Season's Greetings

IMO ECONOMY DIGEST
Vol. 1 No.2 December 2022

Giant Strides of the Governor

INSIDE

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Governor's Message

It is my pleasure to share the second edition of the Imo Economy Digest with you, particularly following the excellent reception of the first edition. Instructively, this edition focuses on good governance and its implications for economic growth.

Happily, the 3R Strategic Approach of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Recovery, which is very central to my administration, is helping to stimulate economic growth in all sectors. I have a sense of fulfilment that in Imo State today, under my administration, the dividends of democracy are widespread, and the benefits of sound economic policies are not limited to a few in the society. Without doubt, this edition of the Imo Economy Digest understands the importance of such a connection. Hence, it focuses on what our government has achieved for public scrutiny and appreciation.

It is worth emphasising that Imo State is blessed with abundant human resources, with immense opportunities to become a leading economic hub in the South-East region of Nigeria. The wealth of untapped opportunities in emerging sectors like renewables, digital economy, oil and gas, ICT, cyber security and technological innovation, presents attractive prospects to usher in real development in the State. As a government, we are committed to providing the enabling environment for a private sector driven economy to thrive and grow.

For instance, the huge positive potential of an initiative like the Corporate Imo Impact Partnership (CIIP), as explained in this edition, is an initiative in the right direction. This initiative is aimed at bringing government, the civil-society, and the private sector together in a fruitful collaboration with a plan to create jobs and enhance the shared prosperity agenda of my government. It is gladdening to know that corporate giants like the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) are funding the training of thousands of youths and providing equipment to boost youth job-creation in Imo State. I encourage other businesses to come on board. Together we can make Imo State the industrial hub of the South East Region.

As a matter of fact, only last month, November, my administration launched its industrial policy which spells out the government's road map towards industrialization of the State and what to do to stimulate the economy and accelerate our Shared Prosperity agenda. Clearly, due to neglect from successive governments, infrastructure deficits have robbed the State of the opportunity to live up to her true potential. But we are determined to arrest this ugly drift. With almost 100 roads already completed or under construction, particularly our signature roads of Orlu-Owerri and Owerri-Okigwe, and plans to do more roads, my government is moving to economically transform Imo State. In addition, my government has created the Ministry of Digital Economy and e-Government, the first in Nigeria by a state government. All these measures demonstrate beyond all reasonable doubts, that we mean what we say, and say what we mean.

In a bid to promote hard-work, creativity and entrepreneurship, this edition contains the success stories of entrepreneurs of Imo State origin who are excelling in their chosen fields of endeavour. This is commendable for the simple reason that it serves as a good example for the youths to emulate. The message is direct and simple. Hard work pays. Determination pays. Entrepreneurship pays. I am convinced that any committed youth will find something useful to do in Imo State that is economically rewarding. Government will continue to do all within her power to support hardworking youths. While I commend the editorial team of the Imo Economy Digest, I recommend this edition to all the good people of Imo State and beyond.

Happy holidays!

Senator Hope Uzodimma
Executive Governor, Imo State.

Walking the Talk

All of us at the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State are happy to bring to you the second edition of the Imo Economy Digest. The first edition appeared in July this year and was well-received. This second edition focuses on good governance in Imo State as a precursor to economic development. It explores the connection between good governance and economic prosperity.

The edition starts with some of the giant strides of the Imo State Governor, His Excellency Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma. There are a number of reasons why we showcase and celebrate the sterling achievements of the Governor as an excellent example of good governance.

First, government in many societies is usually a significant spender in the economy through investments in soft and hard infrastructure. For investors, entrepreneurs, and businesspeople, government's spendings and project priorities are pointers to the direction of development and invitations for fruitful and rewarding investment. Therefore, good investments usually respond to or rely on government's own honest efforts. The achievements of the government since inception in 2020 signal the direction Imo State is travelling on and serve as sources of opportunities for both entrepreneurs and investors.

For example, the digital economy is emerging as a critical sector in Imo State through the sustained efforts of the present government. In September 2022, the Governor created a new Ministry of Digital Economy and eGovernment – the first in Nigeria, as well as the Ministry of Health Insurance – another first in the history of our nation. The two Ministries offer significant investment opportunities as can be seen from the discussions with their respective commissioners in this edition.

Secondly, the recording of the giant strides of the government of Imo State is an act of accountability. It exemplifies the democratic culture of accountability to voters, citizens, taxpayers, and relevant publics. The importance of public accountability in a democracy cannot be over-emphasized. It binds people and the government in a democratic union. For instance, this edition focuses on how far the government has fared in its 3Rs mantra of Recovery, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation and why it matters to the vision of economic prosperity. It is expected to help the public to understand in plain terms how the shared prosperity doctrine is bearing fruits. It is also crucial to showcase the achievements of government in order to renew the confidence of the people and continue to enjoy their support.

Thirdly, accountability drives positive public image, legitimacy, cooperation, acceptability, and citizen's support. Some activities of the government are physical, but quite a substantial portion of government responsibilities and tasks are intangible and not usually visible. Therefore, it is important to showcase them so that they don't fall out of public view. Even the physical activities are sometimes located in distances that might not be accessible to everybody at the same time. Showcasing these achievements puts them in the public domain for both appreciation, rigorous scrutiny, and constructive feedback. In other words, accountability is also about a two-way communication between the government and the people.

The edition also features some informed essays on a number of issues such as digitalization of both hospitality and health, practical guides for youths on revenue mobilization via social media, as well as tips for effective cybersecurity.

In pursuit of its agenda to celebrate entrepreneurs from and in Imo State, this edition explores the entrepreneurial credentials of the doyen of road transport sub-sector in Nigeria, Mr. Frank Nneji, the CEO/MD of Associated Bus Company (ABC Transport). The story of road transport in Nigeria cannot be told without this illustrious son of Imo State, who was at some point the Chairman of Owerri Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines. It is a full meal of inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs. Two other young people, whom we dub as 'emerging entrepreneurs', are also presented to the public as examples to emulate, because they embody those traits that every entrepreneur should have.

Nnaemeka Ikegwuonu identifies and solves problems for farmers under the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) sector, while Comrade William Eke himself a young farmer leads the way on self generated employment in the agricultural sector. Success is possible in every sector. It simply requires developing the winning mindset and the right spirit. If we can help build up such zeal and sense of responsibility in the minds of Imo youths, then the aim of this Digest would have been realized.

Once again, welcome to this second edition of our magazine. Happy reading.

Governor Hope Uzodimma's Footprints on the Sands of Time

At critical junctures in history, major event(s) or factor(s) converge to disrupt the existing political, social or economic balance. The emergence of His Excellency Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma as the Governor of Imo State came at a critical juncture in Imo State history.

It came at a time when global politics was most fractured; at a time the world was recovering from a depressed economy and a bitter memory of COVID-19 which killed thousands of people all over the world. Not forgetting the insecurity occasioned by the unknown gunmen and politically contrived killings that continued to dominate news headlines. Always regarded as a man of the people with a big heart, it is fitting that Uzodimma emerged during a particularly challenging moment of our shared history.

However, Uzodimma, who was rather buoyed by his carefully articulated roadmap for the people of Imo State, plunged on undeterred. The Uzodimma administration was anchored on the Shared Prosperity Agenda which stood on the tripod of reconstruction, rehabilitation and recovery.

1. RECOVERY:

Imo State witnessed what was regarded as a "rape" of its assets. Stolen resources included physical assets and intangible assets. In fulfilment of the recovery agenda of Governor Uzodimma, the following were accomplished:

[A] The Eastern Palm University worth over 40 billion naira was recovered from former Governor Rochas Okorocha and his family. The University is now owned by the Imo State Government following the



approval and issuance of certificate of ownership by the National Universities Commission (NUC).

[B] The Imo State Standard Shoe Company, previously foreclosed by the Assets Management Company of Nigeria (AMCON), was equally recovered after it settled its indebtedness to AMCON and recovered it back.

[C] Following the report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry on Land and Related Matters, Governor Uzodimma handed over more than 2,000 plots of land to the original owners. Through the efforts of the state government, institutions reclaimed their lost assets. The Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education was given back the Alvan Quarters. The Magistrate Court quarters was recovered, including several properties belonging to various institutions. The designated new Government House Layout was returned to government.

[D] The famous Eke Ukwu Owerri market, which is the ancestral market of Owerri people, was recovered.

[E] The Imo State Rubber Plantation, which was illegally ceded to private operators and cronies of the previous administration, is now back into the hands of the government. The Rubber Estates are located in Emeabiam in Owerri West Local Government Area, Umuokanne Agriculture Rubber Estate and the Obiti Rubber Plantation, both in Ohaji Egbema Local Government Area.

REHABILITATION is another agenda on the tripod. Here again, His Excellency, Governor Hope Uzodimma, delivered on the following:

[i] The rehabilitation of 305 Health Centres in the 305 electoral wards in Imo State.

[ii] The rehabilitation of the abandoned Adapalm Plantation which occupies an area of 4,310 hectares of oil palm. A new Public, Private Partnership arrangement is now in place, with the state and host communities holding joint stake in the Company. The money-spinning venture now produces about 120 tons of Crude Palm Oil (CPO) monthly.

[iii] The Acharaubo Farm Estate at Emekuku in Owerri North Local Government Area is back to life. Established by the government of Late Chief Sam Mbakwe, this livestock farm is now in operation with the Imo State Government partnering with the National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA).

[iv] The Otamiri Water Scheme, which served the Owerri Capital Territory, now delivers potable, hygienic water to members of the public. With the support of the World Bank and USAID, the Company won the 2022 Word Bank Utility of the Future Award as an acknowledgement of the successes recorded.

[v] The Eluama Water Scheme in Orlu local government area and Ekenguru Water Scheme in Aboh Mbaise LGA has been rehabilitated.



In the area of RECONSTRUCTION, infrastructural revolution remains a defining feature of the Uzodimma-led administration. As a demonstration of his commitment to the infrastructural renewal agenda, 74.64% of the 2022 Imo State budget is allocated to capital expenditure. More than 1000 kilometres of road networks in both the urban and rural areas have so far witnessed reconstruction.

The 35 kilometres Owerri-Orlu dual carriageway and the 46 kilometres Owerri-Okigwe road was delivered as intercity road. The dualization of the Owerri-Mbaise-Umuahia road, another 46 kilometres stretch, is ongoing. Also under construction is the Orlu-Akokwa-Arondizogu-Uga road leading to Anambra State measuring 37 kilometres.

For Owerri capital territory, the following are some of the completed urban roads:

1. Oparanozie Street
2. Amaigbo Street
3. Edede Street.
4. Ring roads in Aladinma Housing Estate.
5. Lake Nwaebere Street,
6. Olokoro Street,
7. Umuahia Street
8. Okeikpe Street
9. Arugo Street
10. Egbema Street
11. Ngwa Street
12. Douglas Road
13. JP Ajaelu Street
14. Thomas Moore Street
15. Gozie Nwachukwu Street
16. Archdeacon Dennis Road, Aladinma
17. Assumpta / IbariOgwa / Portharcourt Road
18. Federal Secretariat Road (now Muhammadu Buhari Dual Carriageway Drive)
19. Dick Tiger Road
20. Akachi Road (now Evan Enwerem Way)
21. Relief Market Road
22. Imo University Teaching Hospital Road, Orlu
23. Market Road, Opposite IMSU Gate
24. Egbeada Bypass Road (dual carriageway)
25. Sam Mbakwe Road.
26. House of Assembly Back Gate Road.
27. Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Road, and
28. The Deputy Speakers Lodge Avenue, and many others.

As an administration that prioritizes inclusive development, the rural areas of Imo State are not left out. The Imo State Government is constructing 153 kilometres of rural roads at five kilometres per each local government area in the first phase of the program.

[vi] The famous Dan Anyiam Stadium in Owerri has been fully reconstructed, including the main complex, the indoors sports centre and the handball court. An Olympic sized swimming pool under construction in the same site, is now nearing completion.

[vii] The Imo State House of Assembly Main Complex has been fully reconstructed and commissioned by President Muhammadu Buhari.

In the area of intangible assets, the government of His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma has added tremendous value.

a. The Alvan Ikoku College of Education has been elevated to a Federal University of Education.
b. The Federal Medical Centre, Owerri is now





upgraded to a Teaching Hospital for the Federal University of Technology, Owerri.

c. The optimization of revenue processes through the Treasury Single Account (TSA) is another policy that has grown the internally generated revenue of the state.

d. The adoption of the SEFTAS open budget system has led to World Bank awards and an influx of financial grants.

Under Governor Hope Uzodimma, over thirty bills were passed and signed into law between January 2020 till date. Some of these laws are listed below:

1. Imo State Revenue Administration (Amendment) Law No. 1 of 2020
2. Imo State Administration of Criminal Justice Law No. 2 of 2020
3. Imo State Environmental Transformation Commission (Amendment) Law No. 3 of 2020
4. COVID-19 and other Dangerous Infectious Diseases Prevention and Eradication Law No. 4 of 2020
5. Imo State Waste Management Agency Law No. 5 of 2020
6. Imo State Land Use Charge Law No. 6 of 2020
7. Imo State University of Agriculture and Environmental Studies Aboh/Okpala (Establishment) (Amendment) Law No. 7 of 2020
8. Imo State Governor's Pension and Privileges (Repeal) Law No. 8 of 2020
9. Oil (Licensing and Control) Law No. 9 of 2020
10. Imo State of Nigeria Traditional Rulers Autonomous Communities and Allied Matters (Amendment) Law No. 10 of 2020
11. Imo State Polytechnic (Amendment) Law No. 11 of 2020
12. 2020 Imo State of Nigeria Appropriation (Review) Law No. 12. of 2020
13. Imo State Bureau for the Co-ordination of Donor Assisted Projects (Establishment) Law No. 13 of 2020
14. Imo State Micro, Small and Medium Scale Industries Development Agency Law No. 14 of 2020
15. 2021 Imo State of Nigeria Appropriation Law No. 15 of 2020
16. Imo State Administration of Criminal Justice (Amendment) Law No. 16 of 2020
17. Imo State Waste Management Agency (Amendment) Law No. 17 of 2020
18. Imo State Bureau for the Co-ordination of Donor Assisted Projects (Establishment) (Amendment) Law No. 18 of 2020
19. Imo State Micro, Small and Medium Scale Industries Development Agency (Establishment)



(Amendment) Law No. 19 of 2020

20. Kingsley Ozuomba (K. O) Mbadiwe University (Establishment) Law No. 1 of 2021
21. Imo Security Organization (IMSO) Law No. 2 of 2021
22. Imo State Land Administration and Geographical Information Service (Establishment) Law No. 3 of 2021
23. Imo State Audit Law No. 5 of 2021.
24. Imo State Dept Management (Establishment) law No. 6 of 2021.
25. Imo State Markets Development Authority (Amendment) law No. 7, 2021.
26. Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) law No. 8, 2021.
27. Imo State Supplementary Appropriation Law No. 9. 2021
28. Imo State Local Government Development Areas Administration (Amendment) law No. 10 of 2021
29. Imo State of Nigeria Appropriation law No. 11 of 2021

In today's global economy, partnership is a critical tool for expanding economic development. The Imo State Government under the leadership of Governor Uzodimma has partnered with several international development agencies to consolidate development in the state.

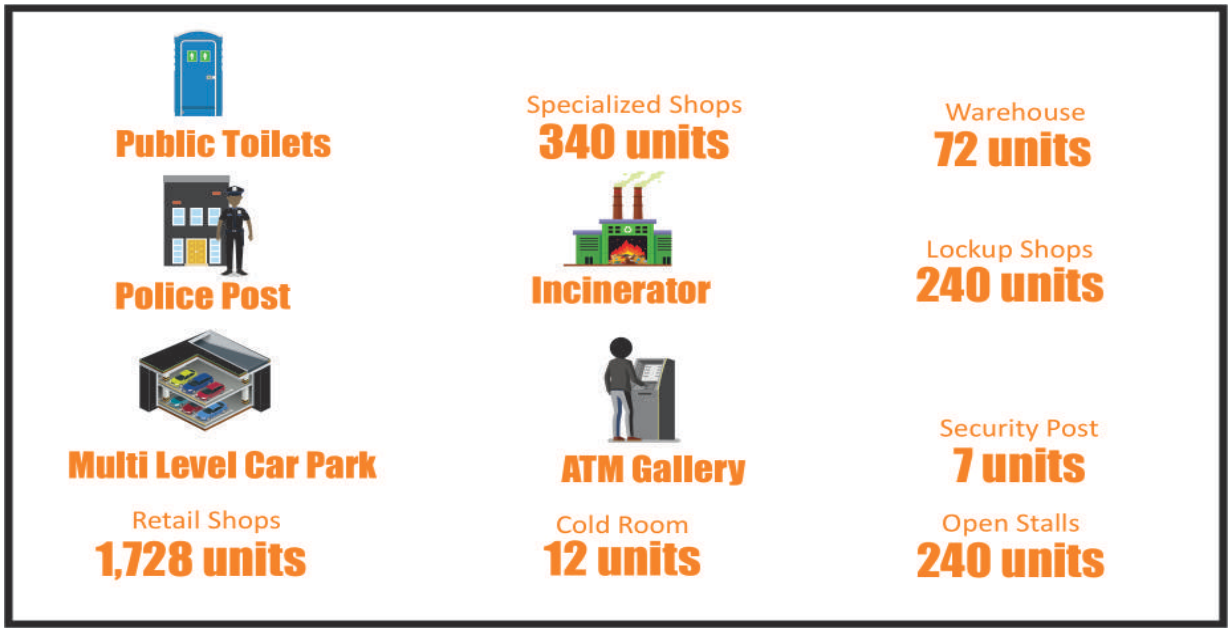
In 2022, Imo became one of the beneficiaries of the Special Agro Industrial processing project. This is a $160-million agricultural programme of the African Development Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural and the Islamic Development Bank. The project is a mega cluster-based infrastructure venture to aggregate farmers, processors, and retailers to connect



https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/09/buhari-commissions-orlu-owerri-dual-carriage-road/

A NEW ULTRA MODERN MARKET FOR OWERRI CAPITAL CITY

From the ashes of the destroyed Eke Ukwu Owerri market rises a brand new modern market ready for commissioning soon. The new market layout includes (see diagram)



agricultural production to the market. According to Dr Akinwumi Adesina, the AfDB President, Nigeria's former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, "the special agro-industrial processing zones will be game-changers for agriculture in Nigeria."

Similarly, the Imo State Industrial and Innovation Park is slated for take-off. The multibillion-naira project will be situated at the Ibigwe Oilfield in Ohaji-Egbema LGA. Already, Waltersmith Petrolman Limited, an oil and gas production company in the community, has committed to the success of the project. The administration has equally secured from the federal government a new naval base located at Oguta. The base is now performing their maritime security duties along the Imo State waterways.

In the area of Healthcare, more than 300 medical students have been graduated by the Imo State University Teaching Hospital located in Orlu, after a decade of non-accreditation. The Teaching Hospital is now fully equipped with state-of-the-art medical facilities, including digital x-ray machines, mammogram machines, ambulance, dialysis machines, molecular biology and chemical pathology laboratory equipment (for COVID-19 and other viral disease tests) and anesthetic machines.

The Imo State Specialist Hospital, Umuguma in Owerri is now fully functional and performing complicated operations such as spinal and brain injury surgeries. To optimize healthcare service delivery across the state, the Governor has procured 10 mobile clinics for speedy intervention at the primary level. Public servants in Imo State both at the state and local government levels are beneficiaries of the Imo State Health Insurance Scheme. A new Ministry of Health Insurance was established to drive the agenda.

Imo State became the first state in Nigeria to create a Ministry of Digital Economy and E-government. The Imo Digital Economy Agenda (IDEA) 2022-2026) is the State Government's policy document formulated to harness ICT potential to provide new solutions to developmental challenges and foster economic growth, competitiveness, enhance access to information and knowledge, poverty eradication and social inclusion.
Across the state, there is renewed optimism, thanks to the Governor who has demonstrated commendable leadership in transforming the socio-economic fortune of the people.

Compiled by the Office of the Governor, Special Adviser on Public Enlightenment



Technology in Hospitality

The nexus for Growth and Impact in Imo State

By John Nsikak





Exponential technology convergence and growth is creating opportunities for smarter business models and disruption all over the world. The printing press, invented by a German goldsmith Johann Gutenberg in 1448, has been called one of the most important inventions in the history of humankind. This singular innovation quickened the spread of knowledge, discoveries, and literacy in Renaissance Europe, with so much impact and gave rise to what we now refer to as the "Gutenberg Moment." What was the real value of the gutenberg moment? Knowledge was democratized with the emergence of books and everyone that could read had access to knowledge which hitherto was believed to be bestowed on a few, by the gods.

It is interesting to note that today, we are having an avalanche of gutenberg moments across several technology stacks, bringing about extreme metabolism and tectonic shifts in the global business environment. Some of these technology tools are Networks, Sensors, Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, 3D Printing, Synthetic Biology, Virtual/

Augmented Reality, Quantum Computing, and DLT to mention a few. Each of these new tech tools is growing at an exponential rate and democratizing access to value at scale; but the real game changer is predicated on the overlaps between these tools when they begin to work together and unlock convoluted value.

This paper is not about technology in business per se but seeks to narrow down into technology and hospitality and how Imo state can benefit from the convergence of these two. The hospitality industry and tourism have a well-defined relationship across the following three main areas. These areas work together to create memorable and delightful experiences for consumers.

Accommodations

Lodging is an important service for consumers when they travel. Hotels, motels, hostels, bed, and breakfasts are examples of accommodative services.

Food and beverage

Whether travelling far or staying close to home, consumers often enjoy dining at unique, fancy, or culturally themed locations to experience something different. Restaurants, fast food chains, and other dining establishments are part of the hospitality industry. They may be located at hotels or standalone locations.

Travel and/or tourism

Modes of transportation are included in the hospitality industry so that consumers may savor the travel experience and arrive at their locations to enjoy more hospitality. Airlines, taxis, trains, and cruise ships provide transportation and in some cases are a vacation on their own.

Events can also be said to be part of tourism/ hospitality and we must make the point that hospitality is not just about recreation and pleasure as business trips also fall under the broad heading.



It is interesting to note that today, we are having an avalanche of gut-tendberg moments across several technology stacks, bringing about extreme metabolism and tectonic shifts in the global business environment





Globe News Wire put the value of Global Hospitality Market at about USD 3953 billion in 2021, with a prediction to grow to around USD 6716.3 billion by 2028 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of roughly 10.24% between 2022 and 2028. According to Statista, mirroring the hospitality sector in Nigeria, revenue in the Travel and Tourism market is projected to reach US$2,252.00m in 2022. Revenue is expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2022-2026) of 12.60%, resulting in a projected market volume of US$3,620.00m by 2026. Undesirably, Covid-19 caused a major dip in the global market size since it was one of the first sectors to be directly impacted by the virus. The closure of domestic and international borders as well as prevailing travel bans, coupled with restrictions on people sitting in eateries, and functioning only partially, were some of the main reasons that led to the downward revenue in 2020 and the beginning of 2021. As listed by Forbes, the global tourism industry was down by USD 935 billion because of the pandemic.

Globe News Wire put the value of Global Hospitality Market at about USD 3953 billion in 2021, with a prediction to grow to around USD 6716.3 billion by 2028 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of roughly 10.24% between 2022 and 2028.

In spite of the downturn in 2020, the hospitality sector is seen as attractive and bankable across many parts of the world and within the local business space. In January 2020, The Nation newspaper x-rayed the hospitality industry in Imo state and referred to Imo as "a booming hospitality destination." In the same report, what was made clear is that most of the buzz is centered around the urban area of Owerri – the state capital. Imo state, unlike her other commercially vibrant neighbors, is considered a civil service state – what that means is, money is spent in Imo and seldom made there. Despite this, the state



and its people maintain their entertainment-loving lifestyle and Owerri is dotted with hotels of every kind, entertainment centers, eateries and amusement spots. The hotels also boast of good patronage from people who are either on a leisure or business trip. Another strong factor boosting the hospitality sector in Imo is the presence of six higher institutions of learning. The presence of these schools and pockets of catering and nursing schools encourages establishment of hotels, clubs, eateries, and bars across the state capital and these play a major role in attracting fun seekers to the Eastern Heartland.

The big question is: How can we leverage the nexus between technology and hospitality to unlock economic value for Imo state? We know that Technology is an enabler and can deliver business growth and outcomes specially when applied correctly. Is there a way to deploy emerging tech tools to enhance value creation within the Imo State hospitality sector towards exponential growth?

Generally speaking, the following tech tools and applications are the emerging "hospitality-tech" front runners. Gamification/smart travel planning, virtual reality, contactless payments, chatbot/digital concierge, IoT for room control/ customization, and geo-fencing + location-based services. While these may sound sophisticated. these tech tools can be leveraged locally for growth in Imo State.

Let's take a cursory look at two of these and dimension a bit further.

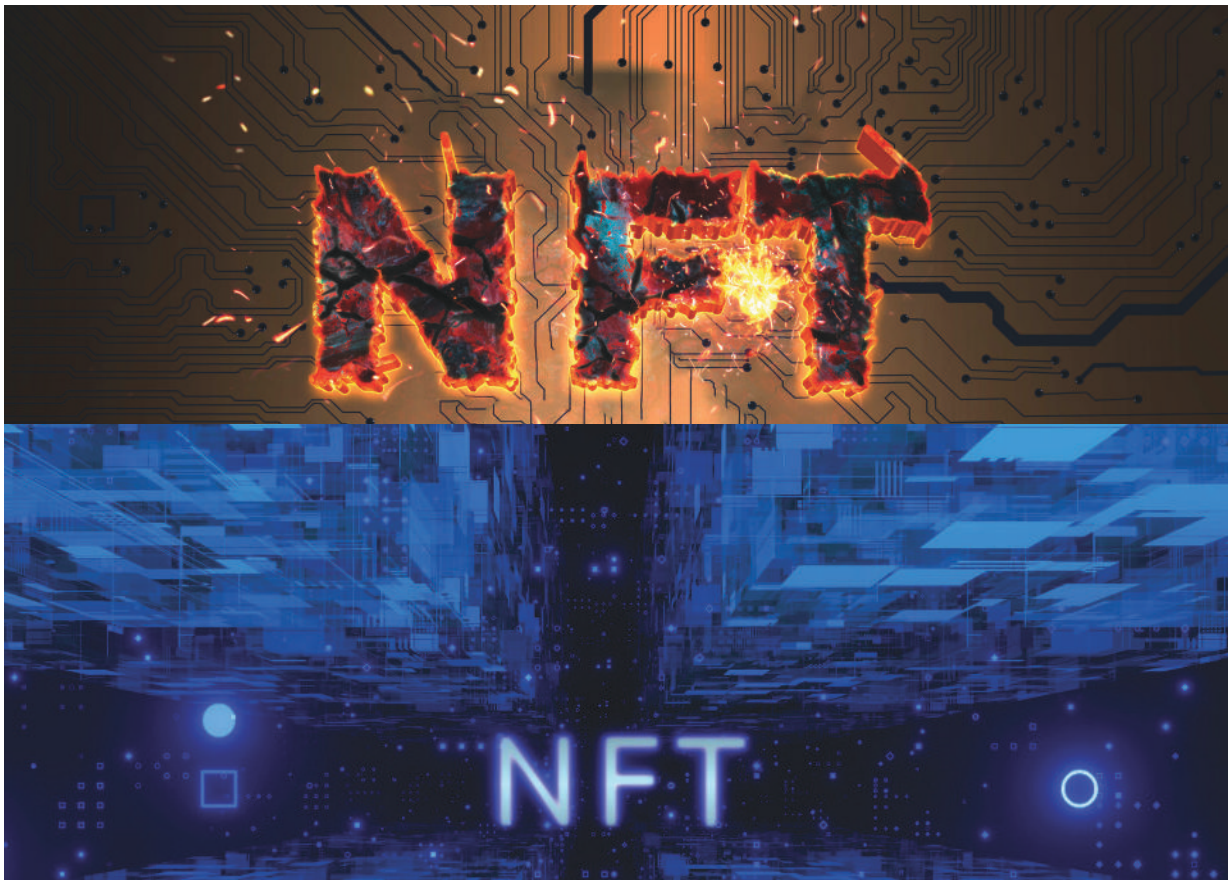
Virtual Reality

VR can be leveraged for virtual immersive tours of heritage sites and tourist attractions in Imo State. It is common knowledge that some of the very exciting tourist attractions in Imo state have been abandoned over the years and hold no value or attraction at the moment. Some of the notable ones are:

Oguta Lake and Golf resorts, Ogbuide River, where two great rivers flow side by side but do not meet and Mbari Cultural Centre , just to mention a few. It would



Oguta Lake



be in the interest of all Imolites and lovers of progress to have all hands on deck to bring back these tourist attractions. These sites will attract visitors to the state, while VR tools can also be used to organize virtual tours for people who wish to have an immersive virtual experience of these sites Remotely.

NFTs:

A non-fungible token (NFT) is a unique digital identifier that cannot be copied, substituted, or subdivided, that is recorded in a blockchain, and that is used to certify authenticity and ownership. Recently, we have seen NFTs bought for millions of dollars, and the market for NFTs continue to grow. NFTs can be created for iconic artefacts, assets, or moments. Humans everywhere crave a sense of connection to something higher than themselves or one that celebrates their cultural identity. An average Imolite or even a Nigerian, foreigner or a lover of culture at home or in the diaspora will jump at the opportunity to own something iconic that connects them to their roots.

Some NFTs are part of a series that tells a story. NFTs can also be minted to represent great tales of historical and cultural value to propagate and sustain these values. These will not only bring prosperity in local currency to the economy of the state, but they are also a source of foreign exchange.

There are many more ways to leverage technology within the hospitality industry in Imo state. The above options are only a snippet of the immense possibilities in the Imo hospitality sector. These initiatives will not only attract people to Imo State but take Imo state to the globe. Airbnb, Inc., based in San Francisco, the online marketplace focused on short-term homestays and experiences, became the biggest player in the global hospitality space even though the company does not own a single hotel or home. They achieved this feat by leveraging a smart business model, powered by technology. Imo State hospitality industry can also benefit from good thinking, creativity and technology to unlock unlimited benefits for all.

(Nsikak JOHN, Head, Transformation, Tediafrica. Nsikak has extensive footprints mentoring business leaders across venture acceleration, strategy and sustainability. As a tech-novation leader, he has spearheaded the design & development of an array of "disruptive" solutions within the African business space.)

From Hospitality to Tech Hub: Opportunities for the Imo Economy

By Ikem Okuhu



With a population projected to be around 5.5 million, more than 65 percent of which are aged between 18 and 65 by end of 2022, Imo State is demographically tilted for huge consumption of technology. But this also offers an opportunity for a planned evolution of a market for the technological solutions to feed the market.

The fact is Imo as a market goes beyond the confines of the boundaries that separate it from other states. Its geographical location as gateway to the country's oil capital of Rivers State adds to her streams of intangible assets of being the hospitality capital of the old eastern Nigeria to present a potential opportunity for the cocreation of leisure and tech.

Technology is the present and perhaps, much of the foreseeable future. Researchers estimate that the global digital economy is worth $11.5 trillion, equivalent to 15.5% of the global GDP, and has grown two and half times faster than global GDP over the past 15 years. Sadly, the bulk of these developments are taking place in the western world, with Nigeria, and indeed Africa, lagging.

The digital decadence of Africa has been attracting international attention and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) actually pointed out that this digital divide is impeding development of developing



countries. In fact, the secretary general wrote, "by the end of the next decade, growth, productivity gains, and human development will be determined by levels of integration into the digital economy. To guard against new forms of inequality, the international community must do more to help developing countries close the connectivity gap."

Imo State is a natural for the incubator for a future of Nigeria where technology can be harvested for state and even national economic leap. It is a strongly held view by development economists that tourism and leisure bears a direct correlation with business incubation. This is because investments, among other factors, follow the trail of hospitality and leisure to settle. Countries have invested in nation branding, using the propositions of peace, security, and comfort as lures. What it means is that once a destination is found to be peaceful and conducive, it becomes a good place for investors.

Imo State stands a great chance to lead the charge in driving Nigeria into the tech revolution she so desperately needs. Certain prerequisites are on ground to make it possible, the strongest of which is the hospitable nature of the people and the environment. Imo State is among southeast Nigeria that attracts young people. Leisure-seeking young people would rather visit Owerri than any other capital in the region.

The Youth as Lure

Besides its attraction to leisure hunters, Imo is home to more than 6 tertiary educational institutions. These institutions of higher learning form a strong pool of manpower and talent from which technology hubs can be created. Luckily,



there is the Federal University of Technology (FUTO), Owerri. Although owned by the federal government, the state government can initiate programmes and partnerships that will enable the university offer tailor-made technology programmes and courses relevant to the predetermined needs and objectives of the state.

Besides the need to solve unemployment, mobilizing young people into the tech ecosystem will, in addition, lead to the birthing of new industries that will also enhance the economic base of the state, while also ushering opportunities for propositions that could trigger other developments in other areas.

There are existing local examples to borrow from. Flutterwave, Nigeria's unicorn with a valuation standing at more than $1 billion, and Paystack, purchased for more than $200 million, are start-ups that rose from the Yaba tech hub in Lagos. And the Lagos State government is determined to leverage this by building what it called the Knowledge Information Technology and Entrepreneurship (KITE) centre.

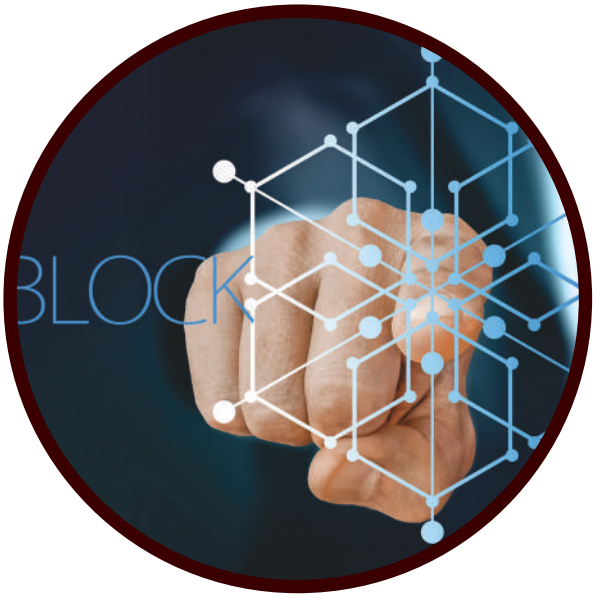


> ***Imo State stands a great chance to lead the charge in driving Nigeria into the tech revolution she so desperately needs. Certain prerequisites are on ground to make it possible, the strongest of which is the hospitable nature of the people and the environment.***

Explaining why the state was embarking on the project, Lagos Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu said: "Technology is the new oil and the basic element for the fourth industrial revolution globally. As a state with a massive population of young people, we need to play a major role in the development of technology, which is an enabler to leapfrog into rapid socio-economic growth. We take technology as an important deliverable in our government's development agenda. For us to make lasting impact in the tech industry, we said to ourselves we needed to build the infrastructure to support the sector. We are building a tech campus on a 22,000 square meters land in Yaba, which we christen K. I.T. E. We are working with global brands in the tech space, such as Facebook and Google, to deliver this important technology hub."

What Lagos is doing is connect to the organic tech hubs springing up in Yaba, Lekki and Ikoyi areas of the state and fuse them into a cross-functional ecosystem, with Yaba as the centre.

The co-creation hub in Yaba evolved because of its location at the heart of Lagos. Perhaps because it is an old settlement, rent was also relatively affordable. The cluster of higher institutions around the area, including the University of Lagos, Yaba College of Technology and Federal College of Education





(Technical), all conspired to create a fertile environment for the gathering of young people, the impetus upon which the hub rose.

Owerri, the Imo state capital, is blessed with the important population segment needed for a co-creation hub to spring up and survive. One of the first things the state should do is to orchestrate fun events around the multifarious melting pots in the capital to attract and cater to the needs of developers, startup founders, makers, coders, DIY-ers, kids, women in technology, designers, et cetera. Like most businesses, no technology field is mutually exclusive and once one group begins to gather, the need for others will be created.

Technology tourism as gateway

Either as a sole initiator, or in partnership with established companies and agencies, Imo State can enable tech development by intentionally hosting wide-ranging tech and tech-related events in the state. Government agencies such as the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), the Nigerian Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), National Space Research and Development Agency, and the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure, are among the federal government agencies that could be partnered for events.

Overtime, Imo will gain reputation as the destination for tech and tech-related events, with businesses and individuals buying into the calendar. Each event leaves footprints and other marks on the people, feeding the educational institutions in and around the state, and propelling investments in various forms of technology.

While hubs like the Silicon Valley and even the Yaba hub may have started by accident, there is nothing that prevents Imo State from intentionally creating its own hub, leveraging its reputation as capital of hospitality.

Positioning to reap the economic and social benefits from technology has grown in importance, especially for governments. Today, the world's biggest companies are technology companies. In Nigeria, as seemingly slow in adoption as the country appears, the proportion of tech's contribution to the country's GDP stands at 18.44 percent at the end of the third quarter of 2022, representing a growth of 6.5 percent.

Imo has all it takes to add to its economic numbers through technology. And it does not have to cost heavily in investments. A lot depends on how it handles its perception. Once it is able to create the right kinds of associations and win the battle of being seen as the tech and hospitality capital of the southeast, the path to becoming a regional champion will thus begin, followed by possible national and, who knows, continental and global recognition.

(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).

Imo Digital Health: Facts You Did Not Know

By Kenneth Okereafor, PhD

Healthcare is a cherished asset but delivering it promptly and efficiently is an art. Imo State is well-positioned to evolve a world-class healthcare industry. Interestingly the healthcare of the future is delivered with the help of computer resources across high-speed data networks, a domain popularly referred to as digital health. To get the best out of digital health, everyone needs to understand its benefits. In this paper, I introduce digital health and explain its potentials to improve the health outcomes in Imo State.



Imo State is well-positioned to evolve a world-class healthcare industry.

What is Digital Health?

Digital health is the use of computer technologies in healthcare and related areas to facilitate health delivery and improve health outcomes. It consists of digital platforms, connectivity, software, and sensors that are applied in the delivery and administration of healthcare. Digital health simply uses Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to deliver healthcare and break the barriers of speed, spread, distance, and complexity. The technologies applied in digital health have become a global phenomenon that have redefined the patient experience in all aspects of healthcare including, but not limited



to, general wellness, pharmacy, medical laboratory investigation, medical billing and claims, health insurance, referral administration, surgery, emergency treatment, vaccination, applications as medical devices, etc.

What are the Technological Drivers of Digital Health?

Generally, ICT advancements are rapid, but the recent COVID pandemic has triggered more innovations that are improving the healthcare delivery experience. Therefore, digital health is largely driven by the following ICT innovations:

1. **5G:** Super high speed data networks enable the speedy exchange of sensitive life-saving medical data and health information among healthcare professionals in real-time. 5G provides the bedrock for remote medical procedures, tele-health, tele-medicine, etc.

2. **Artificial Intelligence:** AI and Machine Learning (ML) create an opportunity for using robots to perform complex medical procedures and take healthcare-related decisions faster than (and often on behalf of) humans. This is already redefining many aspects of medical practice and has impacted on global healthcare delivery.

3. **Internet of things:** IOT is the use of computer systems to link and inter-connect objects for the purpose of controlling them remotely such as smart houses, connected factory operations, etcetera. Similarly, in healthcare, with the application of Internet of Medical Things (IoMT), it is now possible to monitor, control and administer medical tools and objects over the internet or across dedicated private networks of healthcare facilities including hospitals, pharmacies, medical laboratories, etc. IoMT played a crucial role in the management of quarantine centres during the COVID lockdown in 2020 and is a potential area that can be harnessed in Imo State given its geographical diversity.

4: **Big Data and Analytics:** Big data is the concept of using complex computing systems to aggregate and manage large volumes of data from many sources and derive meaningful insights from them. The reality is that healthcare constantly generates huge volumes of patient-related data from disease treatment, consultations, medical lab tests, patient encounter, drug administration,



hospitalization, vaccine production and utilization, disease prevalence, etc. These patient-specific data and information are kept in a computer-based store, a database known as Electronic Medical Records (EMR). Big data and analytics tools are specially designed computer tools that help to aggregate EMR from multiple hospitals facilities and generate credible statistics and intelligence for the healthcare community and for government decision-making purposes.

5. **Cloud and Mobile Computing:** This is the use of internet platforms and web-based software applications (Apps) to drive services. Setting up individualized Apps for the management of medical information requires huge logistic and financial investments on the parts of governments and institutions. A possible remedy is to use cloud-based software tools to warehouse health management information systems. Although there are concerns about privacy and data security, there are several cybersecurity mitigation strategies that can be applied to safeguard health data resident in the cloud. It also requires the application of specific security standards.

6. **Blockchain:** Blockchain or "distributed ledger technology" has a wide range of applications in digital health. It creates an efficient, transparent, safe, and effective way of communicating data across healthcare facilitates, thereby enabling secure transfer of patient medical records. This results in cloud-based information storage that is resistant to data theft and easy to share/exchange transparently amongst different providers. Blockchain can help Imo to manage the medicine supply chain.

7. **Metaverse**: This is an evolving area which simulates situations and gives the user the feeling of reality. With the metaverse in digital health, surgical teams can learn new procedures without having to be physically present in the same operating room. The metaverse creates immersive and engaging









3D environments for various aspects of healthcare. This technology relies on the combination of Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and IoT.

What are the Benefits of Digital Health for Imo People?

Digital health has the potential to prevent disease and lower healthcare costs, by helping patients to monitor and manage chronic conditions. It can also tailor medicine for individual patients. It helps organizations to deliver better health outcomes, improved efficiency of scarce healthcare resources, cost savings, enhanced organizational performance, and more sustainable health systems.

In summary, digital health:

- Enables sustainable and responsive healthcare.
- Fosters prevention before treatment.
- Promotes re-modeling of patient-doctor relationship.
- Expands the coverage of healthcare professionals.
- Reduces medical inefficiencies and wastages.
- Improves access to healthcare.
- Reduces cost of treatment.
- Increases quality of healthcare services.

Conclusion

The digitalization of healthcare has given birth to numerous computer tools and online resources that can potentially improve healthcare services, including the use of software that makes health information more accessible to patients, and keeps patient data secure in one place. Digital health is a potential area of focus for Imo prosperity, and the gains are many. Given its thriving population, growing economy, and collaborative health ecosystem, Imo State is ripe for massive digital health interventions. With sustained political will, digital health is a reality that must be exploited. In the long run, it is to the benefit of our people who will enjoy computer-driven faster emergency medical attention, more efficient medical finance mechanisms, and wider healthcare coverage from Ngor-Okpala through Mbaise to Okigwe and Orlu.

(Kenneth Okereafor is a digital health expert who has been protecting Nigeria's digital health infrastructure from cyber attacks at the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) since 2013. He provides professional technology advisories to senior decision makers as a UNESCO-trained ICT specialistwith a PhD in Cybersecurity from Azteca University Mexico).



Social Media, ICT and Income Generation for Youths

By Segun Abraham Sanni

Social media refers to forms of interactive technologies which enable people to create and share experiences, news, information, ideas, interests etc., through virtual communication.

It is not for nothing that a lot of emphasis is being laid on the importance of ICT and its transformative potential in terms of job creation and revenue generation. This truth needs to be explored better for the benefit of youths in need of new avenues of revenue generation. Any youth who owns a smartphone or a laptop and is willing to cue in has the tools to benefit maximally from the limitless potentials of the ICT revolution. This article explains what is happening in the social media space and how the youths can maximize the revolution and benefit through job creation and personal revenue generation.

Social Media and Digital Revolution

Social media refers to forms of interactive technologies which enable people to create and share experiences, news, information, ideas, interests etc., through virtual communication. Whether texts, videos, pictures, infographics, social media makes the creation and sharing of data instantaneous. In Nigeria, there is a social media revolution sweeping across the country's landscape.

According to Statista, "the number of social media users in Nigeria has been on the rise. As of 2022, the number of social media users in the country reached 34 million in total, expanding from 18 million users registered by 2018".

FELICITATIONS



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Sen. Hope Uzodimma

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Your Excellency, we are proud to be associated with you and your giant strides in our dear State.

Ride on, Your Excellency as second tenure awaits you.

Signed:
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Following these trends, social media users in Nigeria are projected to hit 90 million by 2025. That's nearly half of the Nigerian population. This means that by 2025, roughly one in every two persons in Nigeria would be on one social media platform or another.

The most common platforms include Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn etc. Interestingly, the more people join social media platforms, the larger the market and the opportunities for wealth generation.

Income Generation Opportunities on Social Media

There are several ways people can generate income on social media. Thousands of people make money on social media as either content creators or influencers by featuring brands in their content. A HypeAuditor survey found that Instagram influencers make $2,970 per month by working an average 28.7 hours in a week. already The growth of e-commerce has opened the door to direct sales via social media, making it possible to sell directly to customers from the social media platform they're already on.

Content creators do not necessarily need excess number of followers to unlock earning potentials. Micro-influencer can also generate income on social media with as little as 1,000 followers. However, the more followers a micro-influencer has, the more income they

stand to generate. The question is, how can income be generated on social media? What are the procedures? The following are ways that social media influencers generate income online.

1. **Partnership with brands**
   One of the major ways of generating income on social media is to partner with brands and this is considered a flexible option with many approaches. In addition, working with brands is a great way to legitimize your business ideas and position yourself as a professional to other potential partners. Overtime, many social media creators have been successful via brand collaborations.

   The interesting part is that anyone can achieve this feat without dedicating their entire life to it. After all, many influencers began their journey as a pastime or a side gig, supplemental to income from a full-time job. All you need is an understanding that brands are constantly looking for opportunities to connect and engage with their customers to grow their market share.

2. **Becoming an affiliate**
   Affiliate marketing is another passive way to earn income on social media. You can recommend products and services on your social media channels to your followers or connections. Organizations pay a commission in exchange for every sale through your referral. The beautiful part of affiliate marketing is that you can start with little or no money.

3. **Selling your own merchandise**
   Another way of generating income on social media is by selling your products or services online. If you have a strong presence and loyal following, you might consider turning it into branded merchandise. Social media is an excellent channel to promote products by either driving people to your digital store or selling directly via social commerce. Julia Roblin is an artist from Winnipeg who turned her TikTok success into a product-based business opportunity. She started posting her tattoo ideas and quickly garnered an audience of more than half a million followers. When people demanded her designs on products they could purchase, she







launched a Shopify store to sell merch in the form of stickers, apparel, and tattoo templates. This has been a workaround for TikTok's strict creator fund restrictions.

Making and selling merchandise doesn't necessarily require extensive experience. In fact, you can outsource everything from product design through order fulfilment. You can even work with third-party print-on-demand suppliers who can manufacture and ship your products to customers on your behalf. Keep in mind that each platform has its own parameters when it comes to selling products on its platform. Julia found a way to use TikTok to promote her merchandise business.

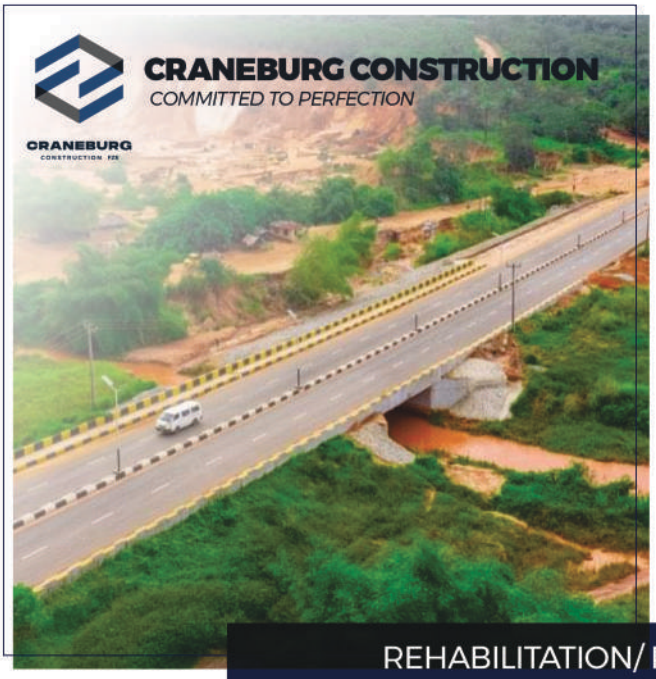
4. **Offering of premium services or coaching**
   Premium services or coaching is a money spinner on social media. You can generate tons of income by consulting or offering coaching services. If you're a skilled social media marketer, you can monetize your expertise via a service-based business. There are many avenues you can leverage this business idea. You can choose a specific niche, such as helping product-based businesses create social media plans or coaching professional photographers on how to prep their photos for their feeds. The possibilities are endless, which makes this a great option to make money with social media.

5. **Selling of your own educational products or services**
   Another passive way to earn income is by selling educational products or rendering services to users. There are multiple types of educational products or services you can create and sell on social media such as courses, ebooks and mentoring. For example, Andy Guitar teaches how to play the guitar on YouTube for free, and to make money, he started by advertising his private guitar lessons. Today, he monetizes his channel by creating online guitar courses.

Conclusion

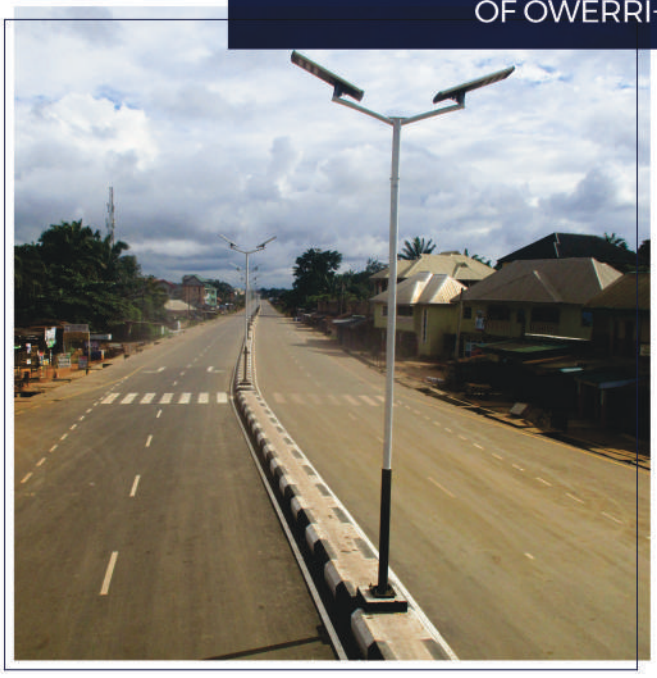
A coin has two sides. For many people, social media is mainly for entertainment. But it has huge business and high revenue generating potential. Youths can enjoy the entertainment value of social media, connecting with friends, watching their favorite comedy skits or engaging with content that resonate with them. But they can also generate revenues at the same time by exploring the other side of the coin on revenue generation.

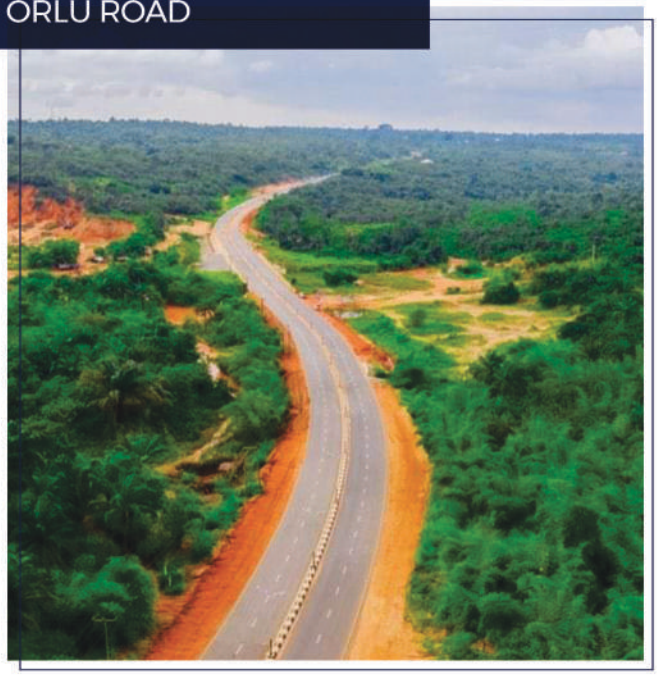
(Segun Abraham Sanni is an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Public Administration at Coal City University, Enugu. He is an IT consultant for the Pelican Resource Centre, an Enugu based consulting firm).





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Essential Cyber Security Tips to Stay Safe Online

By Kenneth Okereafor, PhD

The cyberspace offers us a world of unlimited possibilities, but this also come with several risks that threaten our safety online. Today, cyber criminals are on the prowl, targeting nations, organizations and individuals. Below are essential tips to stay safe online:

1 UNDERSTANDING ACCESS CONTROL

Proper application of cybersecurity protects both the human users and the digital assets they interact with. Digital assets are the computing resources which humans use to communicate information in electronic form. Examples are computing devices, softwares, internet portals, data transmission systems, etc.

Every human that uses digital assets interacts with them in a manner that regulates how these computing devices and software are safely accessed and manipulated. So, whether it is a cell phone, or an email account, or an online form, or an e-Business portal, or an ATM interface, or even a zoom session; the human user must be verified in one way or the other to certify that they are authentic, real, and not a robot.

This explains why each user is mandatorily required to supply a username and at least a password when logging into our banking Apps and email accounts. That process of regulating how a user accesses a digital asset is known as access control. Access control is a security technique that regulates who accesses what in a computing environment. It restricts access within a safe range.

Humans can access digital assets or systems using any or combination of the following three techniques, depending on how and where the system is designed to function:

1. What the user knows, such as a password, a PIN, a secret code, etc.

2. What the user has, such as a badge, a debit card, a proximity card, etc.
3. What the user is, example is biometric.

2 SECURE PASSWORD AUTHENTICATION

We had defined authentication as the process of verifying the identity of a user prior to granting access into a digital asset or environment. Now we breakeach of the authentication techniques down, to understand their security benefits.

Technique 1: What the user knows

This is also called memory-based authentication because it uses an item memorized by the user as a means of authenticating his/her identity. This technique relies on the user's ability to remember the correct item. The most commonly used type of memory-based authentication is a password. Other types are personal identification number (PIN), short term secret code, passphrase, etc.

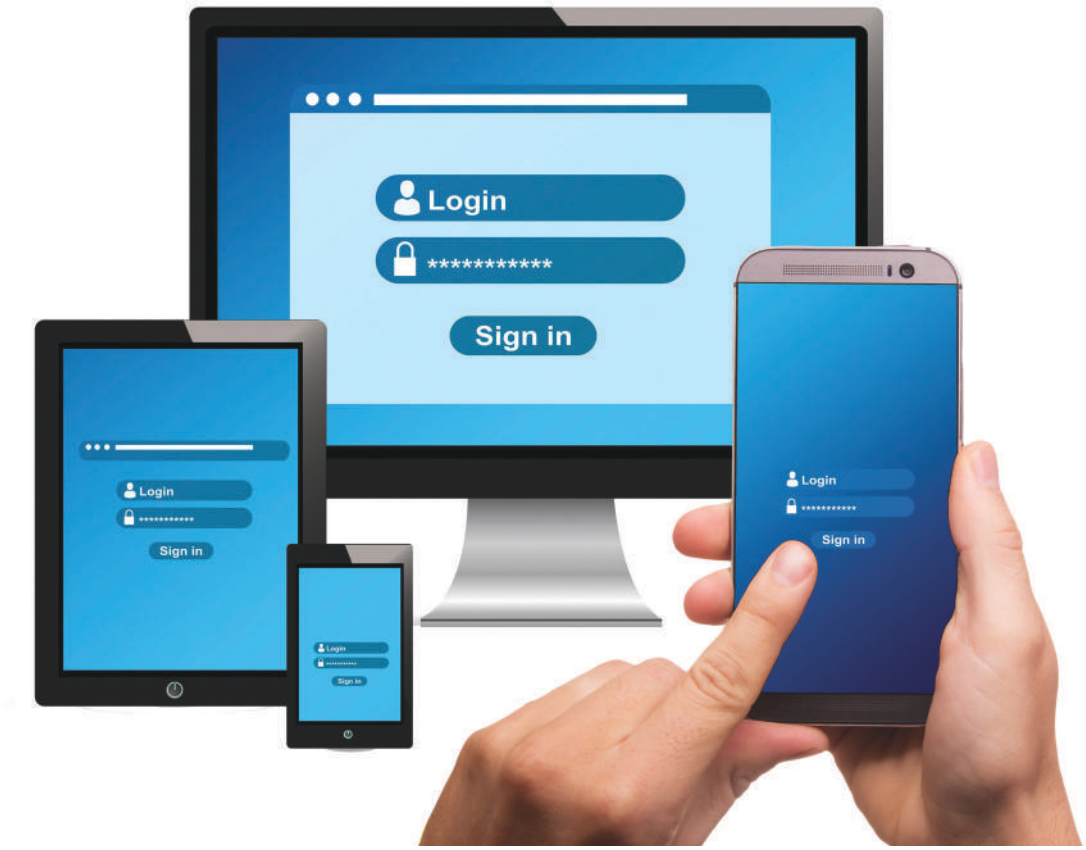
The security and strength of a password make up its complexity and is determined by its composition. A password is said to be strong if it is composed of a proper mix of upper cases, lower cases, numbers, and special characters; as well as length of digits that could make it difficult for cyber criminals to hack. Hacking a password is called cracking. There are many password cracking tools available, and unfortunately most of them are free and can be easily downloaded online.

How can a password be made more secure?

Apart from the password complexity described above, it is a good practice to change a password at regular intervals to minimize the chances of successful cyberattacks by fraudsters who have enough processing power to crack it. A weak password can be cracked within seconds, minutes, hours, or days, but a complex password could take months and years of continuous malicious attack, hence the need to change at intervals.

Why do most users prefer easy/weak password?

Often times, users find it difficult to remember complex passwords, which often forces them to either write them down, save them on a shared computer, or share them with family and colleagues, thereby increasing the possibility of a compromise. All these actions are risky and are highly discouraged. So, the question is, how can you design a complex password that is easy to remember?



3. HOW TO CREATE A STRONG PASSWORD THAT IS EASY TO REMEMBER

Having established that password is a good example of a memory-based authentication that verifies a user of a digital asset, we now discuss how to design highly secure passwords that are easy-to-remember by the user, but difficult to guess by a cyber-criminal or password cracker.

Recall that the major reason why most people choose weak and insecure passwords is because of the difficulty of remembering many complex passwords for different applications. The burden and anxiety of remembering too many passwords for several operations is called password chaos. Password chaos leads to risky behaviours including:

- sharing passwords,
- reusing same password for multiple applications,
- writing passwords down,
- hiding passwords under the keyboard,
- choosing weak passwords.

All these risky behaviours are known as password fatigue. Both password chaos and fatigue can be addressed by designing highly secure passwords that are easy-to-remember by the user, but difficult to guess by a cyber-criminal or password cracker.

The secret is to use a phenomenon called a passphrase. A passphrase is a type of password that is derived from a long phrase or sentence. The trick is to first formulate a long sentence that is easy to remember, and then from that long sentence, pick out a sequence of texts that includes a combination of upper and lower case letters, special characters and punctuations. Simply take out the first letters, numbers, special characters and punctuations from that long phrase to generate a strong and secure password, called a passphrase.

Two examples below show a phrase, and then a passphrase derived from it:

Phrase1: COVID resulted in several deaths in 2020.

Passphrase 1: Cri$Di20

Phrase 2: At last Dr Ken teaches in October, the cybersecurity awareness month.

Passphrase 2: @LdkTi0,tCaM

Passphrases (i.e. passwords formed from phrases) are stronger, more secure and more complex, and yet easier to remember than traditional passwords.



4 USING PHYSICAL ITEMS FOR IDENTITY VERIFICATION

Having discussed the password as a first verification technique based on "what the user knows", we shall now discuss the second authentication technique called "what the user has".

What the user has

This mode of verifying or authenticating a user is based on the ability of the user to produce a physical item to prove his identity. Since it requires the user to present a tangible item that he/she possesses, this technique is also called possession-based authentication.

Example. 1: the debit card. This is commonly used at Automated Teller Machine (ATM) and Point of Sale (POS) terminals. Debit card is a physical item, which identifies the user and binds him/her to a back-end profile for the purposes of financial, banking, and/or payment transactions. Presentation of the correct physical item – also called a hardware token – guarantees access into the digital asset.

Example 2: the proximity card. A proximity card is a physical electronic card mostly used for door access at hotels, schools, hospital theatres, and other critical facilities where controlled entry and exit are a mandatory security requirement. At the point of access, the holder of a proximity card is assumed to



be an authentic and authorized user of the system, who has obtained the card from a legitimate source for access control purposes.

Example 3: the phone token. Another example of "what the user has" that is increasingly becoming popular is phone-generated tokens used for accessing mobile Apps. This is a method of verifying one's identity using their mobile device rather than a dedicated hardware token. At the point of access, the phone token is automatically generated as a one-off code, sent to the user's registered phone number, and must be used within a short validity period, after which it expires.

5. HOW TO TACKLE SECURITY CHALLENGES OF PHYSICAL AUTHENTICATION ITEMS

In previous tips, we discussed exciting topics ranging from access control to password management. We also used amazing real-world examples to illustrate these concepts. Now we shall analyse the security challenges







of using these physical items for digital access control, and how to tackle them to ensure a safer cyberspace for all of us.

What are the issues with possession-based authentication?

Recall that possession-based authentication refers to the use of physical items to verify users and grant them access to computing systems. Examples include the debit card for granting access to ATM terminals, and the proximity card for accessing office, car, and hotel room doors, etc.

- **They are prone to loss and theft.**
  These physical authentication items can be forgotten inside shops and cars, or lost amidst laundry, or even stolen for malicious intent. The remedy is to carry them securely inserted inside a tightly gripping purse where they cannot slide out easily, but the purse itself must be protected from loss and theft.

- **They can be easily damaged or deformed.**
  Damage to physical authentication items is very common. They can suffer a twist or bend under heavy load or excessive pressure. There are also possibilities of dropping inside or on top of hot surfaces. These can be avoided by taking personal responsibilities for their safety and handling them with care.

- **They can suffer electronic interference.**
  Depending on the technology used to design a card, data on an electronic card is technically stored either as a chip or magnetic stripe, both of which can surfer interference from other sources of radiation such as microwave ovens, strong x-ray signals, or when in close proximity with other electronic cards of varying technologies. This can result in the erasure of the user's authentication data. The remedy is to avoid packing cards of different technologies together, and to guard against storage that introduces frequent friction.

In part 2 of the Essential Cybersecurity Tips for the Digital Age series, we shall study the third mode of authentication – biometrics. Do biometrics have benefits? Are there any challenges in using biometrics? Do fingerprints expose our privacy? What are the solutions? What is the meaning of biometric liveness detection? Stay tuned for all the answers!

(Kenneth Okereafor is a digital health expert who has been protecting Nigeria's digital health infrastructure from cyber attacks at the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) since 2013. He provides professional technology advisories to senior decision makers as a UNESCO-trained ICT specialistwith a PhD in Cybersecurity from Azteca University Mexico).

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Dialogue with

Dr. Chimezie Amadi,

Commissioner for Digital Economy and eGovernment

The administration of Senator Hope Uzodimma has prioritized digital economy as a way to expand the Imo economy, address youth unemployment, and create shared prosperity. As such, the Governor, in September 2022, created the Ministry of Digital Economy and eGovernance – the first in Nigeria – to spearhead this agenda. Dr. Chimezie Amadi is the Imo State Commissioner for Digital Economy and E-government. In this interaction with Prince Eze Ugochukwu, Special Adviser to Imo State Governor on Public Enlightenment, he explains the roadmap for the emerging digital skills sector in Imo State.

May we get to know you Sir?

My name is Dr. Chimezie Amadi. I hold a PhD in Entrepreneurship Development, MSc in Housing, MBA and Diploma in Emerging Technologies with over 19 years' work experience at the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) where I rose to the Director cadre before my recent appointment as the Honorable Commissioner for Digital Economy and e-Government. My specialties include Telecommunications Regulations, Digital Innovation & Entrepreneurship Management; Emerging Technologies Research with focus on Applications and use cases in African markets, Digital start-up incubation and mentorship.

For the ordinary person out there, what is the digital economy and e-government?

Digital economy is a collective term used in describing all economic transactions that occur on the internet. It can simply be defined as the Web Economy or the Internet Economy while e-government (electronic Government) is the use or deployment of technologies for the provision of public services to citizens and other persons in a country or state. E-Government enables Government to Citizens (G2C), Government to Government (G2G), Government to Employee (G2E) and Government to Business (G2B) interactions.

Recently, you launched the IDEA (2022-2026). Imo Digital Economy Agenda which you anchored on six pillars. Can you speak briefly on these pillars?

The Imo state digital economy agenda (IDEA2022-2026) is a policy document that was formulated to communicate to our stakeholders what the government intends to do in order to actualize the vision of positioning Imo as the leading digital economy state in Nigeria. The policy thrust is anchored on six pillars that will birth a modern economy that leverages digital technologies to deliver good governance and economic prosperity for all Imolites.

The first pillar is digital literacy and skills, the second pillar is solid infrastructure, the third pillar is the service infrastructure, the fourth pillar is advocacy, the

fifth is monitoring and evaluation and the last pillar is collaboration and partnership. The digital literacy and skills pillar is built to upskill, reskill and train Imo youths on 4th Industrial Revolution skill-set which is critical in participating in the evolving global digital economy. If we do not position our youths by upskilling them to take advantage of and be part of the global digital economy, they will be unable to participate effectively in the emerging global economy. The other five pillars will accelerate the transitioning of Imo economy to a digitalized economy, leading to value and wealth creation.

You've talked about collaborations and partnerships. Apart from such collaboration and partnership with industry players out there, what about the existing digital eco-system here in Imo State? Will you reach out to them to domesticate this Agenda?

Yes of course. The way an ecosystem operates is that you do what is called environmental scanning. As a new Ministry that is evolving, you need to take stock, and know what is on ground, and be able to connect to the local ecosystem players. So, in trying to ensure that we have an effective partnership and collaboration model, the first thing we did when we came on board was to hold a meeting with ecosystem leaders in Owerri. That afforded us the opportunity to share our mission and vision with them and also get a sneak peek into the domain challenges facing the ecosystem in Imo state. We had a very productive engagement that helped us synthesize the IDEA 2022-2026 as the digital transformation policy thrust of the Imo State Government.

In implementing some of our programs in the IDEA 2020 - 2026, a lot of collaborative partnerships will be built. Some Startups with the skills to provide services to government as it relates to each of the pillars will be engaged. Through this partnership, we will also be able to provide mentorship and acceleration programs that will help them optimize their potentials and improve their capacity in the innovation value chain. The full realization of the objectives of Pillar 6 of the IDEA 2022-2026 will help us facilitate creation of new ventures and innovative solutions that will address our local challenges while making global impact.

You talked about people staying here in Imo State and servicing local and International businesses. How can this be achieved. What is the pathway?

Fantastic! If you recall, we recently unveiled the Imo Digital Economy Agenda 2020 to 2026. A lot of Imo youths were in attendance. The ecosystem and business players in Imo State were also in attendance. During that unveiling, we made it clear that the digital economy has also given rise to what we call the GIG economy. The GIG economy is an economy that supports freelancing - where people with digital skills will be able to stay in their local environment and provide digital services to companies that are outside the shores of their local environment.

For example, a web designer in Nigeria or a mobile app developer that has the right skills and proficient in providing such services will stay here in Owerri and might be providing the same services to Google, to Apple, to Microsoft and to all the big tech companies in the world that do not have footprints or physical offices in Nigeria. But because you are able to showcase that you have the skills, which are by the way in very high demand globally, they will engage you and pay you in their own foreign currency to provide the services to them. So, there is no barrier, boundary, or borders. Wherever you are, so far you are connected to the internet, you can provide services to any of these companies and they will pay you handsomely.

In what way can your office through digitization help the state to improve her internally generated revenue. It is obvious that if the state doesn't have money, every other thing will fall apart?

Our dear Governor came on board with the 3R mantra of reconstruction, rehabilitation and recovery. This ministry will provide the digital backbone towards the actualization of the 3R mantra for shared prosperity. One of the ways to do it is to create a new workforce that is digitally optimized for Imo State. But how does a state economy grow and revenue increase? It's all about injecting efficiency in the system. Once efficiency is properly injected in the state workforce, it leads to higher productivity. That high productivity will lead to higher earnings and that high earnings is what is called internally generated revenue.

So, once we are able to infuse efficiency by digitization of government processes and procedures; that will improve how we offer government services to the people, to communities, and to businesses in the state That will increase the productivity of the agencies of government and by so doing increase the internally generated revenue of the State. Besides, we will passionately drive the development and adoption of an integrated payment system that integrates receipting and invoicing features to plug budget holes and bolster the state's IGR.

Office of the Honourable Commissioner for Finance & Coordinating Economy.
Ministry of Finance & Coordinating Economy.
State Secretariat, P/H Road, Owerri.

Congratulatory Message

The State Executive Council, Management and Staff of Ministries, Departments and Agencies, and the entire Imo Citizens, heartily congratulate His Excellency, **Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma,** the Executive Governor of Imo State on the Award of Excellence in fiscal transparency, accountability and citizens' participation in government by the **World Bank States' Fiscal Transparency, Accountability and Sustainability (SFTAS) Project.**

Your Excellency, this award is an eloquent confirmation of your efficiency and prudence in the management of the state's resources by this incorruptible and independent body — the World Bank.

With this award, Imo State has been distinguished from the rest in: Open Budgeting and Citizens' Participation in Governance; Efficient Procurement Processes, Sound Payroll System; Financial Transparency and Citizen Feedback Mechanism; Efficiency in Revenue Generation and Blocking of Leakages amongst others.

Your Excellency, your legacies in public finance management of Imo State are yielding enviable fruits.

Congratulations!

Dr Doris Nkiruka Uzoka Anite
Honourable Commissioner For Finance and Coordinating Economy, Imo State.



Conversation with

Dr. Barthy Okorochukwu

the Commissioner for Health Insurance

As they say, "health is wealth". The link between health and the economy, and how market mechanisms can be leveraged to achieve sustainable health outcomes is very much appreciated by the current leadership of Imo State Government. In pursuit of this agenda, the Imo State Governor, His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma, recently created a new Ministry of Health Insurance. In this interaction, Dr. Barthy Okorochukwu, the first Commissioner for Health Insurance in Nigeria, shares his thoughts with Prince Eze Ugochukwu, Special Adviser to Imo State Governor on Public Enlightenment.

Congratulations on your new appointment. Being the first of its kind in Nigeria, what is the importance attached to this new Ministry leading to its creation?

The Governor is highly passionate about efficient and affordable health care system. You will agree that there is a direct relationship between a healthy populace and a thriving economy. His desire to achieve Universal Health Coverage through efficient health insurance must have prompted this decision.

How does your Ministry favour the individual, the family, and businesses?

The family and the individual will benefit directly from the scheme because they can now pay much less to secure quality and accessible healthcare, unlike in the past. This leaves them with more disposable income. Businesses will benefit indirectly because when hospitals receive more funding from the Insurance scheme through the monthly capitation and service

The Governor is highly passionate about efficient and affordable health care system. You will agree that there is a direct relationship between a healthy populace and a thriving economy.



We intend to work with traditional, religious and town union leaders to mobilize the citizens for massive enrollment. We will also encourage wealthy and well-meaning individuals to pay for health insurance for their indigent community members in the spirit of onyeaghalanwanneya.

fee paid by IMSHIA, they can now expand the scope of their operations by buying more and better equipment. The pharmaceutical companies, laboratories, medical equipment manufacturers and distributors will experience better patronage, all resulting in increased business turnovers.

Will this health insurance plan be truly affordable? What is the payment plan?

The answer is yes. At N12,000 per person per year, it is very affordable. For a family of 6, the premium is N60,000 per annum instead of N72,000. This is a massive saving of N12,000. When you consider the current cost of health care services in the country, you will agree with me that there are lots of advantages in enrolling into the health insurance scheme.

For State and Local Government civil servants in Imo State, the Governor has approved their insurance payments by the government. How far has the enrolment process(s) gone?

Fortunately, we are not re-inventing the wheel in this regard. We are collaborating with the State Data Centre to facilitate this through ICT. Because the data centre has the biometrics of all public servants, we will synergize with them to share data. This is not as simple as it sounds, but then the process has been completed, and we are good to go. Consequently, there will be no need to start another round of capturing to avoid waste of time and scarce financial, material and human resources.

For those living in rural areas, what mechanism will you deploy to enroll them? What is the role of traditional rulers and town union presidents in this, considering they are galvanizers of their people?

Very important question. They will be covered under the Informal Sector Scheme. This sector caters for over 95% of the population, and it is a sure way of ensuring long term sustainability of the State Health Insurance scheme. We intend to work with traditional, religious and town union leaders to mobilize the citizens for massive enrollment. We will also encourage wealthy and well-meaning individuals to pay for health insurance for their indigent community members in the spirit of onyeaghalanwanneya. Hopefully, legislators at the state and national levels will use health insurance coverage for their kits and kins as their constituency projects. Similarly, government appointees at state and local government levels will adopt their less privileged constituencies by paying for their health insurance.

Bearing in mind the level of earnings of retirees, does your Ministry plan any special status for them in terms of assistance to pay? Same for indigent pregnant women and mothers.

I believe that most retirees can afford N12,000 per year for their healthcare needs. Where they can't, I am optimistic that those who can help in their various families, communities and wards can support in our usual kindred spirit. For the vulnerable, the Basic Healthcare provision fund will be used to support them.

We have many privately owned hospitals in Imo State. How do they fit in as healthcare service providers? Do they have any role to play?

Both private and public hospitals have been accredited for this purpose. This process will continue. However, we can only start with few hospitals to ensure quality assurance, effective performance monitoring and evaluation. This is our short-term strategic objective

CONGRATULATIONS, AS THE PEOPLE'S GOVERNOR ADDS ANOTHER YEAR!

On behalf of my Family, the APC family and the good People of Imo State, I, Hon Macdonald Ebere, the Chairman of Our great Party in Imo State (APC), wish to join the teeming people of goodwill in the State to Congratulate our amiable Governor on this occasion of his birthday anniversary.

We pray to God to continue to lead him in sound health and wisdom in the leadership of the State and all the development strides. His Excellency, continue to cruise as the coast is clearer and victory assured.

Hon Macdonald Ebere PhD
State Chairman,
All Progressives Congress Imo State.





A LOOK AT THE SPECIAL AGRO-INDUSTRIAL PROCESSING ZONE PROJECT

Game changer for agriculture in Imo State.

In 2021, Imo State emerged as one of the seven states in Nigeria selected for the establishment of the Special Agro Industrial processing zone project. (SAPZ). The SAPZ project is a multilateral funded project between the Federal Government of Nigeria, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Islamic Development Bank and seven state governments, including Imo State. Following, a delegation from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the African Development Bank (AfDB) the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) arrived Imo State to tour the proposed rural locations for the project and conduct the necessary environmental impact assessments. According to Mr. Richard Mark Mbaram, the Technical Adviser to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, who doubled as the oversight officer for the project, they were in Imo State on account of the massive political goodwill of His Excellency, Governor Hope Uzodimma, who had masterfully navigated the issues surrounding the inclusion of Imo State in the SAPZ project.

While welcoming the Appraisal Mission of the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Federal Government Team in Owerri, the Governor, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma, pointed out that "the recognition of Imo State in the SAPZ project aligned with the strategy of his government towards stimulating intensive production and processing of agricultural commodities across key value chains."

The Appraisal Mission visited Imo State to assess the State's competency in delivering on the project. The team had in the delegation, Mr. Fernando Lado, adviser on livestock industrialization at the African Development Bank and Mr. Yusuf Kabore, who is the Chief Livestock Officer at the African Development Bank, both from the AfDB headquarters in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. About four locations were visited by the Mission, including Owerri West, Ngor Okpala, Okigwe and the cargo section of the Sam Mbakwe International Cargo Airport, Owerri. The appraisal team, led by Richard-Mark Mbaram Esq., Technical Adviser to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, applauded the state government for the strategic Agro-industrialization supportive investments across the state, beginning with the Sam Mbakwe International Cargo Airport, which he described as "the only cargo airport in the South-East and South-South region, and best in-class in the country, remarkably dwarfing the Lagos Airport facility."

For the SAPZ project, the Imo State government has prioritized oil palm, cassava, poultry, maize, soybeans and livestock. The main hub of the Imo SAPZ Project is however planned for Okigwe and will cater for an Integrated Livestock Processing Complex. For this, the experts from the Bank, working with the State's Consultant, have undertaken a comprehensive design and structuring of the facility, prior to commencement of construction.

Meanwhile, some private sector agro-allied companies in Imo State have indicated interest to partner with the State Government to realise the objectives of the project. One of the partner organizations is Victoria Farms Ltd., an integrated private-sector led endeavor located in Ngor-Okpala and strategically placed along the borders of Imo and Abia State, making it a turn-key facility which, at full operation, will help plug the protein deficiencies in the South-East and South-South regions.

According to its Managing Director, Mr CNC Nwachukwu, Victoria Farms sits on 80 hectares of land, with the capacity to produce 600,000 eggs per day, working with partners from Germany, Netherlands and Italy.. He also indicated that maize and soybeans are the major raw material requirements for the farm's feed mill. "In six months, we will cater for a demand of up to 5,500 hectares of maize cropping, that's what our silos will need". He added that with the necessary infrastructural support from the AfDB and the Federal Government, the company's next line of business would be meat processing.

JP Agro Limited, another private sector player in the state participating in the SAPZ project, recently secured 2500 hectares of land solely for the cultivation of maize and soybeans and is currently cultivating rice on a 500-hectare farm in Umudim. According to the CEO, Dr. Pauline Igwe, key support around land preparation will go a long way to help kickstart the new project.

The core objective of the Special Agro-industrial Processing Zones, according to Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, the President of the African Development Bank, is to build new economic zones, located in rural areas, to be fully supported by infrastructure (power, water, roads, digital infrastructure, and logistics) that will allow food and agribusiness companies to locate within such zones. This will put them close to farmers in production catchment areas, provide market offtakes for farmers, support processing and value addition, reduce food losses, and allow the emergence of highly competitive food and agricultural value chains.





In essence, the first phase of the Nigeria SAPZ program is co-financed by key development partners to the tune of $538.05 million. The African Development Bank is providing $210 million; the Islamic Development Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development will provide combined funding of $310 million while the government of Nigeria is contributing $18.05 million.



On how the SAPZ stands in the overall development plan of the Imo State Government, Governor Hope Uzodimma said: "If you look at it, facilitating industrialization in the state through agricultural activities is not only strategic, but also sits in the matrix of the economic development roadmap and investment promotion plan for Imo State." The launching of the first phase of the SAPZ project in Abuja on 24th October 2022 offers in Imo State the opportunity to upscale its agricultural sector.

The Deputy Governor of Imo State, Professor Placid Njoku, headed the committee that interfaced with some of the local communities designated to host the SAPZ, while Hon. Mrs Pat Ekeji supervised the secretariat and documentations.

In his remark, Professor Njoku said:"Fortunately, Imo State has an international cargo airport; the SAPZ project may be the impetus that will drive exportation from our airport. So, it is a project with great potentials. 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.

"Citing the project in Imo state positions Imo as a hub for the Southeast which invariably makes it a center for agricultural revolution. It is anticipated that neighboring 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 would certainly like to take full advantage of."

On January 25th 2022, African Development Bank President Dr Akinwumi A. Adesina received four Nigerian executive governors and the Chief Executive Officer of the Nigeria Sovereign Investment Authority (NSIA) at the Bank's Abidjan head office. They are Governors Dapo Abiodun, Ogun state; Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai, Kaduna State; Hope Uzodinma, Imo State and Seyi Makinde, Oyo State. The Bank President invited the governors and the NSIA head to discuss what will be the rapid rollout of the first phase of the Bank's Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ) program in their states.

The discussion underscored the important role of the Nigeria Sovereign Investment Authority as an honest broker of the program, as well as the commitment of all the governors to it. NSIA managing director Uche Orji stressed that agriculture was a key focus area of his agency. He said: "The NSIA pledges to work with governors to ensure that procurement is done professionally and on time." He added that the National Sovereign Investment Authority, owned 52% by states, and 48% by the federal government, would play a key role in the rollout of the program. In Abidjan, Governor Hope Uzodimma presented a roadmap on Imo State's commitment to becoming a major hub for agro-processing and other revolutionary initiatives to making Imo a destination in the macroeconomic sector.

A Report by Prince Eze Ugochukwu, Special Adviser to Imo State Governor on Public Enlightenment

APPRECIATION!

On behalf of my family, I, Eunan Placid Amaeshi, wish to thank His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodimma for his wisdom and selfless service to the good people of Imo State, as he has rekindled the hope of civil servants and the entire work force by this singular act of looking into my case of "unjust indefinite suspension from office for over 30 years ."

Your Excellency, the people of Imo State can now rejoice as the much awaited "DANIEL" has come to "JUDGMENT."

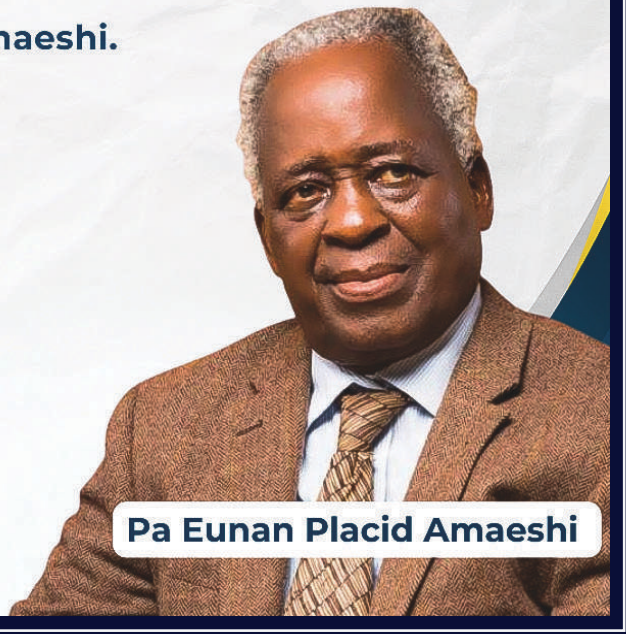
May I as well, use this auspicious opportunity to join people of goodwill to congratulate you on this occasion of your birthday on Dec. 12, 2022. I wish you many more years of good health and wisdom. You are a rare gem and the people of Imo State are proud of you.

Thank you His Excellency and HAPPY BIRTHDAY to you.

Pa Eunan Placid Amaeshi.



His Excellency,
Senator Hope Uzodimma
Executive Governor of Imo state



Pa Eunan Placid Amaeshi

Imo State Governor commends NBC on Youth Empowered Initiative



Imo, Nigeria, August 19, 2022 – The Executive Governor of Imo State, His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodinma, has commended the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) Limited for its commitment to empowering Nigerian youths through programs that enable them to contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic development of the nation. This commendation was made by the governor while declaring open the Company's Youth Empowered Program held in Owerri, the Imo State capital.

In his keynote address, Senator Uzodinma thanked NBC for hosting the 2022 edition of the Youth Empowered program in the state, noting that the initiative consolidates the government's efforts in accelerating youth development.

He said: "The program is greatly needed in this present day and age marked by a major shift from the traditional workforce and I believe that it will not onlybenefit the young people in attendance today but also Imo State and the Nigerian economy at large."

This year's edition marks the successful continuation of NBC's Youth Empowered initiative which commenced in 2017 and has since impacted over 22,000 youths. The initiative is part of the organization's commitment to strategically complement national efforts towards enabling youths to unleash their potential whilst creating an enabling business environment that supports innovation and growth of the Nigerian economy.

The two-day intensive workshop featured trainings on a range of globally relevant skills, including project management, business planning, sales and negotiation, job readiness, amongst others.

Earlier in his remark, the Corporate Affairs & Sustainability Director at NBC, Ekuma Eze, said: "We are pleased to continue this exciting journey to expand the vista of opportunities for millions of youths across Nigeria. Not only are we happy to provide these youth with the vital tools they need to thrive in our increasingly competitive world, this program also represents a major step towards the fulfillment of our goals to build a world where youths can discover themselves, understand their strengths and bolster their confidence to succeed.

"Our vision is that with NBC's social investment, these youths can also make positive contributions and impact on their families, communities, and the country at large."

Speaking at the commencement of the program, Ifeoma Okoye, Corporate Affairs & Community Partnerships Manager, East & Centra, at NBC, said the intervention was designed to address the challenge of unemployment through skills and entrepreneurship development. According to her: "The trainings are carefully curated to prepare participants for exposure to global opportunities whilst empowering them with relevant career, life, vocational and business

skills that are critical for success in the emerging global economy."

Since the launch of NBC's Youth Empowered in 2017, the program has reached over 22,000 youths across 10 cities, 7 campuses and within the digital space in partnership with IBM. Beneficiaries have been trained on entrepreneurship and employability skills. The intervention has also led to the birth of many start-ups in different fields in the blue, green and digital economy, with tangible contributions to the Nigerian economy.

About Nigerian Bottling Company

Nigerian Bottling Company Ltd or NBC is a growth-focused consumer packaged goods company and the strategic bottling partner of the Coca-Cola company in Nigeria. NBC is a member of the Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company (CCHBC) Group, which operates in twenty-nine countries with over 605 million consumers and 197 brands in these markets.

NBC operates eight manufacturing plants and fourteen distribution centers spread across Nigeria. The company is headquartered in Ebute-Metta, Lagos. The company has a workforce of over 2,700 Full-Time Direct employees, more than 7,000 dealers and contributes to the livelihood of millions of people in Nigeria.

As the pioneer bottler in the group, NBC manufactures, markets, and distributes a range of Sparking Soft Drinks including the iconic Coca-Cola, Coke Zero, Fanta, Sprite, Schweppes and Limca; Still Drinks including the Five Alive range and Eva water as well as Monster and Predator energy drinks.







Celebrating

AN ICON AS HE ADDS ANOTHER YEAR!

I, Hon (Mrs) Esther Ukachukwu, Special Adviser to the Governor on Education Intervention Programs, on behalf of my family and the good people of Imo State heartily felicitate with our amiable Governor, the ONWA of Imo State, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma on this occasion of his birthday celebration.

Our dear Governor, your landmark achievements in office in these past years of your administration speak volumes of a man of "human heart " that understands the heartbeat of his people.
The construction of the Orlu-Owerri road, the the on-going road works on Okigwe-Owerri and Owerri-Umuahia roads and other projects you have embarked upon in the State speak more of a detribalised leader.

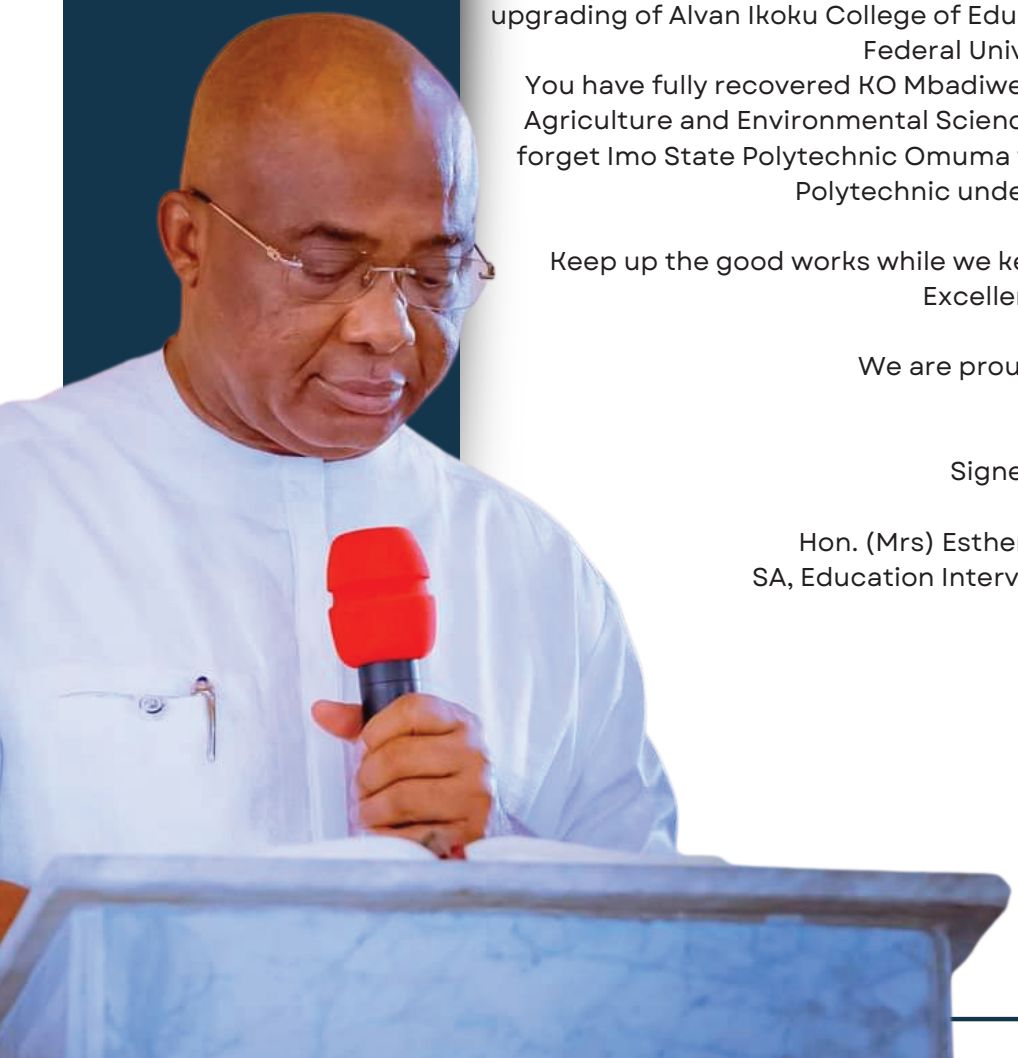
In the Education sector, the people of Imo State have written your name on marble, as you remain the Governor under whose administration, the President and Commander- in -Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces signed the upgrading of Alvan Ikoku College of Education and Federal Medical Centre to Federal Universities.
You have fully recovered KO Mbadiwe University and made University of Agriculture and Environmental Science a functional University. We can't forget Imo State Polytechnic Omuma which has turned into a world class Polytechnic under your watch.

Keep up the good works while we keep praying for your success, His Excellency.

We are proud of you.

Signed:

Hon. (Mrs) Esther Ukachukwu.
SA, Education Intervention Programs.





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 Imo Economy Study (TIES) Network and Economic Revolution in Imo State

One of the most outstanding initiatives of the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State is 'The Imo Economy Study (TIES) Network' which runs every fortnight since June. It runs as a webinar, leveraging technology for easy access to Imo people, the general public and other interested audience from across the world. The webinar, which is themed 'Unveiling the Hidden Potentials in Imo Economy', is designed to grow Imo economy by attracting investors, inspiring youths with new information or perspectives and creating new jobs.

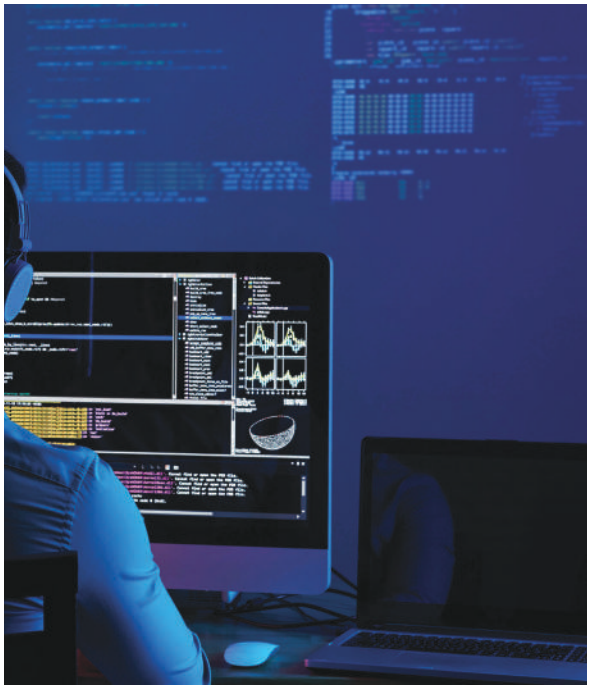
Streamed live on social media handles and on different radio stations, the webinars have had an estimated combined audience of over ten million people. The webinars have covered sectors of the economy such as renewable energy, digital economy, agriculture, entertainment (movies and music), hospitality, creative arts, health, oil and gas, education, fashion industry, etc. Led and guided by the moderator, Professor Kenneth Amaeshi, the Chief Economic Adviser, along with his co-moderators, the invited panelists explain the different aspects of the day's topic. One of the winning strategies of the webinar is that it is interactive and engaging. Participants have the opportunity to ask questions or make contributions by phoning in or by sending messages through any of the social media handles. In this way, it is not just one directional, but mutual and interactive.

To illustrate the importance of these economic webinar series, let us reflect on the highlights of two editions on hospitality and digital economy. Owerri the Imo State Capital is known to many as the hospitality capital of the Southeast. Managing Director of Legend Hotels and Suites Limited, Owerri, Dr. Bethram Ozumba, who featured as a panelist, described the hospitality industry as a very important component of any city because "apart from serving as a revenue generation stream for the state, it also offers ample opportunity for the growth of the economy of every state or country". He described the hospitality value chain as deep and wide-ranging while pointing to the most visible ones as lodging, food, drinks, travels and events planning, as well as promotion of entertainment,all of which he said are rife in Owerri, and therefore "contributed to make Imo State the home of hospitality in Nigeria."

Chairman of Maranatha Suites, Owerri, Dr. Etofolam Osuji, who also featured as a panelist in the Hospitality edition of the webinars, emphasized the limitless opportunities that abound in the State's hospitality industry and why they must be duly harnessed to drive development. The hospitality expert described the serenity of Owerri and environs as enchanting and a value that promotes hospitality and tourism. In his







contribution, another panelist and Chief Executive Officer of The Royal Entertainment Place and Palm Estate Properties, Hon. Alex Emeziem Ph.D., said that Imo state has a comparative advantage as it is where people come for relaxation and identified the availability of the products as advantageous pointing out that skilled manpower is required.

Opening the session on 'Opportunities in Digital Economy' the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government, Professor Kenneth Amaeshi, who was the chief moderator of the session, described the Digital Economy as the best passport to the global economy because it allows people to access products and services as well as create wealth through social media and e-commerce using the appropriate applications. Host of the program and Commissioner for Science and Technology, Prof. Boniface Nworgu, said that Information Communication Technology (ICT) is one of the cardinal objectives of the State government under the leadership of His Excellency, Senator Hope Uzodinma, adding that Digital Economy in the state has been accorded national recognition as President Muhammadu Buhari recently appointed Governor Uzodimma a member of the National Digital Economy.

One of the panelists and Country Manager, Elev-8 Nigeria, Mr. Nsikak John, described digital economy as a world-wide internet technology creator and enabler which enhances the exchange of value. He argued that ownership of a mobile phone that can connect one to the internet is a gold mine as of today "as it affords one the opportunity of doing business locally and globally without moving from place to place". Nsikak identified E-commerce as having the capacity to add about 25percent or more to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by the year 2025. Another panelist and President/CEO, OPay Nigeria, Mr. Olu Akanmu, stressed the need for access to the internet as key to remaining relevant in today's digital economy as well as wealth creation.

Mr. Akanmu said that OPay, as a financial institution, exists virtually in all the states of the federation including Imo State. With an extensive network of agents across the state, the people of Imo can leverage the mobile money service to process their financial transitions in the most seamless way possible.

Corporate Imo Impact Partnership Initiative

NBC on Youth Empowered Initiative

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This year's edition marks the successful continuation of NBC's Youth Empowered initiative which commenced in 2017 and has since impacted over 22,000 youths. The initiative is part of the organization's commitment to strategically complement national efforts towards enabling youths to unleash their potential whilst creating an enabling business environment that supports innovation and growth of the Nigerian economy.

The two-day intensive workshop featured trainings on a range of globally relevant skills, including project management, business planning, sales and negotiation, job readiness, amongst others.

Earlier in his remark, the Corporate Affairs & Sustainability Director at NBC, Ekuma Eze, said: "We are pleased to continue this exciting journey to expand the vista of opportunities for millions of youths across Nigeria. Not only are we happy to provide these youth with the vital tools they need to thrive in our increasingly competitive world, this program also represents a major step towards the fulfillment of our goals to build a world where youths can discover themselves, understand their strengths and bolster their confidence to succeed.

"Our vision is that with NBC's social investment, these youths can also make positive contributions and impact on their families, communities, and the country at large."

Speaking at the commencement of the program, Ifeoma Okoye, Corporate Affairs & Community Partnerships Manager, East & Central, at NBC, said the intervention was designed to address the challenge of unemployment through skills and entrepreneurship development. According to her: "The trainings are carefully curated to prepare participants for exposure to global opportunities whilst empowering them with relevant career, life, vocational and business skills that are critical for success in the emerging global economy."

Since the launch of NBC's Youth Empowered in 2017, the program has reached over 22,000 youths across 10 cities, 7 campuses and within the digital space in partnership with IBM. Beneficiaries have been trained on entrepreneurship and employability skills. The intervention has also led to the birth of many start-ups in different fields in the blue, green and digital economy, with tangible contributions to the Nigerian economy.

Coca-Cola Foundation approves Grant for Imo Benefit

The Corporate Imo Impact for Partnership idea launched by the Chief Economic Adviser to the State Government, Professor Kenneth Amaeshi, is yielding outstanding results for job-creation in the State. For example, the Coca-Cola Foundation has recently approved the proposal by the Centre for Social Awareness, Advocacy and Ethics (CSAAE) in partnership with the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government for the sum of about $500,000 for a project to stimulate the creation of 300,000 IT jobs in Imo State. This is huge and the potential is enormous. The components of this projects, which will enrich its job-generating potentials, are many including but not limited to training on the



development and deployment of ICT solutions and application, infrastructure, provision of hardware and working spaces, mentorship, linkages to global networks, continuous entrepreneurship training and support, amongst others.. The project has the potential to catapult Owerri into the IT-hub for Southeast Nigeria, Nigeria and the West-Africa Sub-region. It will benefit all those in the ICT supply chain including hardware sales and maintenance, offices and workspaces developers, ICT services providers, ICT services consumers, ICT and cyber cafes, internet security experts, programmers etc. It hopes to create a digital revolution around the city and create a formidable knock-on effect on other sectors of the economy in the Owerri city and Imo State at large.

About Nigerian Bottling Company

Nigerian Bottling Company Ltd or NBC is a growth-focused consumer packaged goods company and the strategic bottling partner of the Coca-Cola company in Nigeria. NBC is a member of the Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company (CCHBC) Group, which operates in twenty-nine countries with over 605 million consumers and 197 brands in these markets. NBC operates eight manufacturing plants and fourteen distribution centers spread across Nigeria. The company is headquartered in Ebute-Metta, Lagos. The company has a workforce of over 2,700 Full-Term employees, more than 7,000 dealers and contributes to the livelihood of millions of people in Nigeria.

As the pioneer bottler in the group, NBC manufactures, markets, and distributes a range of Sparking Soft Drinks including the iconic Coca-Cola, Coke Zero, Fanta, Sprite, Schweppes and Limca; Still Drinks including the Five Alive range and Eva water as well as Monster and Predator energy drinks.



Excitement as Imo State Unveils first-ever Industrial Policy

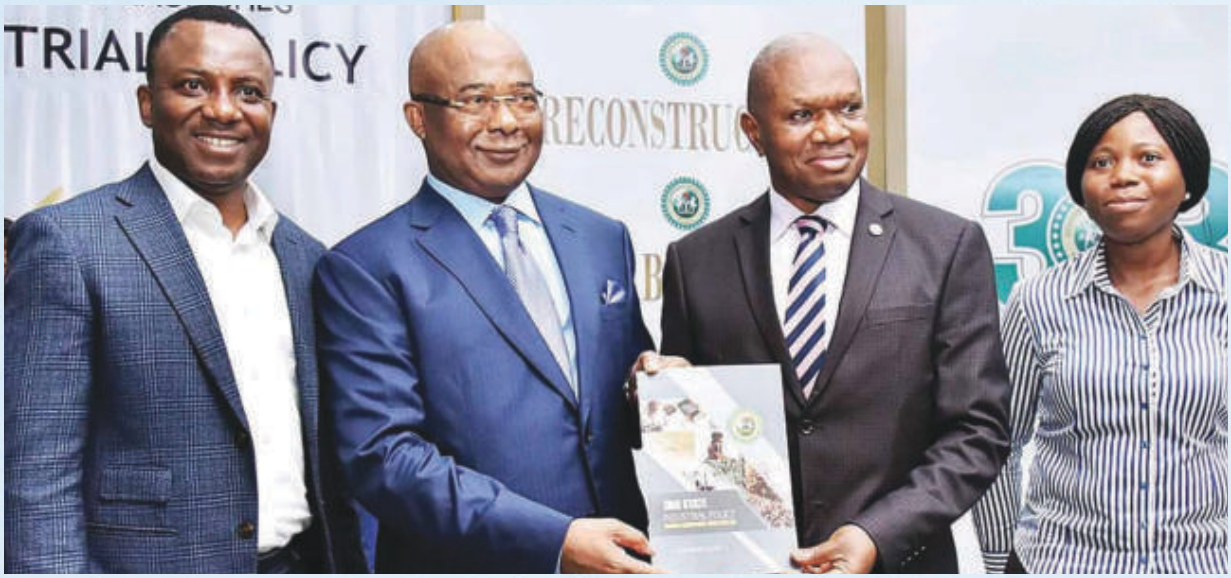
On Wednesday November 2, 2022, the Governor of Imo State, HE Hope Uzodimma, launched the first ever Imo Industrial Policy for the State to provide a definitive guide and roadmap for the industrialization of the state. The development of the industrial policy was led by the Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government, Professor Kenneth Amaeshi and the Regional Directorate Office of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) following due consultation with key industry players, the academia, relevant government agencies and other stakeholders., The Policy is designed to deliberately promote and drive economic growth and development in the state through existing and emerging sub-sectors.

Commenting on the initiative, the Governor said: "My administration has again made an audacious step in its determination to put Imo firmly on the roadmap to economic growth and prosperity. Part of what the industrial policy is meant to achieve is to identify all the economic potentials abundant in the state, take advantage of where we have comparative advantage and clearly outline how government can help in harnessing these opportunities."

The Imo Industrial Policy, with the sub-theme 'Making industry work for all' is an elaborate and detailed document which stands on a good understanding of the people of Imo State, their past experiences, their economic history, and distinct philosophy. It first looks at the economic background of the State including a quick overview of the economy in broad strokes covering agriculture and agribusinesses, solid minerals (and gas), hospitality, tourism, etc. It offers a detailed analysis of the current economic challenges in infrastructure, manufacturing, regulation, unemployment, shortage of innovation and entrepreneurs and proposed bold solutions to the

problems. It then focuses on addressing the important question of what kind of industrialization Imo needs and which of the options can be sustainable, because the industrialization efforts must be fit for purpose and must suite the ontological, geographic, socio-cultural as well as the philosophical constitution and disposition of our people. While the industrialization and wealth-creation agenda are to be supported by industriousness and desire for personal growth and development, it nevertheless must be socially responsible in the spirit of Africapitalism or the African economic philosophy of sharing and inclusion. Not only does the policy connect to local philosophy, it also connects to national, continental and global trends. Above all, it connects with the 3Rs of Governor Hope Uzodimma's administration in Imo State, which center on reform, reconciliation and reconstruction. The document then proposes the kind of industrialization Imo State needs which will both require improvement and consolidation in the old areas of strength as well as opening up new untapped sub-sectors like digital economy, renewable energy, fabrication, packaging, etc. It also addresses the important concern of funding which it recommends is to be primarily driven by the government in conjunction with donor agencies and the organized private sector. On the issue of responsibility for the implementation of the policy, and for monitoring and evaluation, the document recommends the creation of Imo State Industrial Development Authority. The document also projects how Imo State will leap-frog to development and economic prosperity for everyone if the proposals and recommendations are implemented. With the industrial policy now published, and the requisite political will supplied by the administration of HE Hope Uzodimma, nothing can stop the march to greatness on the part of Imo State.

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CORPORATE IMO
IMPACT PARTNERSHIP (CIIP)

...a **voluntary network** of private sector actors, donor agencies, and other organisations designed to focus primarily on **addressing the challenges of unemployment** through job creation and entrepreneurship development.

Please join the train!

Some of the potential organisations include:

Unilever
The Coca-Cola Company
NBC – Nigerian Bottling Company Ltd (A member of Coca-Cola Hellenic Group)
IHS Towers of strength
FirstBank Since 1894
DBN Development Bank of Nigeria
-CSAAE-
UNDP
Kimberly-Clark
FrieslandCampina
WALTERSMITH
GBF Growing Businesses Foundation
IIF Impact Investors Foundation
access
Sterling
International Breweries PLC
Small & Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria
UBA United Bank for Africa
FMN Flour Mills of Nigeria PLC
Manufacturers Association of Nigeria
PIND
FMDQ
DIAGEO
LAFARGE
OCCIMA
UN Global Compact
NB
LAPO Microfinance Bank
American Business Council – Promoting Nigeria-America Economic Partnership



Mr. Frank Nneji, OON

Frank Nneji and the Transformation of Road Transport in Nigeria

Sometime in 1991, a young man was heading to Lagos on a bus that would later break down along the way. That experience, though discomforting and unpleasant, ignited the flame of the possibility of a transport service – one that provides safety and comfort for the traveling public. His name is Frank Nneji. Except for his brain and brawn at the time, the young Nneji lacked the financial wherewithal to bring such a venture to fruition. But, by sheer dint of hard work, the idea is today shaping how thousands, and possibly millions of Nigerians travel.

Since the 1990s when it opened its doors to the Nigerian travelling public, the Associated Bus Company (ABC Transport) has redefined and revolutionized road transport in Nigeria and the West African sub-region. Behind this revolution is Chief Frank Nneji, the company's Founder and Managing Director.

Who is Chief Frank Nneji? What is the story of ABC? Why does he fit our picture of an established entrepreneur and example of the Imo spirit of resilience? What values and entrepreneurship traits does he exemplify the most that can inspire the younger generations?

Born on April 30th 1960 at Abo-Mbaise area of Imo State, Frank obtained a degree in Biological Sciences from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka where he was a member of the Students' Union Government, holding the position of transport officer. After his mandatory National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) assignment in 1983, Frank set up Rapido Ventures Limited, the parent company of the Associated Bus Company Transport, which was born in 1993 following a business loan obtained from the then Diamond Bank (now Access Bank). What flourished and came to be known as ABC Transport, a testament to the entrepreneurial ability of its founder, actually began with only five leased Toyota Hiace buses. In no time, ABC Transport became a phenomenon, growing in leaps and bounds. But it could only grow so rapidly because of the depth of ideas behind its identity and services.

There are at least four outstanding strategies which stood ABC out at inception and helped its growth to become one of the biggest road transport company in West Africa.

Professionalism

ABC was professionally run and corporate in outlook, a strategy adopted to turn around the quackery that characterized road transport in Nigeria at the time. Everything about the conceptualization and operation of the ABC Transport was different and revolutionary. From the garages, bus depots to the buses ticket clerks, office managers to drivers, everything was properly branded and well packaged. It stood out in an unmistakable manner. If it was not ABC, it was not like ABC. A strong brand identity is critical to every sustainable business, and ABC Transport clearly ticked that box.

Quality Service

For the first time in the history of Nigeria road transport, a passenger would have significant control over his own journey plan. For instance, a customer knows when to begin the journey and when to arrive at their destination. With one or two persons on the bus, ABC would begin as scheduled. The distances to each destination and on all routes were already determined and worked out on moderate speed, so that the buses did not have to over speed. Thus, safety was assured. In view of such high sense of discipline and safety consciousness, the Nigeria's middle-class thronged to ABC for all road transport as alternative to flying.



Innovation

ABC also prioritized comfort by launching what came to be known as coaches, the first of its kind in Nigeria. Coaches were medium-sized buses that had good seats and enough leg-rooms to guarantee comfort throughout the journey, including long trips . They were the first to launch on-bus lavatories for passengers to avoid the crude road-side bush method. To extend this revolution to the West African sub-region, ABC opened a daily land travel route taking passengers from Nigeria all the way to Ghana through Niger and Togo. It was unprecedented.

ABC Transport was dubbed by the Business Highlight 'the most successful transport company in West Africa." Frank Nneji was determined to transform it into a dominant force by transiting successfully from a limited liability (LTD) company to a Public Liability Company (PLC), becoming the first land transport and passenger company to be quoted on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. As expected, millions of Nigeria bought the shares running into billions of Naira making it possible for the company to expand its operations. ABC Transport has since expanded its operations to include a strong logistics arm handing parcel and luggage delivery across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Owing to strong leadership and management as well as resilient entrepreneurship spirit, the transport company which started small remains a leading and dominant player in the transport industry.

But as an entrepreneur, Chief Nneji continues to expand into profitable new areas. Today, under the chairmanship of Chief Frank Nneji, Rapido Ventures Limited, the parent company of ABC Transport, has grown to include Rapido Foods Limited, producers of an assortment of food and beverages, Transit Support Services Limited extending to car assemblage and manufacturers' representative, Mayfair Suites and Conference Centre and Abuja City Sightseeing Tours focusing on tourism and its other supply chain components.

In 2017, he won the Top 100 Tourism Personalities Award for his outstanding contribution to the tourism sector and for connecting peoples and countries through his international routes and destinations.

The former chairman of Owerri Chamber of Commerce, Mines and Industry is believed to be one of the largest employers of labour in Imo State, aside the government. Chief Nneji once declared in an interview that his monthly wage bill stood at about N89 million. Frank is one of the best examples of entrepreneurial success, rising from humble beginnings to the top. Aside his creativity and fertile mind, his determination and innovation among other sterling qualities helped him to achieve success in his chosen area of endeavor.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISER GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Happy Birthday

Your Excellency

We at the Office of the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Imo State heartily felicitate with Your Excellency, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodimma, the listening and peace-loving Governor of Imo State, on your birthday.

Your Excellency, your good works in the State have singled you out as a man who feels the pulse of his people.

May God continue to bless and guide your footsteps as you lead the good people of the State .

Professor Kenneth Amaeshi
The Chief Economic Adviser to the Imo State Government





Meet Nnemeka Ikegwuonu:
The Man Who Stood for Rural Farmers

Born in Owerri Imo State, Nigeria in 1982, Nnaemeka Ikegwuonu is a globally recognized agricultural and social entrepreneur who provides support to rural farmers through innovative solutions to their problems. He was born 1982 and raised in Owerri, and had his early, secondary education and university in Owerri. Born to peasant farmers, he soon developed passion for agriculture. With this agricultural background, he has witnessed firsthand the challenges facing rural farmers especially lack of information and basic modern farming skills to help them improve their farm output and agricultural yield.

The Early Years

In 2003, upon graduation from Imo State University, where he studied History and International Relations, he founded Smallholders Foundation, a non-governmental organization with a mission to provide regular support and education to rural farmers on best practices, sustainable agricultural development and environmental conservation. Through this NGO, he mobilizes rural farmers, visits them in their locations and listens to their challenges. In other to reach many more farmers in rural locations separated by long distances, he established the Smallholders Farmers Rural Radio Station (Farm 98.0), the first of such radio stations in Nigeria. Through the daily broadcast, he reaches an estimated 250,000 rural farmers spread across remote locations in Imo State and beyond. Listen Africa, an organization that promotes social change and transformation through the use of transistor radios, had supported his foundation to provide thousands of free radio sets to rural farmers.

For the young social entrepreneur, environmental sustainability is big on his agenda for these communities. Alongside the information sessions, he leverages his weekly radio dramas to sustain their interest and to educate them on climate change management. In line with the 'Leave No One Behind' promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Nnaemeka has launched the Young Farmers Clubs in secondary

Cold Hubs





In 2015, Nnaemeka founded ColdHubs, a form of refrigeration mechanism or cold rooms powered by sola -panels to help farmers preserve their perishable goods.

schools in all the local governments of South Eastern Nigeria, encouraging them to expand existing school gardens and awakening in the young boys and girls the love for agriculture as well as equipping them for possible career pathways in the sector. a key element of his engagement strategy is organizing periodic agricultural competitions in partnership with his array of funders Listen Africa.

For all the successes he had recorded, Nnaemeka would later face a major dilemma. After watching the farmers' yield improve as a result of the support he had provided, the farmers were confronted with the problem of how to preserve their produce in order to improve food sufficiency and increase profit. In 2015, Nnaemeka founded ColdHubs, a form of refrigeration mechanism or cold rooms powered by sola -panels to help farmers preserve their perishable goods. Till date, ColdHubs has helped tens of thousands of rural and urban farmers preserve their produce.

A King Deserves His Honour

The positive social impact of his work has been recognized around the world. In 2008, he received a fellowship award from Ashoka, an international organization that promotes social entrepreneurs. In 2010, Nnaemeka received the Rolex Award from his outstanding social entrepreneurship achievements and from World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) funded by the Quatar Foundation. He also won the Yara Prize for Green Revolution in Africa.

The agriculture icon has represented Africa in many global workshops, seminars and summits, including those organized by the BMW Foundation and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). He won a Rainer Arnold Fellowship Programme, a social entrepreneur grooming program of Mulago Foundation.

In 2016, he designed a trolley that prolongs the shelve-life of cassava, which won him a biodiversity fellowship at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science at the University of Oxford, England. Currently, he is a Foundry Fellow at the Legatum Centre at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA funded by the Mastercard Foundation. Nnaemeka began his life in Owerri and has pioneered a lot of innovative solutions to problems facing rural farmers today. That is why he is being celebrated.





WILLIAM EKE AND CUCUMBER PRODUCTION:
MAKING LEMONADE OUT OF LEMONS

"Imo State is a blessed land with diverse hidden potentials which needs to be tapped from".

Let's meet you sir

My name is Comrade Willam Eke. I am an indigene of Eziala-Umuohiagu in Ngor Okpala LGA. I am the youth president of my community and a graduate of two higher institution; Federal Polytechnic Nekede where I studied Business Administration and Management and Imo State university where I studied Business Management as my second degree. Currently, I run a cucumber farm that sits on 10 plots of land.

What is your motive for choosing to go into farming? How did it all start, your decision to go into cucumber farming?

As a Nigerian youth, you wake up every day to the ugly reality of unemployment. You find a large army of willing and able-bodied youth roaming the streets in search of non-existent jobs. So, on upon graduation from the university, I began to think of ways to make ends meet rather than staying idle. I wanted to create something for myself and be self-sufficient. Considering, that I had a background in farming, which I learnt from my parents I decided to venture into cucumber farming. I began by acquiring the knowledge and skills required in growing cucumber. And, as they say, the rest is history.

What is unique about cucumber farming? Why did you choose cucumber in place of other crops?

Coming from a family, whose major source of livelihood is farming, you would expect that I toe the familiar path But I decided to try out something new and different outside the cultivation of cassava and maize. I considered cucumber because, unlike other food crops, it is not commonly grown in the Southeast. The unique thing about cucumber farming is that it is very delicate and requires dedication and maximum attention due to the peculiarity of its processes. Another reason why I opted for cucumber farming is that it is one of most demanded imported crop since /2.1it's not commonly produced here. So, I thought to myself that by producing it in Imo State, that naturally takes away the burden and cost of importing it from other states.. Then, it became my plan to increase and commercialize it so people from other states will come to patronize us. Another unique thing about cucumber is that it yields its fruit four weeks after planting. This means one will always be in business. I enjoy bountiful harvest between four to five times a year.

How many employees do you currently have working for you?

I have a total of five employees working for me; 4 full time and and a part time member of staff. I also have contract workers whom I engage on short-term projects like weeding, harvesting, staking, plumbing and they earn a daily wage.

From your experience, how would you describe the job creation potential of cucumber farming?

Let me begin by saying that cucumber farming has the potential to generate considerable job opportunities for people. I have two cucumber farms here in Imo State. One is located at my village in Umuohiagu and the other in Owerri behind Imo Youth Centre. Aside

the people I employ to work for me on the farm, a lot of opportunities exists around the value chain. For instance, I need the services of people who install drip tapes in the ground to aid the steady supply of water. A cucumber farm also requires such facilities as a functioning borehole. This means the services of a plumber are also required in the farm. I can go on.

Can you tell us more about the different value-chains in this business?

The cucumber we grow is the hybrid specie popularly known as Ngor Okpala cucumber. To better understand the value chain of this business, one needs to start from the producer of the seedlings. These companies sell the processed seeds to the farmers. For instance, I buy mine from Thyagro. I do all the planting and harvesting. After this, I begin to distribute it to wholesalers and retailers. His Excellency, I also want to you know that I am a major supplier of cucumber in the Relief market and since 3 years now, no cucumber has being imported into the state from the North. Rather, we have been sending to other States.

Have you considered expanding your farm and making it a community business by bringing other young people on board?

Yes, I have and it has always been a thing of joy to see young people show interest in farming. As the youth president of my community, I have introduced a lot of youths into cucumber farming and different farms have been set up within and outside the community. For instance, I have set up farms for clients in Ngor Okpala, Orlu and Ideato. The largest farm I have set up so far is at Mbaise in E dey Work Adoration Ground where the padre secured an entire hectare of land just for cucumber farming. I make bold to say that Ngor Okpala and Imo State as a whole have the opportunity to become the cucumber hub of Nigeria. Also, last year we had the 'One Youth, One Farm' program under the government of His Excellency Hope Uzodinma, supervised by the Special Assistant to the Governor on Youth, Hon. Eric Uwakwe, whereby I mentored thousands of youth on profitable cucumber cultivation.

Do you have apprentice who have learnt under you and are now on their own?



Yes, I have trained a lot of people in this business, who are now on their own and doing well. I have also set up cucumber farms for people and gotten paid for it.

Would you call yourself an emerging entrepreneur?

Of course! I believe I have started on a good note, and the possibilities ahead are enormous.

What is your vision for the future? In ten years from now, what's your growth and job creation plan?

In the long run, my intention is not to remain a cucumber farmer. I have plans to diversify and venture into other areas of agriculture. One sub-sector I would like to play in is what we call recycling. In so doing, I will engage in poultry and pig farming and later convert their droppings to be used as organic fertilizers for the cucumbers and other crops. I strongly believe this will help save cost of buying organic manure. Also, I would like to grow other crops that are not cultivated in the state such as watermelon, tomato, ginger, carrot, etc. The interesting part is that once we can locally produce these food crops, their prices in the market will significantly reduce and there will be no need to import them from other states. I believe this is good for our people and our economy.

In a nutshell, diversification is a major priority for me between now and the next ten years. So, I just don't want to remain as a cucumber farmer. I want to become a big entrepreneur who has successfully ventured into diverse aspects of farming, providing jobs and business opportunities for our people.

What key principles and values guide your life and business operations?

The key principle that has been guiding me all through my journey in life is dedication. One vital lesson cucumber farming has taught me is the importance of dedication and resilience. These values are critical if you want to record a bountiful harvest. These principles are not only relevant for my business, but they are also critical for our journey here on earth. Also, consumers are our most valuable resource, and above anything else, we prioritize their health and safety across our operations. This means we pay special care to how we produce our crops, ensuring that every substance used guarantees the safety of our consumers. This is why we prefer to use organic manure rather than inorganic manure. We believe we are not just a farm or food company. Our business is designed to promote good and healthy living by nourishing our consumers with quality produce.

What would you like to say to the State Government or what would you want the governor to be aware of?

His Excellency the Executive Governor of Imo State, Senator Hope Uzodinma, has always been very supportive of new innovations and creativity. I would like him to pay more attention towards young farmers because farming is not an easy one, especially for a young man with no other source of income. The Governor should provide subsidies and grants to farmers in the state. This would go a long way in accelerating production. The government could also consider incentivizing farming in such a way as to encourage new entrants, build camus-to-farm apprenticeship schemes where thriving farms are encouraged to absorb new and inexperienced entrants in exchange for government aids.

Are you getting any inspiration from the government of His Excellency Hope Uzodimma. Would you require any help?

Yes, I am. The Governor is a very accommodating person and during a phone-in program which he had early this year, I was privileged to speak with His Excellency and he encouraged and asked me to train more youths in Imo State. That alone inspired me a great deal.. I have written a book titled "How to Grow Cucumber in Igbo land" and this book has been approved by both the state ministries of Education and Agriculture. With the permission of His Excellency, I believe this book can be introduced to all secondary schools and tertiary institution in the state. The book is also dedicated to HE Senator Hope Uzodinma, the Executive Governor of Imo State, for his giant strides in Agriculture.

What key challenges are you facing in this business, how can these problems be resolved?

Some of the challenges we face include high cost of transportation of essential materials for the farm. The lack of vans also affect the seamless movement of produce after harvest. There is also the high cost of raw materials such as bamboo sticks for stalking, binding wire, dripping tapes, pesticides and seedlings. I believe that with the support of the state government, farmers in Imo State can find a supportive environment to accelerate agricultural revolution in the state. It is a win-win for the people and the government.

May the peace and blessings of
Christmas be yours and may the
New Year be filled with
prosperity and happiness for
you and yours.

Happy holidays!

The Office of the Chief Economic
Adviser to Imo State Government