university - its training will be in an applied manner - it is not just teaching people to know things, but also to be able to do things. They teach you to know things and how to do those things.

The Tripartite functions of a university are to teach, to research and to do extensions. For a University of Agriculture, training is the aspect that makes it different and specialized. You train the students to gain skills to enable them to establish their own enterprises. A University of Agriculture teaches the basic sciences and requirements to produce crops and livestock; secondly, it trains students on how to actually go into practical crop and livestock production using best practices; thirdly, it conducts research on various aspects of agriculture, such as on the quality of soil that we have and what we can do to remediate identified deficiencies; and fourthly, it conducts extension, so that trained students can now go out and educate farmers on how to do farming by applying best practices. From research, the University will be able to develop the best kinds of seeds appropriate for our soil; it will know the quality of our soil and proffer the kind of nutrients or fertilizer we need to put in our soil, and most importantly determine and train in the necessary skills to enable proper planting, growing, harvesting, storage and processing of the products. This way, when the students graduate, they become not only educated farmers, but agripreneurs or agricultural entrepreneurs.

For the Environmental component of the University, it will look at the different components of the environment of Imo State, and conduct appropriate research, for example on gas flaring, its effects on the trees, farmlands, rivers, and on the quality of air that we breathe, how it affects the growth cycle of our crops, and productivity of our crops. How do we remediate water pollution and many more environmentally related challenges? So, the University will produce skills and methodologies that will be deployed to bring about a better and cleaner environment.

QUESTION: *What are the potentials and opportunities in the Imo economy?*

ANSWER: ***Imo State is a very rich state. Rich, not yet in terms of money, but in opportunities and resources. There is hardly anything you want to do in Imo State that you cannot do. Imo State can leverage its top quality manpower, agriculture, medium and small-scale industries, large scale industries, oil and gas, mass production of any product. What the state requires is some identification of the key products where we have major comparative advantage in terms of raw materials and access to markets. And these things we can develop. There are lots of raw materials in the state that we can actually concentrate on and make the best of them. If we take for example, the palm oil, and we want to call this state the palm oil state of Nigeria, we can have the best quality oil palm trees across this State that can bring us more revenue than oil and gas. And we don't need to have 50,000 hectares of oil palm plantations in a place. All we need to do is encourage every family to plant some oil palm trees, say 15 trees, and we can have 100,000 hectares. All government needs to do is produce seedlings of oil palms, best quality oil palms and sell them to families and communities. The palm oil which we produce is going into so many products across the world.***

Imo State is rich. And in every sector, if we dig in consciously, we can take advantage of the massive opportunities that abound in our State!

Congratulations

SIR MACDONALD EBERE (Ph.D)

IMO STATE APC CHAIRMAN



Hon. MACDONALD KELECHI EBERE (Ph.D)
STATE CHAIRMAN APC, IMO STATE

Dear Maco, we, your classmates at St. Peter Claver seminary, Okpala (Class of 83-88), celebrate with you on your numerous achievements

Congratulations to you and your family on your recent elevation as the Imo State Chairman of the ruling All Progressives Congress political party. This is no small feat. It is a big deal. We rejoice with you and want to formally tell Imolites how happy we are for you.

We have continued to watch you successfully build a political name for yourself. Do not rest on your laurels and our accolades. Settling for less is never in our class Alumni bloodstream/DNA. Thus, we eagerly expect more upward political trajectory from you.

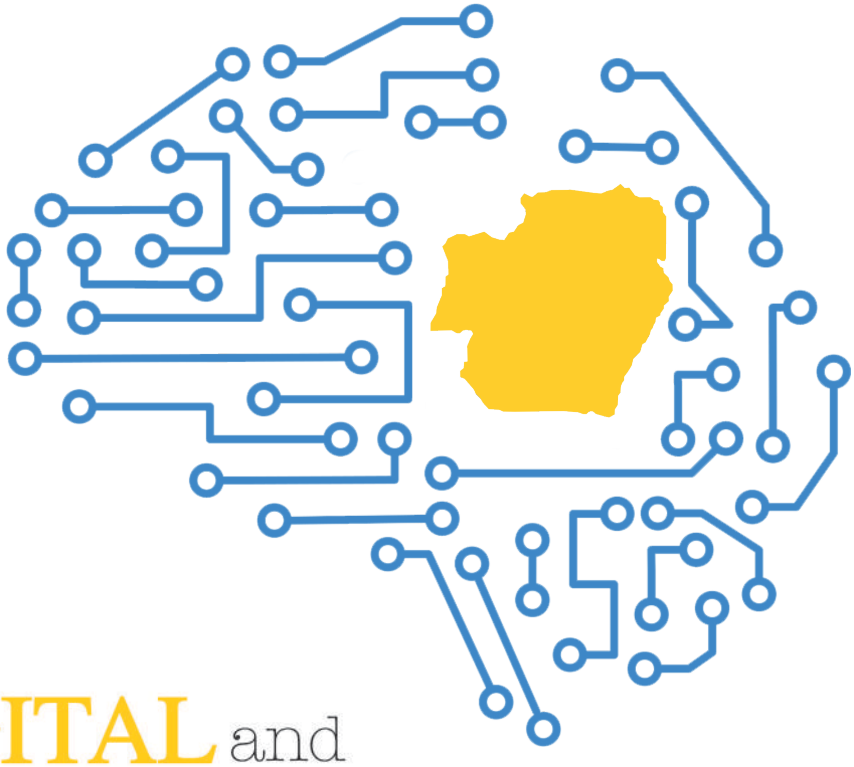
With gratitude, we acknowledge the wisdom of the Imo State Chief Executive, His Excellency, Governor Hope Uzodimma in recognizing and tapping into your leadership skills. Your notable achievements as the Mayor of Owerri Municipal Council and recent leadership at the ENTRACO, no doubt, prepared you for your current State-wide responsibility. Please be assured of our prayers as you chair your political party and expand the democratic ideals for ALL Imolites.

Congratulations *Dr. Ebere!*

CHARLES OGUIBE
(Class President)

PAUL O. AMALIRI
(Class Secretary)

On behalf of our Exco and Classmates of
St Peter Claver Seminary Okpala (Class of 83/88)



A major reason why unemployment is high in Imo State is because there are insufficient jobs for the growing youth population.

DIGITAL and Information Technology Jobs: Hidden Opportunities in Imo State

By Fr. Dr. Godswill Agbagwa

A major reason why unemployment is high in Imo State is because there are insufficient jobs for the growing youth population. One way to reduce unemployment in Imo State is to create more jobs. There are many types of jobs that can be created for Imolites, but I want to draw our attention to high paying and sustainable jobs that can be created in a short time and with minimal resources. These include digital and information technology jobs.

As the founder of a nonprofit dedicated to helping young people build great careers, cultivate a spirit of entrepreneurship, become leaders of character and embrace their roles as critical actors in building a better society, I can say that youths equipped with digital and information technology skills are not only making a living with these skills but are also creating job opportunities that are helping other youths make a living. Indeed, there are immense opportunities in the digital and information technology world, and I shall be discussing a few low hanging ones, some of which we are already exploring at our hub (www.chubng.com) in Owerri.

Digital and Information Technology Jobs

Digital and information technology jobs are in-demand today because we live in a digital age and can no longer cope without digital services. Digital and information technology jobs are also sources of decent and sustainable income. For instance, the lowest some web

designers can accept from a local client for a simple website is between N100,000.00 and N150,000.00. For an international client, the fee is between $500.00 and $1000.00 which is about N500,000.00 based on current exchange rate. A good web designer can design up to three simple websites in a month. Of course, the websites need to be maintained too and web designers charge monthly maintenance fees to keep the websites running. Do the math and tell me how many employees earn such amount of money per month in Imo state. But this is just for web designers.

Cyber security experts earn even more. An average cyber security expert in the United States earns up to $100,000.00 per annum. Many of these experts work for these US firms from the comfort of their rooms and are paid in US dollars. Data analysts earn quite high too and can work for any firm from anywhere in the world. A simple data entry expert may earn as high as $1,000.00 biweekly in the United States. This is about N500,000.00 every two weeks.

Graphic designers are making good money from home, too. An average graphic designer charges about N4,000.00 for a flier and some charge as high as N25,000.00. A good graphic designer can create up to three graphics in a day. Today, many graphic designers use smartphones to design. Video editors are in high demand, too. Video editing is a huge market and one can specialize in one or two areas and make a good living out of it. An amateur freelance video editor charges about N20,000.00 for a short video.

Digital marketers and copy writers have become core personnel in small, medium and large enterprises across the world. There is no serious business that is not on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. Politicians, schools, churches, and celebrities are also on social media. They are on these social media platforms to promote their brands. But they need digital marketers and copy writers to develop contents for them and manage their handles. Some digital marketers and copy writers are serving multiple organizations and persons from the comfort of their rooms. These clients make monthly payments to them. Small businesses pay up to N50,000.00 to copy writers to generate contents and manage their social media handles. Medium and large businesses pay even more. If a copywriter is serving ten small businesses only (and many are serving more), the monthly take home is about N500,000.00 per month.

There are immense opportunities in the digital and information technology world. Blockchain and Web 3.0 offer even more opportunities that can be explored. Coding, software and hardware development are yet other areas of digital and information technology that can be explored. The good thing about digital and

Cyber security experts earn even more. An average cyber security expert in the United States earns up to $100,000.00 per annum. Many of these experts work for these US firms from the comfort of their rooms and are paid in US dollars.



information technology jobs is that most of them have no boundaries. Unlike industrial, farming, tourism and educational jobs that may require the structural presence of these jobs in Imo State for Imolites to take advantage of them, digital jobs can meet Imolites in Imo State from any part of the world. Whether it is website designing, cyber security, data analysis or digital marketing, Imolites can do digital jobs anywhere in the world from the comfort of their homes. Digital and information technology jobs are easy to learn and do not involve lengthy training periods. Digital experts also spend very little in operational cost even though they earn more. Digital job opportunities are limitless and those who have the skills are highly in demand.

Digital and information technology jobs are easy to learn and do not involve lengthy training periods. Digital experts also spend very little in operational cost even though they earn more. Digital job opportunities are limitless and those who have the skills are highly in demand.

Creating Digital and Information Technology Jobs for Imolities:

Imo state government can take advantage of its tech savvy youth population to turn Imo State into a global digital service hub. Like the Philippines and Indians, Imo state can provide digital services to the rest of the world from Imo and here are tips on how Imo can achieve this.

1. **Training:** The good thing about digital jobs is that it only needs skills, not degrees. Once you have the skill, you have the job. Imo youths are already tech savvy. There are hundreds of digital skills that are in high demand across the globe. We have identified some of these skills and offer them to Imo youths in Owerri. Interestingly, some of these skills can be acquired in just a few months or even weeks. For the highly educated youth population in Imo state, learning these skills would be quite easy.
2. **Work tools:** There are only four main tools needed by digital experts to make money:
    - **Laptop:** The laptop is the most powerful tool that digital experts need. Sadly, most Imo youths do not have laptops and cannot afford one. To make Imo the digital hub of the world, Imo youths interested in digital services must be able to access and afford laptops. The government can work with investors to make good laptops available to Imo youths at affordable prices.
    - **Electricity:** This is the most important tool that digital experts need. Without power, digital experts cannot work. Sadly, the power challenge in Imo remains



a major hurdle. Beyond the city of Owerri, access to electricity is tough. To make Imo the digital hub of the world, Imo youths interested in digital services must be able to access uninterrupted power supply. One way to achieve this is by switching to renewable energy. At our hub in Owerri, we use solar energy and enjoy uninterrupted power supply. The government can partner with investors to explore solar alternatives for digital and information technology service providers.

- **Internet:** Without the internet, digital services are impossible. Access to the internet in Imo state is still quite challenging. Beyond Owerri, many Imolites may not have access to strong and reliable internet. To transform Imo State to a leading digital service hub, youths interested in digital services must be able to access strong and uninterrupted internet. Interestingly, new internet providers are already in Imo state. The government can work with investors to provide reliable and affordable broadband connectivity for its people.
- **Workspace:** The digital service provider needs a comfortable space to work. While young people across the world can work from the comfort of their homes, Imo youths may not be able to work from the comfort of their homes because their homes are not conducive for work. Imo youths interested in digital services must be able to access conducive workspaces.



Linkage to Local and International Jobs:

That digital jobs are available world over does not mean that Imo youths can access them. Trained youths equipped with the necessary tools must be linked to jobs by those who know where the jobs are. There are a few procedures that must be in place to enable Imo youths access global digital jobs. Unless we put these procedures in place, digital service providers in Imo may end up fighting over few digital jobs in the State. Currently, we are putting structures in place to link Imo youths to international jobs. There are many battles to fight here, including lack of trust caused by the atrocities of internet fraudsters Across the world, Nigeria is notorious for scam and internet fraud. This is discouraging people from doing business with Nigerian youths. Imolites in diaspora also have a role to play here. They can help rebuild this battered image by patronizing Imolites in the digital and information technology industry.

Conclusion

Imo state has the potential to overtake India and the Philippines as global digital hubs. These are hidden opportunities that some organizations are already exploring in the state. The government can look into these emerging opportunities as avenues to create decent and sustainable jobs for the jobless Imo youths. The government can work with investors and other stakeholders to expand the opportunities already offered in Owerri. This will be a win-win for all. For the government, this would help curb insecurity and other social vices often caused by unemployment. This would also increase income generation for the government as players in this industry can be mainstreamed into the formal sectors so they can pay their own fair share of taxes. For the private sector and the rest of us, this would also mean that we can go about our legitimate businesses without fear of insecurity. Of course, these digital and information technology experts can add significant value to our businesses and contribute to making a difference in the fortunes of the state.

(Dr. Agbagwa is a Catholic priest and a social ethicist. He is the founder of the Centre for Social Awareness, Advocacy and Ethics (CSAAE)).

SHANID
Construction

Congratulates

HIS EXCELLENCY SENATOR HOPE UZODIMMA

Governor of Imo State





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Making Agriculture
The Cornerstone of Imo Economy

By Dr. Barthy Okorochukwu (Hon. Commissioner For Agriculture, Imo State)



Agriculture is the production of crops and livestock for the sustenance of man and economic gain. It is also the processing, marketing and distribution of crops and animal products for money and food. Agriculture was the most important sector of the Nigeria economy before the discovery of oil from the stand point of sufficiency in food and fiber, rural employment and export earnings. It is the hallmark of the first stage of economic development and it held the key to rural development, poverty alleviation and overall economic development. Agriculture has the potential to replace crude oil as an alternative major economic earner for Nigeria.



AGRICULTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The role of Agriculture in development cannot be over emphasized. It contributes to industrialization, political and economic stability of any society. In the first place, it provides food for an expanding population. Both under developed, developing or even developed countries get their food from agriculture for sustenance of life and human development. If agriculture fails to meet the demand for food products, it is found to affect adversely, the growth rate of the economy. Malnutrition causes both mental and physical retardation; and poor dietary conditions affect general health. Also the industrial sector depends on agriculture for raw materials. It is the backbone of an economy which provides the basic ingredients to mankind and raw material for industrialization. Again, it provides employment to a greater proportion of the entire population especially our rural dwellers, and offers them the surest route to overcome chronic poverty. More importantly, it provides foreign exchange earnings from commodity exports. It contributes in fostering economic advancement by creating effective demands even during depressions and health pandemics like COVID-19. The agricultural sector has the potential to offset the negative effect of negative growth in an economy.

Agriculture/agribusinesses constitute great opportunity for to enterprising Imolites / Nigerians to become essential role player in the food chains in the State and country.

This probably explains why the Governor of Imo State His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma is laying a lot of emphasis on agriculture. His recent decisions and activities point in this direction. He has proved his commitment to agriculture by the training and empowering our youths in agriculture, giving fertilizer to Imo farmers free of charge, reviving and commissioning Achara Ubo Farm, establishing 136 hectares of oil palm plantation in Ngor Okpala and Adapalm and host of others.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS POTENTIALS IN IMO STATE

Whether living in the urban or rural areas, Imolites are encouraged to engage in agriculture at different levels. The opportunities are enormous:

- People can still plant some crops in small or vertical containers as nurseries for the burgeoning market or through it to grow food for personal needs and for sale in the local market
- People can also plant a variety of vegetables around their homes and harvest them to eat or to sell
- People can take advantage of the fertile land and grow economic trees around their home for personal consumption and for the open market
- One can raise animals or manufacture animal feeds for sale; there is always a ready market for this.

- Soybeans and cloves give abundant yield in most part of Imo State, so those who have enough space can grow it in commercial quantities.
- One plot of land or equivalent of a space of 50 x 100 meters can serve for rearing of cattle or other animals for the production or meat, dairy products like milk, yoghurt or cheese
- Raising poultry is becoming fashionable in homes, but it is important for people to understand that it is beneficial to them to do more. It doesn't require much capital, space or infrastructure.
- In like manner people can try their hands in fish farming, snail farming, bee-keeping/ honey production or even in raising rabbits; all for food and sales. Bee wax can be sold to candle makers or for related needs.
- Soy is another popular substance that is in high demand because it is consumed in large quantities and can be used in a variety of different products. So people should grow processes and sell it for money and food.



AGRIBUSINESS POTENTIAL IN IMO STATE AND FINANCE CHALLENGES

As we have seen, agriculture presents a big opportunity for our people. We have seen the various value chains and demand structures into which our efforts can fit in for big returns, no matter how small we think the effort is. Enterprising Imolites and Nigerians in general can benefit from the opportunities in the agricultural sector and agribusinesses in Imo state. Agriculture/agribusinesses constitute great opportunity for to enterprising Imolites / Nigerians to become essential role player in the food chains in the State and country. However there is urgent need to move in the direction of large scale and fully commercial farming, and related agribusinesses like processing and marketing as the main engine of economic growth in Imo State.

To do this, funds needs to be available to farmers and entrepreneurs. Investors in agriculture and agribusinesses will benefit by coming into Imo to scale up agricultural activities. Financial institutions should create products that can drive agricultural productivity and the development of agribusinesses in Imo state to help create jobs, food, wealth etc. The state needs to partner with investors (Local and Foreign) to fully harness the agricultural potentials in the state especially in the areas of production of crops where it is believed that the state has comparative advantage. Other areas are the installation of processing machines, value-adding products-creation etc. and so on. The finance sector has a key role to play to improve agricultural productivity and stimulate economic growth and bring about poverty reduction.

PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATION IN AGEICULTURE AND AGRIBUSINESS

The private sector in Nigeria can play a crucial role in developing agriculture and agribusinesses. They can drive agricultural research, invention, innovation, value utilization etc. They can also work hand in hand with government for the development of agriculture and agribusinesses. The state relies on dynamic and innovative private/public partnership between producers, processors, marketers, financiers and Government to achieve agricultural transformation. This will spur industrial development and raise incomes for producers, processors, marketers and the state at large. Trending globally is the Public-Private- Partnership (PPP) in which governments engages the public in working partnership towards food sufficiency. Global





Agricultural development is a must for the economic development. It has proven to be one of the most stable and essential sectors of the economy. Agricultural progress is essential to provide food for growing non-agricultural labour force, raw materials for industrial production and tax revenue for government work...

private spending on agricultural by food industries rose from $5.1billion in 1990 to $15.6billion in 2014. Private investment accelerated as agricultural commodity prices began to rise in 2003. Although the companies that account for most agricultural spending are based in developed countries, their technologies have considerable and growing importance for developing countries.

BARRIERS TO AGRICULURE AND AGRIBUSINESS IN IMO STATE

Imo state is facing some teething constraints in the agricultural sector.

- Dominance of subsistence and small-scale framers with abysmally low output per farmer relative to effort.
- Unwillingness of youths to go into agriculture. Instead they migrate to urban centre in search of white-collar jobs.
- Limited facilities for storage of their produce and lack of processing equipment for value-adding.
- Poor farm mechanization
- High cost of farm inputs
- Land tenure system which is restrictive

Other significant barriers to agribusiness include startup capital, limited experience with farming, lack of knowledge about business planning, discrimination, student loans, access to markets, affordable housing, affordable healthcare, labor, climate change, farm policies, and need for off-farm income.

Agricultural development is a must for the economic development. It has proven to be one of the most stable and essential sectors of the economy. Agricultural progress is essential to provide food for growing non-agricultural labour force, raw materials for industrial production and tax revenue for government work, export to earn foreign exchange and to provide a growing market for domestic manufactures. It will be rational and appropriate to place greater emphasis on further development of the agricultural sector for an overall economic development and gain. The normal projection and saying of "No food, no Nation" details the nexus in the value of agriculture in the nation.

(Dr. Okorochukwu is the Honorable Commissioner for Agriculture in Imo State. He is also an obstetrician and a gynecologist at the Federal Medical Center in Owerri).



The Dubai In Imo State

By Ikem Okuhu

For many Nigerians that have mostly encountered the world through the mirrors of literature and the picturesque narrations of those that have trotted the globe, Dubai might as well be a country in the Middle East created by God with streets and skylines pouring forth the Biblical milk and honey. If you tell many of these people that Dubai, unarguably the most discussed city in the world today, is just one city in a country called the United Arab Emirates, a lot would doubt you until you go through the argumentative difficulty of proving otherwise.

Dubai might as well be a country in the Middle East created by God with streets and skylines pouring forth the Biblical milk and honey.

Within the vast context of nation marketing, Dubai has scored unequalled success in city branding and appeared to have hewn its own destiny separate from the stone tablets of the other six emirates that constitute the United Arab Emirates. For a city that is less than 40 years in its modern development, Dubai has drawn the world's attention.

A study by Mastercard ranked this city as the fourth most visited destination in the world, with more than 17 million international overnight visitors in 2019 alone. With beautiful historically remarkable buildings sprouting luxuriantly from the desert-city, Dubai has become the favourable tourism, shopping and events destination in the world, quietly taking from the West epochal events like Air Shows, Car Racing, Golf and such A-list events.

In a sentence, Dubai built a haven for the world and through it, a new economy for itself and its people. In 2017 alone, tourism contributed a whopping N23 trillion ($41 billion).

It is difficult to push for a replication of Dubai in other places, as every brand has its own distinctive DNA but a state like Imo State, rich as it is in culture, resources (human and natural) and history can carve a space for herself and record impressive upticks in economic development through intentional destination marketing.

However, the operative word here is "intentional" and that presupposes a deliberate long term planning, institutional development, creation of unique believable propositions, and implementing well-targeted marketing programmes that will lure the world outside.



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In a sentence, Dubai built a haven for the world and through it, a new economy for itself and its people. In 2017 alone, tourism contributed a whopping N23 trillion ($41 billion).

It is instructive to note that Imo State is about 6m people. Some countries and nations about the same population are Scotland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Oman, and Qatar. The population of Imo State is about 10 times the populations of Luxembourg and Malta, respectively.

Unlike many states in Nigeria with natural heritage sites as their major tourism bait, Imo State has the advantages of a set of cultures and intangible features that can be deliberately harnessed to create propositions that will resonate with people from other places. I will focus on the low hanging fruits everyone seems to be walking past as evidence:

1. Hospitality
2. Education, human resources and labour availability
3. Quasi political homogeneity
4. Heritage of economic assets



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Hospitality

This is a major economic asset that has not been adequately harnessed. The implication of not transforming the hospitable nature of the people and the environment into a managed economic resource is that all possible storytelling opportunities are lost to loose narratives from the "streets." Long before security and Unknown Gunmen became threats to life and property almost everywhere in Nigeria, Imo State, as evidenced by flight frequencies, was one of the most visited cities outside Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja. This was because people felt there was fun and leisure. With hotels almost everywhere in the state capital, Imo was attractive and safe for visitors.

This has to be leveraged to lift the state to one of the most favoured events destinations for those who want a break from the hustle and bustle of Lagos, for instance. With partnerships, major events centres can be created with capacity to host grander events than just weddings and naming ceremonies. The famous Imo Concorde Hotel can be remodeled against the mini Dubai World Trade Centre, which records an estimated annual revenue of $158 million.





We heartily felicitate with

His Excellency, Distinguished

Sen. Hope Uzodimma,

the Government and good people of Imo State on the launch of the ***Imo Economy Digest***. This is an incredible milestone and you deserve this spotlight to celebrate the moment.

We are indeed proud of you, His Excellency.

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Education, human resources and labour availability

Owerri, as a town, is host to many tertiary institutions. At the last count, there are more than five universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in this city alone. The student population is over 150,000. But what has happened is that the story of this obvious resource advantage has been left to thrive in the negative slurs of stand-up comedians.

But if government takes ownership of the rhetoric and facilitates the revamping of the schools, it will strengthen stories of availability of competent labour and opportunities for modern student hostels and setting up of manufacturing companies to cater to the needs of an overarching youth population, who themselves are ready human capital for any industry.

The student population is over 150,000. But what has happened is that the story of this obvious resource advantage has been left to thrive in the negative slurs of stand-up comedians.

Quasi-political homogeneity

Imo State and Anambra State appear to have a major advantage not found in the three other states in the South East. The centrifugal political divides splintering the other states appear to be only faintly highlighted in Imo State. As a matter of fact, if you meet the average Imo State indigene outside the state, chances are the person will first of all identify himself as an Owerri person, and will leave it there except you probe further. Divisive personalities might explain this along the lines of group dominance, but true historians may trace it to Owerri as a strong brand and melting pot of identities. An internal branding around a "One Imo" proposition will go a long way to bind the people and unite them in volunteer ownership of the state, a factor that eases the task of state managers and hired marketing people.





Heritage of economic assets

Imo State is an oil-bearing state, and although it is increasingly being told that the end of the oil era is near, a lot can still be done with the petro-dollar to set the state on the path of sustainable economic growth. In other words, the oil revenue can be strategically repurposed as the likes of Dubai and Oslo have done. Besides oil, there are other agricultural assets. The palm oil that was the mainstay of Eastern Nigeria economy until the discovery of oil in 1953, still presents great opportunities.

There are endless streams of other economic assets which can be plugged in to form the economic bases for State Branding. If Nigeria continues to lag, a state like Imo can be the example of how not to wait for the centre. Templates on city/state branding are available but it is important for the curators of the Imo brand to align with the 12 Pillars of Competitiveness, outlined by the World Economic Forum, which include: building strong and enduring institutions; massive, purposive and non-discriminatory infrastructure rollout; stable macroeconomic environment; affordable healthcare and qualitative primary education; higher education and exposure to training and capacity development; goods market efficiency; labour market efficiency; financial market development (an efficient local credit system); access to technology; sophisticated market



While all the pillars are, by the nature of the Nigerian federalism, not under the control of state governments, key factors such as infrastructure, cleaner cities, technology, education and quality manpower, and ease of business, among others are possible outcomes from efficient management of state resources.

size; sophistication of the business environment and ease of business, and the acculturation of innovation in the people. While all the pillars are, by the nature of the Nigerian federalism, not under the control of state governments, key factors such as infrastructure, cleaner cities, technology, education and quality manpower, and ease of business, among others are possible outcomes from efficient management of state resources.

Although it may seem unrealistic to expect a replication of Dubai in Imo, given the differences in systems, culture and resources, it is very possible to effect a significant uptick in destination profile with emphasis on the delivery of the requisite infrastructure relevant to the predetermined ends. The route is in delivering the values that will make the people take ownership of the brand and then coordinate the institutions of government to be in charge of the storytelling.

With foresight, dedication, discipline, and an unmatched political will, Imo State can share a lot in common with Dubai. This is a huge opportunity that should not be missed. The time is right! The time is now!!

(Mr. Okuhu is the CEO of Reliks Media Limited. He has managed public relations for a good number of brands, businesses and notable public figures).

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The Imo Economy: Beyond Expectations

Professor Patrick N. Nnamocha
(Imo State University, Owerri)

This essay interrogates the condition of these public notions of the Imo economy in seeking to find out circumstances in which the economy has defied low expectations and come good.

It is often said that Imo is largely a public/civil service state with education as its main economy. This appraisal has coloured most evaluations producing negative stereotypes that tend to negate industrial productivity. Incidentally, perception is potent in influencing business outcomes and investment decisions. It will be important to find out whether this has been the case in the Imo business environment.

This essay interrogates the condition of these public notions of the Imo economy in seeking to find out circumstances in which the economy has defied low expectations and come good. This can offer insight into what lines of industry have thrived against odds and which offer hope for specialization along the lines of comparative cost advantage. The Imo economy has





shown uncommon tendency to be resilient and productive against 'the run of play'. A 2013 MSME National Survey put Imo ahead of Anambra and indeed all south-east states in terms of preponderance of SMES.

Imo had 1,296,386; Anambra 1,223,395, Enugu 1,064,893, Abia 904,721 and Ebonyi 597,216 (SMEDAN and National Bureau of Statistics collaborative survey: selected findings, 2013). This speaks to the higher level of enlightenment, improved quality of the population, and appreciable strength of its institutions. The relative success story is instructive about the kind of unexpected behaviours of the Imo economy, and how markets are responding to these. Interestingly, recent NBS studies of 2017 affirm the 2013 report.

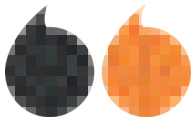




In what other areas can we spot unexpected performances?

1. Entertainment, Hospitality and Tourism

Imo has shown strength in the tourism and hospitality industry. It has become a major destination for relaxation and tourism. It has developed resources in this regard that tend towards a budding specialization. Hotels are built at such a density that out-competes the distribution in Lagos and Abuja. The private capital deployment in this industry is also remarkably high. This trend is significant for a number of reasons. Whereas due to security concerns, most Nigerian states are backtracking on nightlife, consumption of nightlife still thrives in Imo indicating a better management of social life than what exists in many other parts of the country. The relative peace the state continues to enjoy in spite of the recurring security challenge that confronts the nation is also a critical investment asset.



Imo has shown strength in the tourism and hospitality industry. It has become a major destination for relaxation and tourism.

In addition, whereas the economy has tended to shrink across Nigeria, Imo's hospitality landscape, surprisingly, has a thriving premium market. It is beyond expectations that the premium quality nightlife by the Cubana Group was first launched in Owerri. Imo is therefore at the forefront of promoting cultural products and experiences that many other states hope to scale up to.

If one looks at the earning potential of a cross section of Imo people, one may not find the potential clientele to support those types of industries. Incidentally the offering of a relatively safe and secure place within reasonable distance to major commercial hubs of Aba, Onitsha and Port Harcourt has made Imo a choice location to attract patronage from most parts of eastern Nigeria.



3. Retail Chain Development

Imo has recorded successes in retail development that show that absolute numbers in population strength is a poor index of consumption. Effective demand is more important. The expansion of retailers such as Everyday Shoprite and Priceless Stores testifies to what potential lies with the Imo market. Cultural taste is critical to retail development and Imo does not show deficiency in sophistication. Just as the big retailers have expanded in the last ten years, other distributorships that have discovered the viability of the Imo market have also been attracted. The penetration of retail trade and its value chain across Imo is total and deep. In all villages and towns, there are retail outlets and the capacity for employment in retail trade is high and growing.

4. Industry Leadership

Imo played a leading role in the development of water bottling and packaging. As water production was being revolutionized in

2. Real Estate Development

Most parts of Imo State are witnessing large-scale real estate development. Much of this is from repatriated capital -- products of disinvestment in other Nigerian towns and from remittances from the Diaspora. This is indicative of the very polished tastes of the Imo person and the fact that the real estate market is yet very much untouched. The displacement of the low-level civil servants, for which the World Bank intervention designed the World Bank Estate in Owerri, by the middle class shows what unmet demand for quality housing still abounds. In recent time, some of the most successful estate developments such as Graceland Estates and Egbeada, have seen Imo investors committing tens of millions of naira in single units of residential lots. The success of the property market in Owerri and other parts of Imo State is a puzzle to even real estate professionals.







Imo can be expected to play host to a gas-powered plant; given its regional affinity. It can leverage the gas value chain expected to develop from the gas fields of Asaa, Ohaji Egbema.

Nigeria with the advent of Ragolis and SWAN, Imo initiated a quick response with UZZI from the natural springs of Obowo. This demonstrates an uncommon readiness to seize the moment and an early example of successful public-private partnership in commercializing a community-based, shared resource (natural springs). The fact that UZZI water made commercial success at a time water packaging was at infancy indicates the potential inherent in the Imo business community in terms of vision, and technical competence.

Grounds for Optimism

A number of facts justify optimism on the Imo economy. There is the great success of the Imo Transport Company (ITC) beyond the level attained by sister transport companies of other states such as Delta Lines of Delta State and Benue Links owned by the Benue State government. When the fortunes of Delta Lines had floundered, leading to their entering into a public-private partnership with GTDC, ITC has grown in fleet size and route development. With Geometric Power Plant, Aba set for commissioning in September 2022, Imo can be expected to play host to a gas-powered plant; given its regional affinity. It can leverage the gas value chain expected to develop from the gas fields of Asaa, Ohaji Egbema.

If anything, Dangote Refinery in Lagos has shown the capacity of private capital investment in the downstream section of the oil and gas industry. Along the learning curve, and with doubts cleared about workability of this model, Imo refinery has the capacity to attract key investment.

Finally, there is a demonstrated role for teaching entrepreneurship, particularly in agriculture and its value chain. Fisheries and piggeries are being developed through this important role. The potential can only grow.

In conclusion, in many ways the Imo economy shows that it does not fit into the stereotypes of bookmakers. It has on many fronts surpassed expectations yielding high returns where it is not expected and developing an entertainment and hospitality niche with expanding patronage within its national and sub-regional catchment. This signals the possibility of a brighter future for the economy of the state and the attendant impact on the general wellbeing of the people.

(Professor Nnamocha is a Professor of Economics and the Dean of Social Sciences at the Imo State University, Owerri).

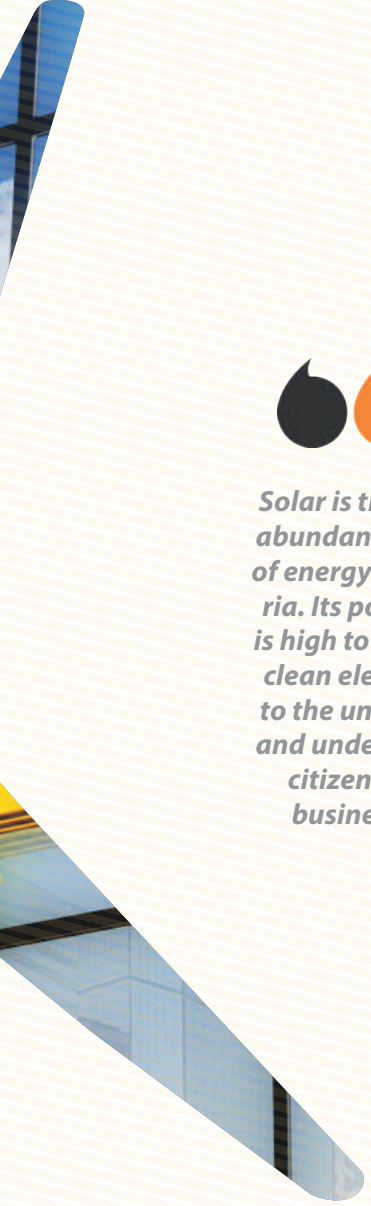


Business Opportunities in Renewable Energy Market in Imo state

By Dr. Emmanuel Ogbonna

The vast majority of the over 1 billion Sub-Saharan Africa population, of which over 200 million reside in Nigeria, live without reliable electricity. Nigeria has the largest energy access deficit in the world, with about 43% of its population without access to grid electricity (World Bank, 2021). However, of those already connected to the grid, the quality of the service is often low and unreliable. It is common for homes and businesses in Nigeria to suffer unplanned, unpredictable power outages, and sometimes complete grid collapse. Imo state is not spared of this electricity epilepsy. The lack of access to reliable power is a significant constraint for citizens and businesses. It is more than just powering homes; it has negative impacts on people's health, livelihood and educational opportunities. Due to the lack of access to reliable electricity people inhale black fume emanating from the exhaust of power generators, especially, "I beta pass my neighbor" generators. Millions struggle to keep up with the demands of their daily activities and businesses, and children are not able to study at night.

Renewable energy is a viable solution for closing the lingering electricity gap. There are different sources of renewable energy in Nigeria, including solar, wind, hydro, tidal, geothermal, and biomass.



Solar is the most abundant source of energy in Nigeria. Its potential is high to provide clean electricity to the un-served and underserved citizens and businesses.



Renewable energy is a viable solution for closing the lingering electricity gap. There are different sources of renewable energy in Nigeria, including solar, wind, hydro, tidal, geothermal, and biomass. These resources need to be harnessed in order to chart a new energy future for Nigeria. However, the high uptake cost, lack of skills and government policies are known factors that hinder the implementation of renewable energy projects in Imo state.

This article aims at providing an insight into solar energy and how it can empower people across Imo state. In addition, it highlights five different business models, the electricity gap they were designed to fill, and the possible challenges that could be faced to implement them as well as some solutions to the identified challenges.

Solar Energy

Solar is the most abundant source of energy in Nigeria. Its potential is high to provide clean electricity to the un-served and underserved citizens and businesses. It is estimated that solar energy can produce about 427 GW of electricity (US International Trade Administration, 2021), compared to the current total electricity generation of about 12.5 GW, excluding millions of self-generation efforts.

Solar Power Technology

All the models discussed in this piece require Solar PV system, but some may need battery bank, a low-voltage single-phase/3-phase distribution network, and possibly a gas powered electricity generator as backup.



Customers, including household consumers and business clients, could be billed through mobile money or through prepaid vouchers. In addition, some models may require a remote tracking system to enable monitoring of electricity generation, consumption and operation.

Business models

The five models of investing into solar power projects are discussed below:

Model 1: Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) Consumer Financing

This is a stand-alone consumer financing model that utilizes mobile money systems for payment. The model is suited for low-income earners for general lighting, with TV and phone charges. Remote monitoring and control of solar PV systems is used to incidentally disconnect a system in the event of default. The model offers flexible customer repayment options and enables the business to easily and effectively manage a large portfolio of dispersed borrowers. Ownership of the system is transferred once the customer finalizes their repayments, with repayments typically ranging from 6 months to 3 years.

Model 2: Consumer Financing (via Partner Financial Institution)

In this model the entrepreneur is in partnership with a financial institution. The entrepreneur provides PV products and associated services while the financial institution provides the consumer financing and collects repayments. This model is suited for the middle class people and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that have the ability to access finance, but cannot pay outright for the solar PV system.



Model 3: Mini/micro-grid

This is intended to bring reliable and clean grid electricity to communities with the aim of boosting the economic capacity of the locality. This model guarantees stable power and will enable people to conduct their business activities round the clock. It will also provide an environmentally friendly power source that prioritizes the sustainability of the environment.

When a potential customer expresses an interest to be connected with power, they would be required to make a formal application. The expected maximum consumption is worked out based on the projected peak load of the prospective customer, when all the electrical appliances are powered on. The wiring of the premises is then evaluated for compliance and followed by a single-phase or 3-phase connection as the case may be.

The main advantage of mini grids over stand-alone solar systems is their ability to empower connected customers to increase their energy consumption without having to invest in additional capacity. They are technically most effective when a large number of customers can be connected within a short radius.

In addition, mini/micro-grids can provide the spectrum of electricity services at a lower cost than other business models. However, they can only be implemented in locations with high a population density.

Model 4: Fee-for-Service

This approach is based on customers paying a monthly fee in exchange for electricity services, similar to a utility model, but using stand-alone systems. Ownership of the system is not transferred to the customer with the business responsible for maintenance. This model is well suited to providing electricity to dispersed communities, where large distances between customers make mini/micro-grids unviable, especially where income levels are very low and customers cannot afford outright purchase of a solar PV system. However, a significant upfront cost has to be borne by the business and the payback period is relatively long.



Model 5: Community Solar Energy Cooperative Society

The community solar energy cooperative society model is one where the community contributes towards the development of the project and afterwards become responsible for its operation and maintenance.

To facilitate this model, an energy cooperative society will need to be registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). This becomes the main vehicle to raise funding through members' contribution and donations from relevant parties.

This model can work well where there is a multi-disciplinary non-for-profit network, including engineers, social scientists, business and financial experts, and other partners such as the Rural Electrification Agency (REA) and the Imo State Government. These partners would provide technical and financial support to the project.

The power generated from this system is distributed through a mini-grid to consumers within the confines of the locality where it is situated. The system should have a backup gas powered generator in the event of a breakdown of the solar energy system.

Besides selling electricity, the cooperative can engage in other income generating activities that will bring some needed services to the rural community. They can harvest water from solar powered boreholes, store it in tanks and sell to the community. This will help to ease the water problem while earning some income for the cooperative.

Challenges

The models discussed above are not devoid of challenges. Some of the major challenges that could be faced include:

- **Access to finance** - This includes shortage or lack of capital for investment or scale. This could be addressed through the injection of capital from personal savings, credit facilities, soft funding, and donor funding.
- **Technical capacity** – This involves the lack of qualified human resources to set-up or operate the systems. This challenge can be overcome through capacity building initiatives that could be organised by the government, project initiators, donors and NGOs.
- **Government policy framework** – Without a commitment from the government to execute the energy policies and framework, investors will not be willing to invest as there is no guarantee that their investment will yield returns in the least possible time. It is expedient for government to show commitment and follow through with the renewable energy framework with evidence that the interest of the investors is protected even in the event of a change in government.



A robust regulatory and legal framework will increase investors' confidence in the renewable energy sector and this will translate into individuals willing to commit their time and resources into the development of solar energy projects in the state.

The government should also consider granting tax rebates, energy credits and other incentives to solar energy investors since the project is capital intensive. Bureaucracy around energy permits and approval should be reduced, if not completely eradicated. This will encourage a number of start-ups to venture into solar power generation. And this will be a major win for the State and the people.

Conclusion

It is undisputable that the lack of access to reliable electricity in Imo state has adverse implications on citizens and businesses. However, it presents huge opportunities for investors/entrepreneurs. Renewable energy, especially solar energy, has the potential to provide lasting solution to the energy access deficit. There are different business models that could be explored to tackle this problem, but these are not without their peculiar challenges. Therefore, there is the need for synergy between investors, entrepreneurs and the government to overcome these hurdles.

(Dr. Ogbonna is an experienced sustainability expert and project manager).

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The Imo Economy Study (T.I.E.S) Network

The Imo Economy Study (TIES) aims to drive for deeper focus on the economy in Imo state through a series of sensitization webinars. The enlightening webinars are expected to delve into issues surrounding a vast range of topics which have been on the back burner for Imo State. Some of the topics already covered include agricultural, retail and real estate opportunities in the state with renowned speakers across the sectors airing their views and providing thought provoking discussion points. The webinar is expected to run biweekly through the calendar year. Details on the topics to be covered and the speakers to anchor these are expected to be released in the weeks leading up to each session. The Webinars can also be tuned into via the radio stations in the state and in the event that you are unable to join us live, recordings of the sessions can also be streamed on our dedicated YouTube page.

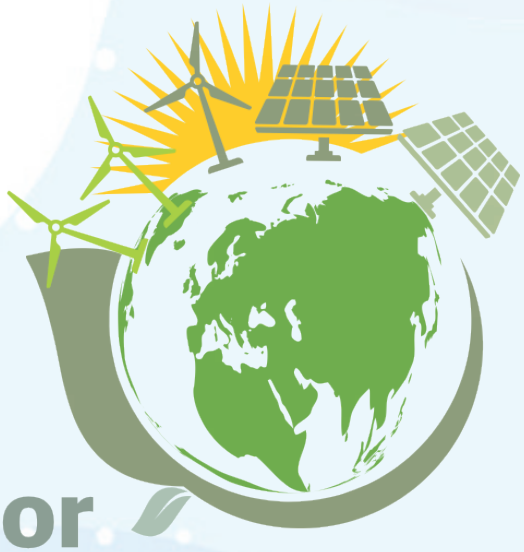








Energy transition is the solution to a cleaner energy future and spans from renewable energy sources (wind, solar, and hydro) to the adoption of emission-reducing natural gas.



Global Energy Transition and Implications for Imo State Economy

By Sam Agbavem & Eunice Sampson

There is no gainsaying the fact that Imo State is blessed with a large gas deposit, which can be harnessed to power its industries and households. But will Imo State be able to utilize this resource, or will it be a case of a stranded asset? What is the place of gas as a source of energy in the short and long term, and how can Imo State leverage this opportunity to secure a better future for its economy and people? These are pressing questions occasioned by the global quest for sustainable energy transition.

The 26th meeting of the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties, commonly referred to as COP26, which held in Glasgow in November 2021, brought together 120 world leaders and over 40,000 registered participants, to accelerate action towards the goal of the Paris Agreement (COP21) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC both seek actions to combat climate change through finance, adaptation and mitigation efforts directed at the control of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions that cause global warming, with the overarching goal to maintain global temperature to below 1.50.

To achieve the 1.50 target requires energy transition – a drastic shift from fossil-based systems of energy production and consumption (which is a major contributor to GHG emissions, principally responsible for global warming and climate change) to cleaner energy alternatives. Energy transition is the solution to a cleaner energy future and spans from renewable energy sources (wind, solar, and hydro) to the

adoption of emission-reducing natural gas. Although, natural gas is considered a fossil fuel, switching from coal-to-gas can significantly reduce emissions and can contribute to the gains of energy transition for most developing countries that are rich in natural gas by leveraging natural gas as the transition starter.

It is estimated that energy transition – whether to renewable energy or natural gas – will bring socioeconomic benefits such as significant reduction in GHG emissions, decrease in the rate of depletion of natural resources, enhanced industrialization, reduced health impacts from air pollution, employment growth, socioeconomic development, as well as significant contribution to the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, the desire to shift to cleaner energy is an ambitious one that poses substantial cost and technology challenges and requires huge financing which most developing countries in Africa may struggle with, especially when considering their socioeconomic indexes.

For example, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa still lag behind the rest of the world when it comes to social and economic development, despite available natural resources in some of these countries. For example, Nigeria is richly blessed with abundant resources, including natural gas, but is still one of the poorest countries in the world, with a high youth unemployment rate put at 53.4% according to figures published by Trading Economic; steadily growing population; and rapid urbanization of cities that lack the critical infrastructures needed to support basic living.



It is estimated that energy transition – whether to renewable energy or natural gas – will bring socioeconomic benefits such as significant reduction in GHG emissions...

The same is true for Imo State, which is yet to leverage its gas resources to transform its economic and industrial fortune. As democracy takes firm roots in the State, stakeholders are increasingly eager to see good governance translate to enhanced socioeconomic wellbeing for individuals, households, and businesses. Hence, the time to drive rapid industrialization and transformative socioeconomic development leveraging the State's natural gas resources is now.











Natural gas is a relatively clean burning fossil fuel that can be considered as a bridge fuel in the ongoing energy transition, by displacing the more carbon-intensive fossil fuel energy system.

Natural gas is a relatively clean burning fossil fuel that can be considered as a bridge fuel in the ongoing energy transition, by displacing the more carbon-intensive fossil fuel energy system. This can be a good starting point for developing countries because the cost and technology required for transiting to large-scale renewable energy system is still mostly challenging, and efforts to mitigate transition risks and the longer-term implication of the transition is not yet fully articulated. Natural gas can, thus, play a significant role as an essential bridge to a more sustainable and reliable energy future, capable of addressing economic development priorities for these countries.

With the unique role that natural gas can play in energy transition, a global energy demand that is projected to increase by about 20% by 2045; and China and India – two of the fastest growing economies – projected to shift their energy mix towards natural gas in the coming decades; Imo State's gas deposit presents a unique opportunity to tackle multiple development priorities and drive industrialization and socioeconomic development in the State. This is achievable if this energy resource is harnessed sustainably through innovation and technology, developing transformative business models that will promote optimal and efficient use of the natural gas, and formulating policies and incentives that will support natural gas as a mainstay of the State's economy.

To achieve this, the State government should elicit the support of and partner with the Federal Government which is vested with the control of all minerals, oils, and gas resources in Nigeria. The State could also leverage the option of setting up a gas

exploration company driven by public-private partnership arrangement.

The goal of developing the State's gas reserves is one that will support the Net-Zero Target proposed by President Muhammadu Buhari during the COP-26 conference and could also help in financing part of the country's energy transition plans (especially as gas has been declared as the nation's transition fuel and a viable pathway to a net-zero carbon emission), while addressing energy poverty and power supply challenges within the State and beyond.

Partnering with the Federal Government, leading gas exploration and development companies and other key stakeholders to commence large-scale development of the State's gas reserves can help spur rapid industrialization and socioeconomic development in the State, improve power supply, create jobs for unemployed youths, enable incubation and growth of small and medium sized businesses and create sustainable wealth for the State.

Important in this regard is the development of a state-level gas masterplan that will ensure that the State's wealth of resources translates into tangible gains for its people, and that accrued revenue and other benefits from the exploitation of the gas reserves is fully maximized to grow the economy, develop critical infrastructure, build capacity of citizens through technology and knowledge transfer, foster the growth of an entrepreneurial ecosystem in an inclusive manner, and develop and adopt a model that will support the State's energy transition plan, with detailed roadmap and clear, actionable goals of what needs to be done in the immediate to long-term.

Funding this plan would require actioning the gas masterplan for quick wins that would attract investments, leveraging local and international investment opportunities and global ESG/energy transition and decarbonization support funds. Eligibility criteria for such funds require the State to develop and adopt sustainable governance structures, polices, and practices, demonstrate a strong commitment to ESG/sustainability,









Partnering with the Federal Government, leading gas exploration and development companies and other key stakeholders to commence large-scale development of the State's gas reserves can help spur rapid industrialization and socioeconomic development in the State, improve power supply, create jobs for unemployed youths ...

and integrate a value proposition for all stakeholders to foster support and drive active participation.

This calls for urgent action by the State government to take necessary steps, first by making a strong case for the State to actively participate in its gas development as a panacea for a sustainable socioeconomic development and wealth creation, and also, by creating a conducive investment and regulatory environment for local and global investors to drive this vision.

(Mr. Agbavem is a Partner and West Africa Sector Leader for climate and sustainability at Ernst and Young.)
(Mrs. Sampson is an award-winning sustainability professional with over 21 years of experience. She is a Director of Climate and Sustainability at Ernst and Young).

Opportunities in Modular Refineries In Imo State

By Prof. Chijioke Nwaozuzu



Modular refineries make excellent economic sense, and rightly so for many reasons. First of all, the capital outlay for any 100,000 barrel per day (bpd) refinery is about $1.5 billion, while a 24,000 bpd modular refinery is roughly $250m.

The recent incident in an illegal oil refinery site in Egbema/Ohaji area of Imo State, where over a hundred people reportedly lost their lives, has reopened the debate on how to resolve the thorny issue of illegal oil refining. High youth unemployment, the growing culture of oil bunkering and a desire to get rich quick, could be responsible for these nefarious activities.

However, these events, despite their ugliness, point to some unexplored economic opportunities for Imo people, the government, and private investors. To start with, the persistence of illegal oil operations clearly shows that there is a significant imbalance between projected official refining capacity and existing demand, such that it has become even more tempting to boil crude oil in drums, knowing that there is a guaranteed market for the petroleum products, especially diesel (Automotive Gas Oil).









Notwithstanding this gap in the market, there is a current over-reliance on government-owned refineries to fill the gap. The Nigerian government can adopt a refining model that relies on modular refineries (built and operated by private investors or state governments) that will produce all refined products. This will allow more suppliers (i.e., producers) to come into the market and raise the bar of market efficiency.

Why modular refineries and why now?

Modular refineries make excellent economic sense, and rightly so for many reasons. First of all, the capital outlay for any 100,000 barrel per day (bpd) refinery is about $1.5 billion, while a 24,000 bpd modular refinery is roughly $250m. Therefore, it is easier to access funds for modular refineries. If the government shows enough interest, banks will fund such proposals for the establishment of modular refineries backed-up by feasibility studies, sound environmental impact assessment and attractive rate of return on investment.

Secondly, the manufacturing time for plant, equipment and machinery for a plant of 100,000 bpd capacity is within the range of 3-4 years. Start-up for modular refineries of 24,000 bpd is within 18-20 months. Thirdly, the modular system allows the plant to be expanded to 100,000 bpd capacity in structured increments. The increments can be funded with the cash flows from phase 1 and additional phases, and so the refinery will not incur additional debt for its expansion. The expansion of the modular plant capacity can be done





without shutting down production from existing equipment and plants. This is not the case with big capacity refineries. In other words, revenue streams and pay-back periods are faster with the modular refining format than with the larger capacity refineries.

...modular refineries are simple, efficient and fast to start up. Such refineries usually operate at optimal capacity at all times. The relatively small investment cost allows for private investors to enter the refining space much easily...

However, a major short-coming with modular refineries is that the plants are semi-automated and less labor-intensive, i.e. not many jobs can be created directly. For instance, 20 to 30 personnel can operate a 24,000 bpd modular refinery. Most of the spin-off jobs created are of a secondary nature, and based around the location of the site. But beyond the direct jobs of oil refining itself, the value chain along the lines of facility maintenance, storage, safe-keeping, transportation and haulage, downstream retailing and associated services will be enormous.

The other challenge is that currently, exploration and refining of oil fall on the exclusive list of the federal government, which means that for a state, like Imo State, to benefit in the stated manner, a lot of legal and diplomatic agreements and concession with the federal government must be reached. The Special Assistant to the President on Niger Delta Affairs, Senator Ita Enang, recently on a TV show announced that the Federal Government was planning to legalize modular refineries. Once the legalization or any form of legal agreement can be reached, it is important that the government of Imo State creates an enabling environment to attract oil investors to the state.

In summary, modular refineries are simple, efficient and fast to start up. Such refineries usually operate at optimal capacity at all times. The relatively small investment cost allows for private investors to enter the refining space much easily, if operated as a private-public-partnership. It also enables governments to build the bigger capacity refineries using the modular format, but in incremental stages. However, government-built modular refineries should have full conversion facilities (i.e. catalytic reformers and naphtha hydrotreaters) to enable the refineries produce Premium Motor Spirit, if not in all modular sites then in specified places. But that's not everything about modular refineries.

Pressing questions and further thoughts

If it takes about 3 years to start and operate a modular refinery, and the world is switching to electric cars from 2030, due to clean energy transition pressures, it only leaves us about 5 years to play with. How realistic and pragmatic is this modular refinery opportunity for Imo State beyond the very short term? Is it possible to assume a scenario where modular refineries produce transportation fuel in the short term, and other things afterwards? These are, in themselves, pertinent and pressing questions.



It is instructive to note that in the energy mix, petrol, diesel and kerosene will still be there for much longer. Despite the overwhelming interest of the Global North to move away from fossil fuel powered transportation systems and vehicles, it will take a while before petrol and diesel engines are completely eliminated in Africa. Even where the desire to do so exists, the lag in technology and innovation will constitute a major bottleneck, especially where the energy infrastructure does not easily lend itself to significant leapfrogging. How we deal with this lag will either make or mar us!

Nonetheless, green energy transition efforts will still go on, and probably replace the carbon products when a significant percentage of the petrol/diesel engines cannot be maintained any longer. Then auto-manufacturers will also stop making spare parts at the time they phase out petrol/diesel engines. What is important, therefore, is to be ready to make a smooth transition to 'green' at the point where it is inevitable. Before then, it is equally important for Imo State to make the necessary transition investments in both people (i.e. capability) and innovation by leveraging existing technology. That's foresight!

In all, Imo State can benefit from encouraging investments in small-scale (modular) refineries in ways that allow and enable private investors to profitably satisfy immediate market demands, create jobs, and contribute meaningfully to both energy sufficiency and resilience. However, this should be done with a close eye on the future and the global pressures to transit to green and renewable energy sources.

(Professor Nwaozuzu is the Director of the Emerald Institute of Energy at the Federal University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. He is a prolific author).



Unlocking Creatives and **Growing the Entertainment Business in Imo State**

By Chinelo Otiji

The entertainment industry has continued to witness a stable burst of growth and development across the world and has proven to be an outlet for creatives to develop, grow and create an exclusive path to success. The industry has continued to expand, particularly by way of the recent exponential growth witnessed in film, music, comedy, spoken word, dance and other genres, with social media playing a huge role in this expansion.

The rise of Instagram comedians, "skit" makers and Tik Tok stars has sparked optimism in the future of the industry by transforming creative but seemingly anonymous, ordinary people into global superstars. Beyond visibility, these platforms have created a stable source of income for these entertainers.

While these platforms have remained a means of income generation for the relatively few who have managed to gain public acceptance through the nature of their content, there is no set out method or guarantee that the success story would be the same for all individuals. While a few of these individuals have taken the wise step to invest and diversify their income streams, success is hardly sustainable for most entertainers. Aside the social pressure that comes with the territory, most entertainers get easily overwhelmed by the sudden success and tend to splurge on luxurious lifestyles which often lead to a depletion of their earnings. Yet, beyond these individual pitfalls, the entertainment industry is one replete with a plethora of opportunities and wealth.

According to Statista, the Nigerian entertainment industry accounted for 0.18% of Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) in the third quarter of 2021[1]. The actors, musical artists, writers and other individuals who together make up what has become a thriving ecosystem in Nigeria recorded remarkable success across various international platforms. Some very notable examples include the movie "Omo Ghetto the Saga" which grossed over six hundred and thirty million naira and was the highest rated Nigerian movie on the Netflix streaming platform in 2021[2]. Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun, professionally known as Wizkid, a popular Nigerian artiste, also recorded immense success with his concert at the London O2 Arena in November 2021, with gross earnings of about five billion naira[3]. Overall, these, amongst others, are incredible achievements on an individual level and have continued to serve as inspiration for young and upcoming artistes who are determined to put Nigeria on the global entertainment map.

At a state level, Imo state has not been left out in producing some of these outstanding artistes. Some well-known entertainers of Imo extraction include Genevieve Nnaji, an award winning actress, producer and director; Naetochukwu Chikwe professionally known as Naeto C, a well-known rapper, afrobeat artiste and music director; Chidinma Ekile, a singer, songwriter, recording artist and stage performer; Okechukwu Anthony Onyegbule, professionally known as Okey Bakassi, a stand-up comedian and actor, among others. Undoubtedly, Imo state has shown that it has the resources and a strong talent base needed to build something extraordinary and play a leading role in Nigeria's fast-growing entertainment sector.

However, while these creatives have continued to bootstrap and chart a course for themselves through free style content creation and use of the resources readily available, the private sector, with the support of the Imo state government, could actively help to promote and develop the sector. This could be achieved by co-creating financially backed opportunities and platforms that support in discovering and nurturing talents. This can be achieved through:

- Provision of education and training resources
- Funding
- Active talent hunt programs
- Mentoring and 'Pay-It-Forward' programs

The entertainment business is not limited to celebrities who pop up on our screens as actors and musicians alone. While this sort of players are more recognized and notable in the society, a good amount of work also happens behind the screens.

Education and training resources: The entertainment business is not limited to celebrities who pop up on our screens as actors and musicians alone. While this sort of players are more recognized and notable in the society, a good amount of work also happens behind the screens. Content/script writers, screen producers, editors, etc are very vital in the grand scheme of things and the overall success of any production. Adequate training could be provided for individuals talented or interested in these areas to equip them with the requisite capabilities to make a mark in the



A great army of talent emerged from talent hunt programs such as "The Voice Nigeria" and "MTN Project Fame" – two major initiatives which owe their success to sponsorship by big brands in the telecommunications and financial sector.

sector. Training opportunities could also be extended to the artistes and actors to enable them hone their skill set and stand a good chance to compete against internationally trained and experienced professionals within the industry.

Funding: The cost of production is relatively high in the Nigerian entertainment industry. The average cost of production of a top-tier movie in Nigeria ranges from about thirty million to fifty million naira[4]. These are capital intensive investments which tend to pose as stumbling blocks for most creatives. Although, alternative solutions have come to exist such as the use of high-end mobile cameras and editing apps in shooting movies and music videos. A case in point is Unsane, a 2018 medical thriller shot with an iPhone. But this is an exception rather than the rule. Funding opportunities by the private sector will provide an opportunity to scale the quality of production as well as ease marketing and advertisement required to reach larger markets. An excellent example is RedTV, an entertainment content platform powered by a major financial institution in Nigeria. Following its colorful launch in 2015, the platform has gone ahead to record great success, not only in terms of output, but also in its remarkable contribution to developing Nigerian talents. Another well-known digital channel also backed by a financial institution in Ndani Tv. Ndani could be argued to be wide-ranging and contributes to the development of creatives across a broad spectrum of the entertainment industry such as movies, music, writing, among others. From the foregoing, support from financial institutions has most definitely improved on the entertainment scene and could be a game-changer in growing local talent in Imo state and ultimately open new vistas of opportunities for the entertainment sector in the state.

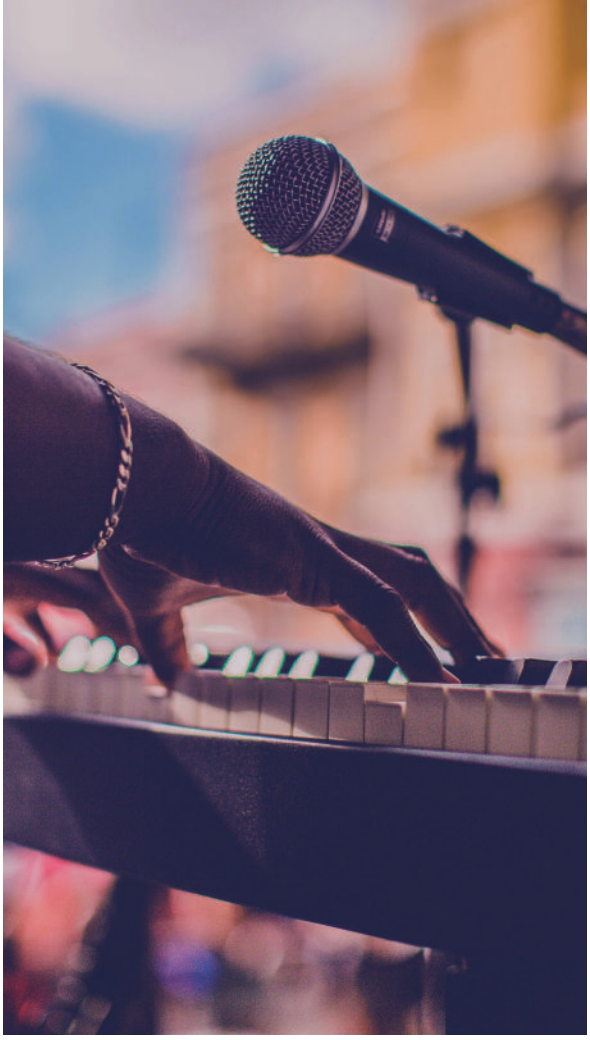


Active talent hunt programs: In 2021, the Lagos State Government launched its Community Talent Hunt and IT-Enabled (Digital) Entrepreneurship Skills Training as part of its Youth Engagement agenda. The program is set to empower about 1140 youths across the 57 Local governments and Local Council Development Areas in the state[5]. The Imo state Government could also take a cue from these initiatives and take deliberate steps to design holistic programs that foster the emergence and development of a creative community. While most talent hunt programs run primarily in search of musical talents, this only scratches the surface on the talent pool which may possibly be uncovered. This could also serve as a way to boost morale for talented indigenes within the state and perhaps even in neighboring eastern states and re-instill trust in the administration from its citizens and help the region attain the lofty heights and greatness which it has always been known for. Similarly, indigenous companies in Imo state are not left out in the discussion. A great army of talent emerged from talent hunt programs such as "The Voice Nigeria" and "MTN Project Fame" – two major initiatives which owe their success to sponsorship by big brands

in the telecommunications and financial sector. The likes of Iyanya Onoyom Mbuk, professionally known a Iyanya, who won the first season of the MTN Project Fame; Timi Dakolo who won the West African Idols in 2007 as well as Chidinma Ekile, an indigene of Imo state who rose to stardom following her 2010 MTN project Fame win, are a clear proof that investment in talent programs could inspire new talents to find their voices and shape the future of an industry. The indigenous companies in Imo state are able and can pull the required resources to create such programs and project the stars in our local communities to stardom. However, these talent hunt programs should not be limited to music, which is mostly the popular consideration for such initiatives. Residency programs could be organized for writers, designers and other creatives to ensure the entertainment industry within the state sees growth in a wholesome and collective manner.

Mentoring and 'Pay-It-Forward' Programs: Mentoring has become popular in recent times with the upcoming generation looking to the experienced professions for guidance and insights to succeed in their area of expertise. This usually take place either at a corporate or individual level. The entertainment sector thrives on the strength of this intangible. Recently, Aristokrat group, associated with internationally successful acts such as Burna Boy, Seyi Shay and DJ Obi, partnered with the music streaming platform Boomplay to organize a mentorship workshop for producers, artistes and music business practitioners. The workshop's primary initiative is to support Nigerian artistes and help them understand how the industry functions and how income can be earned from it. This is an excellent development and could indeed be emulated by other big players in the industry, particularly at the local level, to help support and motivate these creatives. Bringing it even closer to home, Veteran actor Kanayo O. Kanayo, an indigene of Imo state, in 2016 launched the Kanayo O. Kanayo Mentoring Academy whose aim is supporting the younger generation to making the best of their careers in the industry. This is a notable initiative which should again be brought closer to home. Imo state does have a large pool of experienced professionals and a mentorship program of this nature would be a walk in the park to be put together with the right objectives and individuals to steer it.

Overall, Imo state has proven to be home to an immense pool of entertainment talent with some of the most notable and prominent players in the industry emerging from the state in the past.



The Government now has the opportunity to help the new generation in not only achieving their potential but also supporting them to scale the impact, alleviate the challenge of unemployment and broaden the frontiers of opportunities for the people of the state.

(Ms Otiji is an experienced tax consultant and worked for a big 4 accounting firm in Nigeria. She is an alumna of the University of Glasgow).

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How Nigerian States Can Explore Significant Opportunities From Impact Investors

By Rukaiya El-Rufai, Godson Ikiebey and Benjamin Okpara

After securing the people's mandate, finance is perhaps the most important tool to oil the wheel of governance. A government must be adept at deploying this critical tool to accelerate progress and make sustainable contributions to the people of the state. This is why impact investors remains the darling of any forward-looking, progressive society. As their name implies, they are financiers who consider social and environmental impacts and financial returns in their investment decisions. They invest only in projects designed to address social and environmental challenges while making financial returns in the process. Most states in Nigeria, including Imo, have massive financing and investment deficits. Exploring the opportunities from impact investors will be strategic, allowing states deliver on their good governance mandate to the people. Impact investment is essential for funding sustainable socio-economic development, which Imo State desperately needs, especially as it looks to unlock opportunities for its people and revitalize the economy. The composition of impact investors includes Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), Multilateral Institutions, Institutional Investors such as pension and insurance funds, private investors, asset owners, family offices, philanthropic organisations, and so on. This category of investors focus on how their investments directly address societal problems. These challenges may include poor education, failed health care system, unemployment, insecurity, lack of clean energy, environmental degradation, inadequate and insufficient public infrastructures, poverty and food insecurity.

Impact investors can also invest through the stock market by buying up equity of businesses which seek to solve social and environmental problems.



Investments of this nature are vital to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and enhancing the broader sustainable socio-economic development. Such investments improve human development, inclusiveness and quality of public infrastructures, job creation, market capability, and sustainable environmental outcomes. These investments can come in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI), a situation where impact investors directly fund specific projects or invest in businesses with high social and environmental impact for the benefit of society. A case in point is an investment in a tech start-up conceived to improve education outcomes in underserved communities. Impact investors can also create value by leveraging the stock market to buy equity in businesses focused on solving social and environmental problems. Many of these investors achieve this by buying up equity in companies in high-impact sectors like sustainable agriculture, renewable energy development, amongst others.

The sustainable debt market is also an effective vehicle for these investors. Some of the most common instruments in this market include green bond (environmental projects, i.e., clean energy), social bond (social projects, i.e., good roads, quality healthcare and good schools), sustainability bond (social and the environment, i.e., sustainable agriculture), and blue bond (ocean or waterways specific, i.e. sustainable aquaculture and sustainable waterways transportation).

It is imperative to note that four characteristics drive the investment decisions by impact investors, and these are;

1) deliberate commitment to contribute to positive social and environmental impact by setting transparent financial and impact goals,
2) empirical evidence (qualitative and quantitative impact data) to make investment decisions,
3) the management of impact performance to enhance investment decision-making related to societal impact from investments and
4) a strong commitment to driving sustainable development through impact investing.

Market size

Globally, impact investing is on the ascendency. This resonates with the fourth characteristic associated with impact investors, which is to continuously contribute to sustainable development through their investments. According to the "International Finance Corporation (IFC) report titled Investing for Impact: The Global Impact Investing Market 2020, the total impact investment was valued at US$2.3 trillion in 2020, out of which US$636 billion worth of investments have in place an impact management system that accountably and effectively monitors the impact from the investments.

The Nigeria impact investment landscape is also shaping up, thanks to the efforts of Impact Investor's Foundation (IIF) in Nigeria and other key stakeholders. Their efforts have yielded fruits and present opportunities that Nigerian states have not fully exploited. A 2019 report by the Impact Investors' Foundation titled Nigeria and Ghana Impact Investing and Policy Landscape Analysis shows that the total impact of investing in Nigeria from 2015-to 2019 was US$4.7 billion with investment in agriculture, and public-to-public lending, energy, amongst others. Of these investments, 95 percent of Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) transactions were debt investments, while 67 percent of non-DFI transactions were equity investments. However, Nigeria has yet to fully explore this sustainable finance option globally recognised to guarantee cheaper funds for maximum positive impact and better yields for investors.

What are the potentials for the State?

Imo State has a significant infrastructure deficit, which needs urgent financial attention – but obviously, funds are short! State governments can unlock the financing deficit of their public infrastructures by accessing funds from institutional investors, private impact investors, and sustainable bond issuance. By doing this, states align infrastructures with impact-based financing. The investment and financing landscape is changing to a situation where investment considerations and financing are moving from financial returns on investment to the outcome and impact-based returns. This presents an opportunity for Imo State to strategically position itself to access such investment opportunities.

Imo State's ability to attract such opportunities will not only guarantee access to cheap funds, but it will also enhance inclusive development as the funds will witness maximum utilisation in both soft and hard infrastructural development for the benefit of the State and the growth and development of sustainable enterprises. This will help ensure healthy and inclusive socio-economic development, which is essential for improved quality of life of the people and an essential tool to boost public trust in government.

What is required to access this opportunity?

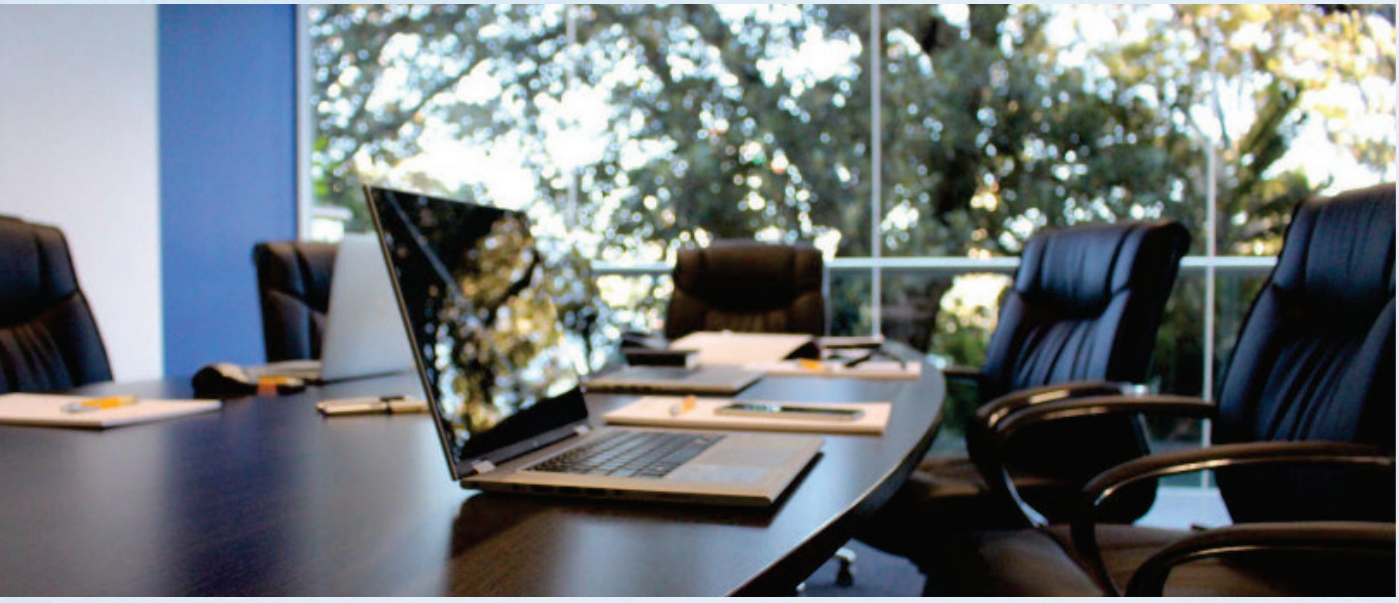
To explore impact investing opportunities and pull a significant amount of impact investment to Imo State, the State should:

1. Ensure that its development trajectory aligns with the core characteristics of impact investing.

Imo State must articulate a clear sustainable investment framework that will focus on investment that enhances the positive societal impact, risk and opportunities of such investments in the State and return on investment for the impact investors in alignment with the SDGs. This will enable the State to clearly identify high social and environmental impact areas that will enhance Imo State's sustainable socio-economic development and make it attractive to these investors.

2. Conduct an impact baseline study.

There is a need for Imo State to conduct a baseline study of its development investments, programmes and projects to date, to capture the accurate position





of its developmental gaps. This will support the development of a holistic result framework, which includes defining realistic objectives for the State's developmental journey. This is in addition to setting credible and measurable impact indicators, , and determining the expected outcomes for success to be achieved within a defined period (5-15 years). Therefore, having a qualitative and quantitative understanding of where Imo State stands in relation to its development based on prior investments will go a long way in positioning the State to attract impact investments. This will also set the foundation for the State's capability to measure, manage and communicate the outcomes of its development investments.

3. Communicate through impact assessments

Communicating the impact of investments in the State to impact investors will provide a competitive advantage for the State's ability to access more sustainable financing for impact investments. Communication of impact can be achieved through impact assessment. Impact assessment measures and communicates progress on success against the objectives, expected outcomes or goals set in the baseline. Impact assessment is important to impact investors and will enhance the capability of Imo State to attract impact investments. According to the G7 Impact Taskforce, "the better we get at measuring impact, the more money will flow into impact investment" [(1)From the foregoing, it is evident that developing an effective impact measurement, management and reporting framework is integral to attracting impact investors.

Conclusion

Impact investing is a burgeoning global market for socio-economic development. Imo State can unlock financing opportunities through impact investors. But to do that, Imo State needs to put some things in place. The State urgently needs a robust impact assessment in particular. This impact assessment will enable the State to effectively communicate developmental achievements and impact to these investors with a view to attracting impact investment. In addition, impact assessment provides accountability to impact investors and increases the confidence of these investors, which opens up opportunities for more investment. Impact assessment can be a critical tool for the Imo State government. It positions the State towards attracting impact investors keen on investing in sustainable socio-economic development.

(Ms El-Rufai is a Partner, Sustainability & Climate Change and Public Sector RAS with PricewaterhouseCoopers. She is an alumna of the London School of Economics).
(Mr. Ikiebey is a manager, sustainability and climate change, at PricewaterhouseCoopers. He works in the interface between organizational strategy and sustainable socio-economic development).
(Mr. Okpara is a sustainability and climate change consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers. He is a graduate of Animal and Environmental Biology (University of Benin)).

[1] Brest, P. (2014) The G8 Task Force Report: Making Impact or Making Believe? Stanford Social Innovation Review. Available from: http://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_g8_task_ force_report_making_impact_or_making_believe

Authors:
Rukaiya El-Rufai (Partner, Sustainability and Climate Change, PwC Nigeria) - rukaiya.el-rufai@pwc.com
Godson Ikiebey (Manager, Sustainability and Climate Change, PwC Nigeria) - godson.ikiebey@pwc.com
Benjamin Okpara (Associate, Sustainability and Climate Change, PwC Nigeria) - benjamin.okpara@pwc.com



Enhancing Public Finance
Opportunities for Imo State

By Dr. Innocent Okwuosa *(Ph.D, CPFA, FCA, FCIB)*

In a meeting between the World Bank representative in Nigeria and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria on ICAN Accountability Index in 2021, it was made clear that the Bank will support states in Nigeria that score high in public finance accountability and transparency. One way through which accountability in Public Finance Management (PFM) has been measured internationally is the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) framework.

The PEFA framework is therefore a tool for assessing public financial management so that leadership can demonstrate to the citizens and business partners alike that they do what they promise they will do when it comes to public finance. This is the foundation of trust in government.

Citizens and business partners repose trust and confidence in any government that subjects itself to accountability. Through accountability, disclosures are made and these disclosures lead to transparency, which is why international multi-lateral financial institutions like the World Bank, African Development Bank et cetera place a lot of emphasis on accountability and transparency.

Emerging trends in public finance accountability and transparency

Accountability and transparency aid Public Finance Management (PFM). The centrality of good PFM for global development has been acknowledged by Effective Institutions Platform – "an alliance of over 60 countries and organisations that support country-led and evidence based policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and peer learning on public sector management and institutional reform". For example, in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of July

2015, participants, mostly representatives of governments, agencies and multi-lateral organisations all committed themselves to addressing the challenge of financing posed by lack of accountability in public financial management.

In accordance with widespread international agreement on the importance of PFM, the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) programme was initiated in 2001 by seven international development partners: The European Commission, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the governments of France, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. In 2019, the Ministry of Finance of Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Finance of Grand Duchy of Luxembourg joined the PEFA partnership program. PEFA began as a means to harmonize assessment of PFM across the partner organizations. It was created to establish a standard methodology and reference tool for PFM diagnostic assessments.

Since 2001 PEFA has become the most widely acknowledged standard for PFM assessments. More than 600 PFM assessment reports from 151 countries have been completed as at October 1, 2019. PEFA 2016 is the latest framework and has seven pillars (see PEFA table)

In Nigeria, poor accountability and transparency culture in public finance management is a major barrier to effective donor support. This is because multi-lateral agencies look up to accountability and transparency as a yardstick for dealing with governments. To address this problem, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) introduced the ICAN Accountability Index (AI). The ICAN AI mirrors PEFA but adapted to suit the local environment has 5 pillars (see ICAN table).

Awareness of accountability through ICAN AI

Prior to the commencement of ICAN AI, in 2018 for 2017 fiscal year, the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) and the World Bank, through the Department for International Development (DFID), endorsed the ICAN AI and IFAC partly provided the initial funds for its execution. Awareness was created among relevant stakeholders in the public sector to share the vision of the ICAN-AI. This included meeting with the then Honourable

PEFA 2016 Framework

Pillar	Details	Objectives
1	Budget reliability.	Government budget is realistic and is implemented as intended
2	Transparency of public finances	Information on PFM is comprehensive, consistent, and accessible to users.
3	Management of assets and liabilities.	Effective management of assets and liabilities
4	Policy-based fiscal strategy and Budgeting	Alignment of fiscal strategy and the budget
5	Predictability and control in budget execution.	The budget is implemented within a system of effective standards
6	Accounting and reporting	Accurate and reliable records are maintained
7	External scrutiny and audit.	Public finances are independently reviewed and external follow-up exists.

Minister of Finance, the Federation Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC) and States' Accountants-General. In addition, the President of the Institute formally wrote to the 36 State Governors informing them of the commencement of the assessment and soliciting their support as well as those of their officials. The result of the 2017 fiscal year assessment (see Ican table).

The 2019 assessment covering 2018 fiscal year produced result as shown in the State Ranking and Information Availability table.

The assessment was quite comprehensive for both years and Kaduna state came first for both years. Imo State remained in the bottom last three for both years. Although it can be explained that one of the reasons for the Imo State not doing so well is because of its failure to provide data/information required by assessors. However, multi-lateral agencies that partner with states like the World Bank, IMF, AfDB will see non-provision of data/information as lack of transparency. It must be noted that why Kaduna performed well is that it has implemented accrual International Public Sector Accounting Standard (IPSAS) and is about the only state that has done that conscientiously, although Lagos state has also.

By leveraging on the ICAN AI, a state governor can demonstrate to the citizens and business partners that he has done what he has promised he will do. This will at least enhance trust in governance and the government. Shortly after the release of the ICAN AI, a report written by Oxford Business Group showed that Kaduna State attracted $2.61 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) within the first six months of 2020 (see https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/09/21/how-kaduna-attracted-2-61bn-fdi-in-six-months-oxford-report/). Many people within the accountancy field in Nigeria knew that Kaduna state, through its accountability and transparency initiatives, has demonstrated to international business partners and multi-lateral funding organisations that it can be trusted. Kaduna state has also done very well in the World Bank's State Financial Transparency, Accountability and

ICAN AI Framework 2021

Pillar	Details	Indicators' No
1	Policy-based Fiscal Strategy and Budgeting	5
2	Budget Credibility	6
3	Management of Assets and Debts	3
4	Control in Budget Execution, Accounting and Reporting	8
5	External Audit and Legislative Scrutiny	3
	Total Indicators	25

State Ranking and Information Availability

Rank	Entity	% Score	% Information NOT Provided	Rank	Entity	% Score	% Information NOT Provided
1	Kaduna	67.5	26	20	Anambra	208	71
2	Jigawa	60.4	24	20	Cross River	20.8	81
3	FGN	52.6	35	20	Niger	20.8	65
4	Kebbi	39.0	48	20	Osun	20.8	81
5	Abia	38.3	50	20	Sokoto	20.8	79
6	Ekiti	35.1	55	25	Akwa Ibom	20.1	84
7	Bauchi	29.2	60	26	Borno	19.5	79
7	Enugu	29.2	60	26	Yobe	19.5	79
7	Lagos	29.2	71	28	Ebonyi	18.8	85
10	Benue	28.6	73	29	Katsina	18.2	89
10	Taraba	28.6	68	30	Delta	17.5	89
12	Kano	27.9	76	30	Gombe	17.5	79
12	Kogi	27.9	65	32	Nasarawa	16.2	94
12	Ondo	27.9	68	33	Imo	15.6	82
15	Bayelsa	26.0	77	34	Adamawa	14.3	98
16	Kwara	24.7	74	34	Edo	14.3	95
16	Plateau	24.7	71	34	Oyo	14.3	90
16	Zamfara	24.7	55	34	Rivers	14.3	98
19	Ogun	22.1	76				

State Ranking

	Scores by Pillars								Scores by Pillars							
Govt	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Score %		Govt	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Score %
	98	77	77	168	70	490	100% [1]			98	77	77	168	70	490	100%
Kaduna	84	31	55	140	46	356	72.7%		Nasarawa	40	35	11	42	10	138	28.2%
Enugu	80	20	41	116	28	285	58.2%		Lagos	18	17	11	70	20	136	27.8%
Jigawa	72	41	39	104	18	274	55.9%		Benue	36	11	35	40	10	132	26.9%
Niger	70	19	29	114	32	264	53.9%		Abia	36	21	17	44	10	128	26.1%
Kwara	58	17	25	112	36	248	50.6%		Oyo	22	21	19	52	10	124	25.3%
Plateau	72	17	41	84	22	236	48.2%		Ebonyi	26	17	11	44	22	120	24.5%
Kogi	80	25	23	60	28	216	44.1%		Bayelsa	28	19	15	48	10	120	24.5%
Kano	70	23	41	60	16	210	42.9%		Cross River	22	17	11	44	24	118	24.1%
Ondo	60	36	17	66	28	207	42.2%		Sokoto	20	17	29	42	10	118	24.1%
FGN	74	19	35	56	10	194	39.6%		Anambra	22	11	21	38	22	114	23.3%
Kebbi	34	11	23	106	16	190	38.8%		Yobe	18	23	11	42	16	110	22.4%
Ekiti	52	23	11	62	32	180	36.7%		Ogun	32	17	11	40	10	110	22.4%
Rivers	50	29	27	46	16	168	34.3%		Akwa Ibom	18	11	11	50	16	106	21.6%
Zamfara	68	25	21	36	18	168	34.3%		Borno	14	11	11	50	16	102	20.8%
Bauchi	26	23	25	56	20	150	30.6%		Taraba	20	17	11	30	10	88	18.0%
Osun	22	17	19	64	28	150	30.6%		Delta	13	17	11	36	10	87	17.8%
Katsina	26	11	21	72	18	148	30.2%		Imo	16	10	11	34	10	81	16.5%
Gombe	32	19	13	52	22	138	28.2%		Adamawa	14	11	11	34	10	80	16.3%
									Edo	14	11	11	28	10	74	15.1%

[1] *Highest score attainable*



Sustainability (SFTAS) initiative in which one of the Disbursement Linked Indicators is accountability. On account of accountability indicator, Kaduna state government comes top of states in Nigeria, collecting billions of naira from World Bank.

Imo State has also benefitted from SFTAS, but the state can do more – especially from other sources. It is our desire that Imo state will continue to improve in its accountability and transparency drive so that it can avail herself the opportunity to attract more public finance as discussed above.

What Imo State should do to tap into such public finance opportunities?

Our suggested action plan for Imo state to tap into opportunities for such public funds will be to first implement accrual based IPSAS. According to the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA), "a key driver for IPSAS adoption is the importance of attracting investment into the public sector, particularly in emerging economies. Financial statements prepared in accordance with IPSAS provide confidence and comparability for investors at an international level. These investments potentially create spin-off benefits for the broader economy in terms of jobs, welfare and societal improvement" (see file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/pi-IPSAS-implementation-current-status-and-challenges.pdf). In addition, the state should work to improve on its performance in the next ICAN Accountability Index due this year by providing the information required, some of which are expected to be made available on its website. This is because the index is already influencing international donors' perception of public accountability by states given their performance in the index. The implementation of these two action plans may be preceded by capacity building among the relevant staff underscoring the need for human capital development. It may also involve the engagement of professional accountants, as Lagos State has done.

(Dr. Okwuosa is the Head of Department of Accounting at Calen University Lagos and the 1st Deputy Vice President, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria.)



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The Governor has also embarked upon massive construction of internal ring roads and major, roundabouts in the state capital, dualization of single-lane or narrow roads and building solid drainage systems to support the roads and prevent frequent flooding that might impact the roads and private proverpty.

Good Roads; Good Economy!

Road networks are central to the optimal functioning of any economy. When the Imo State Commissioner of Information and Strategy, Declan Emelumba, reported after a state's executive council meeting in April 2022, that communities along Orlu-Owerri and Okigwe-Owerri are very happy and have sent solidarity messages to the governor, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma, to thank him for the quality of roads the government is constructing in those areas, he wasn't exaggerating. Any visitor to the state, especially the capital Owerri, will notice the sheer amount of infrastructure upgrade and remodelling works going on in the state. Since the commencement of work on the dualization of the Owerri-Orlu, Owerri-Okigwe roads, communities along the roads have been openly commending the government over the quality of work being done in those roads.

In order for the governor to achieve his mission of "Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Recovery" of dilapidated infrastructure in the state, he had to reposition the ministry of works to be able to perform its core duty of providing technical services such as the design, construction and maintenance of quality state roads and the rendering of professional advice to other arms of the government on technical matters. The result has been noticeable.

This has led to a remarkable rise in the quality and quantity of road construction projects across the state. Since assumption of office, over 90 roads are either under construction or completed. The Governor recently commissioned the following urban roads: Oparanozie Street, Amaigbo Street, Edede Street, Ihechiowa Street, Jeff Oguzie Street, Aladinma, Elezianya Street and Okenza Street, all located in Owerri metropolis – the capital of Imo State.

The Governor has also embarked upon massive construction of internal ring roads and major, roundabouts in the state capital, dualization of single-lane or narrow roads and building solid drainage systems to support the roads and prevent frequent flooding that might impact the roads and private proverpty.

The ministry of works has been central to this commendable road and infrastructure revolution in Imo state. Beyond its primary functions, the ministry has also stepped up its advisory and supervisory





role and obligations to other ministries, departments and agencies in the area of civil engineering, electrical engineering and mechanical engineering projects to foster cooperation and ensure effective utilization of available manpower in the successful implementation of all government programmes.

Renewed opportunities in palm oil

Following the total ban on the export of palm oil by the Indonesian government in April 2022 in line with what it calls "domestic cooking oil shortages" caused by the hike in the price of the commodity worldwide, and the disruption to supply of sunflower oil due to the Russia-Ukraine war, the stage is set for a scramble for palm oil – by far the most consumed and traded edible oil in the world - with prices set to hit records high over the coming years.

The Imo state government has fortuitously set the state on course to be a major player, producer, and exporter of palm oil in the coming years. Recently, it has reformed and strengthened Adapalm to play a leading role in this space.

With the average price for palm oil reaching $8132. 00 per metric ton in March 2022 – and with Indonesia that exports 60 percent of the global supply of palm oil halting exports until it sufficiently meets local demand, all major forecast projects that palm oil will become one of the priciest commodities in the world bringing huge returns to producers and exporters alike.

Adapalm is set to enhance both wealth and job creation for shared prosperity.

Other Initiatives

The state is not advancing its economic renewal drive with palm oil alone. It is also actively seeking investors to develop indigenous fruit trees like Bread fruit (Ukwa), Ogbono, Coconut, Avocado Pears, Mango, etc, which are currently low in production but could be scaled up with moderate investments.

The government is taking steps to invest – and is seeking both local and foreign investments – in the agriculture value chain from the development and dissemination of seeds to animal genetic material, input supply, farmer organization, farm production, post-harvest handling, processing, provision of technologies for production and handling, grading, cooling, packaging, storage, and transportation facilities.





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Spotlight on The Office of The **Chief Economic Adviser**



Professor Kenneth Amaeshi
University of Edinburgh/European University Institute, Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government



The objective is to tap into the goodwill of interested organisations and promote collaborative governance for enhanced collective impact.

The Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government is leading on the following initiatives aimed at growing the Imo economy for shared prosperity:

The Imo State Industrial Policy

The Imo State Industrial Policy (ISIP) is designed to offer a fresh, pragmatic and actionable perspective to the state's rationale and definitive approach to industrialization. Some of the priority sections highlighted in the policy include the digital economy, agriculture, fabrication, tourism, renewables and others. The intention of the industrial policy is to articulate what each of the above listed sector should focus on in terms of development and how it can be utilised to create shared prosperity for the people of the State. It also covers financing mechanisms, governance infrastructure, and necessary complimentary policies which can be developed to constitutively make the policy unique, fit for purpose and innovative. The policy document is in its final drafting stages and would be released to the public once finalised.

Corporate Imo Impact Partnership

A major objective for the Imo State Government at the moment is to promote collaborative governance through the enrolment of the private sector in co-creating solutions to the challenges confronting the State. One of such challenges is the high rate of unemployment, which has other possible negative impacts on society such as increase in poverty levels, a rising crime rate, insecurity and exploitation of labour, especially amongst our youths.

The Corporate Imo Impact Partnership (CIIP) is a voluntary network of private sector actors, donor agencies, development partners and other organizations interested in the sustainable development of the Imo economy through job creation and entrepreneurship. It is designed to frontally address the challenges of unemployment through coordinated job creation and entrepreneurship development in a way that promotes shared prosperity. The objective is to tap into the goodwill of interested organisations and promote collaborative governance for enhanced collective impact. CIIP is conceived to be self-organizing and flexible to cater for

individual requirements and needs of participating private organisations.

The CIIP initiative is scheduled to launch officially in 2022 and will be open for public attendance.

The Imo Economy Study (T.I.E.S) Network

The Imo Economy Study (TIES) is an interactive network that recognises that it takes studious and diligent minds to uncover and understand the peculiarities and patterns of economies. The main objective of TIES is to push for closer attention to the economy in Imo state and gain a better understanding of its key players, enablers, constraints and resources.

TIES Network hosts monthly seminars/ lectures on critical economic issues relevant to Imo State – e.g., job creation, economic growth, and poverty reduction. It will explore deep and probing questions and draw from a variety of intellectual resources within Imo State and those with the interest of understanding its economy. TIES Network is voluntary and driven by both intellectual curiosity and pragmatic solutions. It is a neutral, non-partisan, thought leadership network and its core objective is to inform and advance policies and practices relevant to the sustainable development of the economy in Imo State.

Although the TIES Network is initiated by the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government, it aims to remain as objective as possible all the time and seeks to be as practical as it can be so as to encourage advancement in policies and practices relevant to the sustainable development of the economy.

The TIES webinars are expected to cover various topics centered on issues critical to the success of the Imo economy such as agriculture, retail, technology, arts and craft, entertainment and lots more.

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step". - Lao Tzu

TIES has officially kicked off with the first webinar on Agribusiness opportunities in Imo state.

Overall, these are welcome developments from the state. As rightly noted by Lao Tzu, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step". Thus, with consistency and continuous inclusivity, open discussions and collaborations with the private sector, the journey to revitalize the economy of Imo State is on course, and we expect to see improvements in the unemployment and underemployment rates in the State.

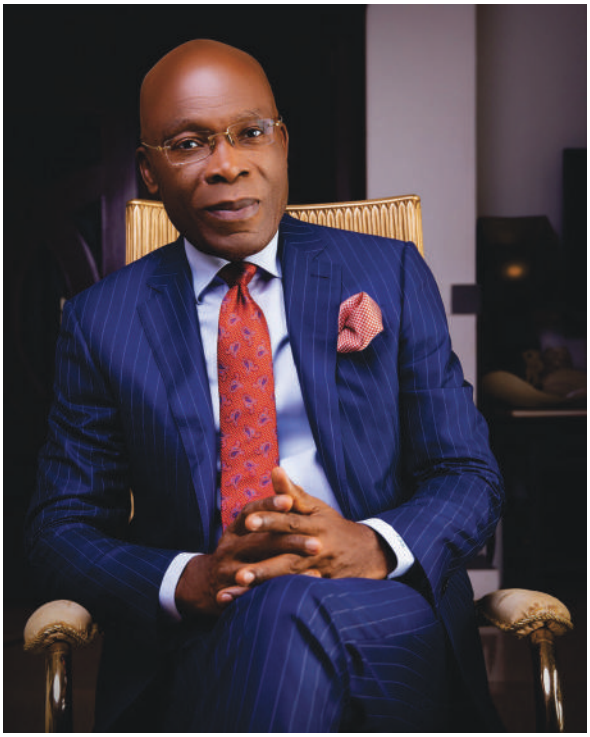


Leo-Stan Ekeh: The Serial Entrepreneur Whose Great Assets Are His Ideas

By Ikem Okuhu

A short article published by This Day newspaper on January 2, 2022 described Leo-Stan Ekeh in its opening paragraph, as a man who "sees opportunities where others are bogged down by morbid fear of failure." Having interviewed this maverick serial entrepreneur back in 2004 for a cover story I did for a magazine, Best of Business, I was a bit surprised by this profoundly crisp description; surprised because, 18 years after I first encountered Leo, it was clear to me that the wear of age has not withered the inventive consistency that has made him build multibillion-naira businesses literally from nothing.

I still remember a few things Leo told me during the interview, and each time I hear motivational speakers mouth the now popular statement that "ideas rule the world," my mind usually races back to that session in his small office in Victoria Island, Lagos.



"What you need to start off in business is not money," he had told me. "The most important factor in starting and running a successful business is the idea. I came into business prepared with the right ideas. I design and conceptualise my products myself. I create my marketing plans. Look at TD Africa (Technology Distributors Ltd) and Zinox, I designed even the logos myself. That is because I knew what I wanted to achieve. If you have millions of naira, but lack the ideas to multiply the money by creating value, the chances of you succeeding are narrow."

By the time of this interview, Leo-Stan had just birthed Zinox Computers, arguably the first in that product category to be branded, "Made in Nigeria." Zinox encountered its existential challenges soon after birth, with cynics and critics wondering how and where anyone manufactured a computer in Nigeria.

Back then, with ignorance ruling most of the media world, Leo-Stan was already aware that although they carried the "Made in the USA" tag, the likes of Compaq, Dell, Hewlett Packard and the rest were actually making the components of their computers in China and other countries.

"What people do not know is that no company makes all the components of its products," I still remember Leo-Stan impressing upon my then young journalism mind. "The Toyotas, the Hondas and the Mitsubishis of this world make the parts of their vehicles with different factories around the world. The key thing is the brand. Which country owns the brand? What value are they adding to the new brand they are promoting? That is what is important".

And did Leo-Stan add value to Zinox? One of the very first problem he solved with the Zinox computer system was the integration of the Igbo alphabet into the keyboard and for the first time, it became possible to type the Igbo Language on a computer with all the tonal annotations on all vowel sounds. That's creativity!

Born Leonard Stanley Nnamdi Ekeh on February 22, 1956 in Ubomiri, Mbaitoli, Imo State, Nigeria, the man

who, today, is one of the biggest names in the Nigerian ICT and eCommerce circles, attended Holy Ghost College, Owerri for his secondary education. Always with his eyes on being the best in whatever he wanted to do, his dream back then was to own the biggest transport company in Nigeria. But the twists of fate took him totally away from transportation, although his venture into eCommerce still runs on the wheels of transport and logistics.

He later went to India for his university education, where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics from Punjab University. After some years in other businesses at home and abroad, Leo-Stan, in 1999, launched Technology Distributors Limited, which later became TD Africa, the pioneer ICT distributor in West Africa, representing the likes of HP, Microsoft, APC, IBM, Dell, Cisco, D-Link, Huawei, Lenovo, Nokia, Vertiv, Philips, Zebra, Mercury and Bosch & Samsung.

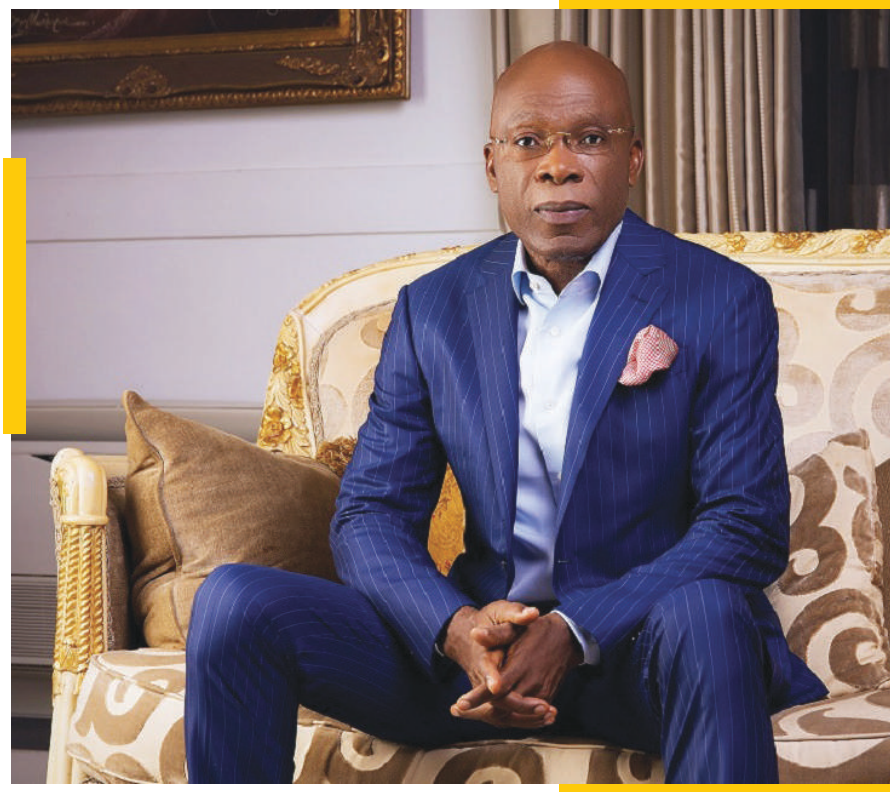
As the first manufacturer-accredited local distributor for the sub-region, TD Africa, with the support of the OEMs, successfully confronted the myriad of challenges posed by the unstructured nature of the tech market at the time. It took the restless mogul only two years to become the leading ICT business in the subregion, and by 2001, he was already in search of new challenges and that was when he launched Zinox, the first computer system that was "proudly Nigerian."

Leveraging his tremendous successes in the IT space, Leo Stan Ekeh, in 2015, ventured into the eCommerce ecosystem, with the launch of Yudala and quickly grew its presence to 15 stores in 10 Nigerian cities.

One interesting thing about the DNA of Yudala that many writers have not bothered to think about is actually the name of the business itself. What does Yudala mean? Does it have any connection with Udala, the sweet West African plant? Udala is a strong tree with widespread branches. One tree could produce tens of thousands of sweet fruits. In the Igbo cosmology, udala signifies fertility, long life and productivity.

Could this have been the philosophical underpinning behind the birth of Leo-Stan's business? This line of thinking might just be correct, because a few years after the birth of Yudala, Leo-Stan, February 2018, went on to acquire Konga, Nigeria's second largest eCommerce company.

It took the restless mogul only two years to become the leading ICT business in the subregion, and by 2001, he was already in search of new challenges and that was when he launched Zinox, the first computer system that was "proudly Nigerian."



Given his foresight and entrepreneurial sagacity, it is obvious that Leo-Stan Ekeh stands a good chance of becoming the biggest player in the Nigerian eCommerce sector. It was not surprising that Forbes, the leading wealth magazine in the world, recognised him as the Best of Africa Leading Tech Icon in August 2021.

Leo-Stan Ekeh is a restless creative genius. He has left his footprints in practically every business that he ventured into and, at 66, those who know him will say the best is yet to come from this proud son of Imo State.



Call for Articles

Theme: **Imo Economy: A Global Tech Hub**

This is an invitation to Heads of government ministries, departments, agencies and the general public to contribute to the second edition of Imo Economy Digest (IED). The IED is a quarterly publication of the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government. The objective is to showcase to the public the opportunities within the State and subsequently attract investors and/or spur the birth of new initiatives and innovations among the people within the state for the betterment of all.

This edition focuses on the theme 'Imo Economy: A Global Tech Hub. We are looking for well-researched, fact-based articles that can help showcase the potentials of Imo State to become a tech hub for South-East Nigeria, Nigeria, Africa and the world. The edition will showcase the potentials of Imo State to occupy this enviable position. Writers are invited to explore the variables and resources required to make it happen and how a creative combination of those variables can bring us to this goal, so that ultimately through it investors and start-ups can find Imo an ideal destination for these innovations and investments. In the final analysis, jobs and wealth can be created for the economic growth of Imo people. The key questions that are driving our inquiry include: what will it take Imo State to position herself to become the tech hub of Nigeria and Africa? What are the infrastructural, policy cum legal instruments, human resource and material conditions to make this possible?

Writers are invited to explore these or related topics:

- **What does it mean to be a tech hub?**
- **What are the job creation potentials of a tech hub?**
- **What are the manpower and human resource requirements of a tech hub?**
- **What is the value chain projections in a vibrant tech hub?**
- **What policies are needed to drive a sustainable tech hub?**
- **What infrastructures are essential for a tech hub?**
- **Who are the key actors, enablers and what are the constraints faced by a tech hub?**
- **The role of financial institutions for a successful tech hub**
- **Security and tech hub success**
- **Human resource and tech hub success**
- **Benefits of the tech hub to Imo economy**

Author's Guide

- **Manuscripts are to be prepared on MS Word, using Times New Roman Font-size 12.**
- **The average length of each article should be between 1,000 (one thousand) to 1,500 (one thousand five hundred) words.**
- **Articles are expected to be of high quality that can satisfy international standards.**
- **All articles will be reviewed by the editorial team. Where necessary, they will be returned to their authors for improvement.**
- **Articles for this edition are to reach the editorial team via kenneth.amaeshi@imostate.gov.ng**

Editorial Team
IMO Economy Digest

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